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Musical Materialities in Milan and Liberal Italy at the *fine secolo*

by

Laura Tiziana Protano Biggs

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Mary Ann Smart, Chair

Professor James Davies

Professor Mia Fuller

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Laura Tiziana Protano Biggs

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines musical culture in Milan from the 1870s to 1890s, with particular attention to the ways the material conditions of musical production and consumption were enmeshed with liberal values. The urban center in these decades was known as the *capitale morale*—the economic, cultural and moral seat of the new nation—in contrast with Rome, the nominal capital. I show that the development of the urban center and that of Milan’s preeminent theater, the Teatro alla Scala, were intimately linked. Milanese liberal imperatives of hard work and innovation in these immediate post-unification decades were played out in and around the theater.

Such imperatives implied breaks with tradition, as in the establishment of the baton conductor and the introduction of electric illumination at the Teatro alla Scala. Chapter 1 concentrates on Franco Faccio, La Scala's first baton conductor. Critics loved the sturdiness of a man measured no less in moral than musical terms. Faccio’s reliability and exacting standards of instrumental execution resonated with a new Bismarck-inspired pragmatism in Milan, and the sound Faccio brought forth from the orchestra at La Scala adumbrates the much more famous house sound under his successor, Arturo Toscanini.

Chapter 2 centers on the Società Edison Italiana’s 1882 installation of electric lighting at La Scala, one of the earliest incandescent installations in the world—and by far the most ambitious. The innovation was made possible by the economic bullishness and inventiveness of these liberal decades. La Scala became a crucial promotional forum for Edison, where unusual measures were taken to ensure the

venture's success, including the unprecedented darkening of the auditorium planned in order to focus audience attention on the novel stage illumination.

Milanese liberal imperatives also implied continual renewal. Chapter 3 investigates the contemporaneous operatic voice: in response to a perceived decline in vocal production, the Milan Conservatory promoted “bel canto” vocal methods in treatises by Lamperti (1864) and Delle Sedie (1874). In fact, however, the latter method set vocal instruction on a controversial new course, one that, because it was alleged to cause extreme vocal strain, stimulated debate about the limits of human productivity.

Finally, Chapter 4 turns to Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff*, which premiered at La Scala in 1893. It is a commonplace of Verdi criticism that the opera was perplexing in its newness. I show that several critics at the premiere chose to promote the idea of *Falstaff* as a civic innovation par excellence, thereby downplaying its links with other “less groundbreaking” repertory. The more innovative the opera seemed, after all, the more it had in common with the *capitale morale*, that center of continual work and progress.

For all my family

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Introduction

Musical Materialities in Milan and Liberal Italy at the *fine secolo*

If liberal Italy has in the past been overlooked in favor of the romance of the *risorgimento* that came before it and the complexities of the fascist era that followed, recent decades have seen a number of cultural histories that enliven the era for us.¹ By 1871, Rome had been absorbed into the new nation, and nominated the seat of the constitutional monarchy.² But it had also been absorbed into a peninsula of former states that wanted to secure their individual identities within the new nation; and of cities keen to establish themselves as nodes in an international network and to fashion themselves as cosmopolitan hubs. Historians have described a nation that tenuously connected its regions on the eve of unification in 1859, but whose local centers resisted this unifying impulse. In one of the richest recent takes on the matter, Axel Körner has shown how musical culture was central to the various ventures Italians undertook to enhance regional identities in the decades that followed.³

It is telling, however, that the claim comes from a historian, and not from a scholar within music studies. Musicological interest in political realities that inform Italian music at this time has been at the same time both insistent and erratic. Scholars have not ceased to look for echoes of the *risorgimento* in Verdi operas, and we are conscious that the rule of fascism did not leave music untouched. But studies of music from unification to the 1890s have been less

¹ Particularly influential recent works include Alberto Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana: l'età liberale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996); Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 2002); Cristina Della Coletta, *World's Fairs Italian Style: the Great Exhibitions in Turin and their Narratives, 1860-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: on Making Italians, 1860-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: from Unification to Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), and Banti, *Sublime madre nostra: la nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo* (Rome: GLF editori Laterza, 2011).

² For an introduction to Italian unification, see Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: a History of Italy since 1796* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 1-322, and Lucy Riall, *Risorgimento: the History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

³ See, Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: from Unification to Fascism*, in particular the chapter “‘Viva Rossini—Morte a Wagner’? From *Campanilismo* to the Future,” 221-262.

discerning, as if political realities faded in and out of consciousness, and in and out of musical lives, across the nineteenth century.⁴ Scholars of Italian music have tended to treat politics exclusively in terms of revolutionary change and sensational power rearrangements.

To be sure, most of the works composed at the *fine secolo* do not exactly demand consideration of liberalism; there are, at least, few pronounced connections between operatic plots, musical details, and the new political order.⁵ It is no wonder then that we have not felt compelled to conceptualize *Un ballo in maschera* (1863), *La forza del destino* (1862/1869), *Aida* (1871), *Simon Boccanegra* (1857/1881), *Don Carlo* (1884), *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893) as Verdi's liberal era works. Yet political resonances encoded in works are precisely those that musicologists are most attuned to: as Mary Ann Smart has recently articulated it, even as we are wary about the slipperiness of musical interpretations, when it comes to Italian opera "we still value most highly historical narratives in which political meaning or impact seems to reside in or emanate from the musical works themselves."⁶

This dissertation shows that liberal political imperatives—above all as given expression in values of industriousness and productivity—were unmistakably played out on the Milanese stage. But, as it also demonstrates, it is those elements

⁴ A notable and important exception is Cormac Newark, "In Italy we don't have the means for illusion": Grand opéra in Nineteenth-Century Bologna," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19/3 (2007): 199-222, which argues that operatic activities at Bologna's Teatro Comunale were intimately bound up with the city's status in liberal Italy. The most authoritative statements about music in these decades are those concerned with the career of Giuseppe Verdi; see in particular Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). A series of recent PhD dissertations have started to look at this period in richer historical terms. See in particular Laura Basini, "Reviving the Past: Italian Music History and Verdi" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2003). Also of note are Carlos del Cueto, "Opera in 1860s Milan and the End of the Rossinian Tradition" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2011); Francesca Vella, "Verdi Reception in Milan, 1859-1881: Memory, Progress and Italian Identity" (PhD diss., King's College London, 2014), and a related article by Vella, "Verdi's *Don Carlo* as Monument," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 25/1 (2013): 75-103.

⁵ There are notable exceptions, not least Romualdo Marenco and Luigi Manzotti's ballet *Excelsior*, which premiered at Milan's Teatro alla Scala in conjunction with the 1881 National Exhibit and was a transparent advertisement for the progress made in liberal Italy. On this, see Flavia Pappacena, Elena Grillo, Claudia Celli, Maria Amata Cal and Mario Musumeci, eds., *Excelsior: documenti e saggi* (Rome: Di Giacomo, 1998), and Della Coletta, "Prologues to World's Fairs: National Exhibitions and Nation Building in Turin," in *World's Fairs Italian Style*, 15-78.

⁶ Mary Ann Smart, "Magical Thinking: Reason and Emotion in Some Recent Literature on Verdi and Politics," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17/4 (2012): 437-447, 438.

of musical culture most overlooked at this time—the material circumstances in which music was produced and consumed—that can tell us the most about the ways music was enmeshed with liberal era values. This study, then, offers an alternative view of the stretch of time between the 1870s and the nineties, accounts of which have been based, to a remarkable extent, around the forward thrust of the career of Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), and on the detailed stylistic links between one work and the next.⁷

Milan was a vibrant musical center during these decades, with a conservatory to rival most others in the nation and a series of top-rank theaters. The Teatro alla Scala and the Teatro alla Cannobiana had been founded in the late 1780s; a decade later the Teatro Carcano, Teatro Dal Verme, and Teatro Santa Radegonda opened their doors, and in due course so too did the Teatro Re (in 1813) and the Teatro Manzoni (in 1872).⁸ All included musical attractions in their varied schedules, but only La Scala had a true role in the international music circuits, and as a result its productions are most accessible to historians, for it dominated the discussion of music critics. Audiences at La Scala were more mixed than most on the peninsula. The cost of admission to the theater was affordable: in one account, around one or two francs for most of the later decades of the century; from the 1880s, in fact, the nobility and the bourgeoisie occupied its boxes in almost equal measure.⁹ Milan also boasted a publication sector that worked to animate the musical scene and popularize its ventures.¹⁰ Casa Ricordi, the rival to the nation's other main music

⁷ Few scholars have discussed other Italian operatic compositions in these decades. Those who have ventured beyond the Verdian parade have done so with hesitation, as if conscious they have wandered into the domain of second-rate or “transitional” composers. For a recent example, see Alan Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera: from Verismo to Modernism, 1890-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007). Mallach sees these decades as so devoid of compositional activity that the chapter devoted to them is labeled “Italian Opera in Crisis: 1860-1890” (14-20). See also Jay Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition, 1871-1893* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), the title of which betrays its author's bias. Italian instrumental music in this period has been mostly overlooked, save in works such as Basini, “Reviving the Past,” and Sergio Martinotti, *Ottocento strumentale italiano* (Bologna: Forni, 1972).

⁸ On this, see Giovanni Treccani degli Alfieri, “La vita dei Milanesi fino al 1900 nel quadro dell'unità d'Italia,” in *Storia di Milano*, vol. 15, *Nell'unità italiana (1859-1900)* (Milan: Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri per la storia di Milano, 1956), 721-809, 778.

⁹ On admission costs, see Treccani degli Alfieri, “La vita dei Milanesi fino al 1900 nel quadro dell'unità d'Italia,” in *Storia di Milano*, 15: 721-809, 778. On box ownership, see Giulio Lupo, “Dal teatro della nobiltà al teatro della borghesia: le trasformazioni dell'atrio e del ridotto nel Teatro alla Scala,” in *Milano 1848-1898: ascesa e trasformazione della capitale morale*, ed. Rosanna Pavoni and Cesare Mozzarelli, vol. 1 (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), 243-255, here 250.

¹⁰ On the Milanese publication industry, see Moe, “Representing the South, c. 1870-1885,” in *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question*, 187-249.

publisher, Lucca, owned most of the works that premiered at La Scala, and from 1842 Ricordi also published the widely circulated *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, whose articles and reviews did much to shape cultural opinion. By the *fine secolo*, though, the influence of the *Gazzetta* was somewhat diluted by the hundreds of other accounts of musical culture published in broadsheets and specialist journals.

One way to understand how liberalism was connected to musical life, altering the material basis on which it functioned, is to begin with theatrical economics. In a nation obsessed with localism—or “campanilismo”—individual cities sought to enhance the status of their theaters within an operatic network both denser and more widespread than ever.¹¹ With unification, the national government had inherited the financial obligations of former rulers towards their theaters, and, eager to limit its financial responsibilities, soon handed over fiscal burdens to municipal authorities.¹² The most venerable theaters were shielded from these changes for some time in order to ensure continuities in theatrical standards between pre- and post-unification, but in 1867 these too came under local control. And as Körner has demonstrated in the case of Bologna’s Teatro Comunale, local leaders also became involved in the administration of these theaters: theatrical commissions that included representatives from local government were formed, such that theaters became direct instruments of local cultural policy.¹³

The broad contours of La Scala’s role in this transition have been documented: in 1868 Milanese mayor Giulio Belinzaghi formed a *commissione teatrale* to oversee the allocation of funds to the opera house, and then established, in 1872, a *commissione artistica*, whose members included Alberto Mazzucato, the then director of the Milan Conservatory.¹⁴ For a vivid sense of this restructuring, we can turn to the minutes of the first artistic commission preserved at the theater’s archive. The minutes of the initial meeting make clear the work its members

¹¹ On theater networks, see Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri: l’Italia del melodramma nell’età del Risorgimento* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2001).

¹² On this transition, see Sorba, *Teatri*, in particular the chapter “L’Opera lirica e l’Italia nuova,” 227-266.

¹³ See Körner, “The Theatre of Social Change: the Opera Industry and the End of Social Privilege,” in *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy*, 47-65.

¹⁴ Jutta Toelle has considered this transition in the most detail. See Toelle, *Bühne der Stadt: Mailand und das Teatro alla Scala zwischen Risorgimento und Fin de Siècle* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), in particular the chapter “Legitimation und Finanzierung: Der Konflikt zwischen Staat, Stadt und Logenbesitzern,” 62-80. Del Cueto has also examined the financial work of the *commissione teatrale*. See Del Cueto, “Paradigm Shifts at the Teatro alla Scala,” in “Opera in 1860s Milan and the End of the Rossinian Tradition,” 131-154.

wanted to effect. Count Francesco Segrebondi, for one, reminded his fellow commissioners:

[The Teatro alla Scala's] artistic commission has been nominated by Milan's council. The public has taken an interest in us; the city's periodicals are covering us. It is our duty to ensure that the public is aware of the vitality [vitalità] and industriousness [operosità] of our artistic commission. We must, therefore, present the public with a great project.¹⁵

The commission, in other words, wanted “operosità” at La Scala to be visible to all in line with the needs of Milan. In some respects, this statement is unremarkable. Such desire for reform was doubtless fueled by a mounting sense across the previous decade that the theatrical culture of Milan was losing ground to that of Bologna. The Teatro Comunale had hired one of the first-ever permanent baton conductors in the Italian opera house, Angelo Mariani, who would soon become a sensation. The Bolognese theater also ushered in works from abroad, with numerous performances of French grand opéra staged during the 1860s, and, in 1872, a run of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*, both of which positioned the theater as innovative and cosmopolitan.¹⁶ Milan meanwhile could boast none of these initiatives; and the press had begun to mutter that the standard of La Scala's performances was in decline.¹⁷ But these Milanese anxieties assume more subtle resonance when read in view of the aims of Belinzaghi's commissioners. In the new national landscape, Milan had fashioned itself as the center of labor, where the values of hard work and commitment to a cause ruled. “Vitalità” and “operosità” developed clear local valence, and became watchwords closely associated with this urban center. These words, in fact, came to delimit quintessentially Milanese values. That they were used to describe the ambitions of the theater's artistic commission is a vivid reminder that the courses plotted by city and theater would be intimately connected.

¹⁵ (“La nostra Commissione è nominata dal Consiglio. Il pubblico si è interessato della cosa; i periodici della città si sono occupati di noi. È nostro debito quindi il dar segno di vitalità e di operosità. Noi dobbiamo per conseguenza presentare un grande progetto.”) Count Francesco Segrebondi made this remark in an 1872 meeting of the artistic commission, the details of which are preserved in minutes held in the Museo Teatrale alla Scala. See *Processo verbale della seduta 27 Febbrajo 1872 della sub-Commissione artistica del RR. Teatri*, Museo Teatrale alla Scala / Biblioteca Livia Simoni, Faldone (Box) B.

¹⁶ On Wagner in Italy at this time, see Julian Budden, “Wagnerian Tendencies in Italian Opera,” in *Music and Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean*, ed. Nigel Fortune (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 299-332.

¹⁷ The perceived decline of La Scala in the 1860s is the topic of Del Cueto's PhD thesis. See Del Cueto, “Opera in 1860s Milan and the End of the Rossinian Tradition.”

The four chapters that follow trace these connections, by excavating and analyzing some key aspects of the material foundations of music-making in Milan. In theatrical life, the Milanese imperatives of hard work and innovation implied breaks with tradition, as in the establishment of the baton conductor and the introduction of electric illumination at La Scala. Such imperatives also implied renewal, as in the dissemination of new vocal methods and critical obsession with innovative premieres. All these intellectual preoccupations contributed to the city's lively discourse, and helped to consolidate Milan's status as a cultural capital in the new liberal scheme.

Liberalism

One measure of the character of that scheme could be taken from the words of conservative statesman Alberto Blanc, who was raised under the direct political guidance of Camillo Cavour, Italy's first prime minister. Although Cavour died in 1861, the conservative liberals who would remain in power until 1876 persevered to bring his political objectives to maturity. In 1871 Blanc articulated a shared vision where, as diplomatic historian Federico Chabod has summarized it, the fundamental laws of economics would be allowed to operate, free from the deleterious effects of what Blanc termed "inclinations to sentimentality or to classicism that have a grip on so many distinguished intellectuals among us."¹⁸ The poetry of the *risorgimento* had to be banished; the sentimentality of intellectuals such as Giuseppe Mazzini replaced with a more sober take on the Italian future, in which calculations were made with economic rather than emotional rationale. Such attitudes were carefully cultivated in a decade that had commenced with the Franco-Prussian war. And from its outset, a moral and intellectual leaning towards Prussia dominated Italian political choices. If at first this meant adopting a Bismarckian concern for the forces that could sustain and protect the nation—technology, productivity, and material wealth—it would lead also to the formation in 1882 of the Triple Alliance between Austria, Germany, and Italy.

Such was the bias of the conservative liberal statesmen, the material effects of which could be seen in their economic priorities. Limited state intervention in the

¹⁸ See Federico Chabod, "What Prussia Had to Teach," in *Italian Foreign Policy: The Statecraft of the Founders, 1870-1896*, trans. William McCuaig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5-66: 6. For the Italian original, consult *Storia della politica estera italiana dal 1870 al 1896* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1965).

economy meant that the nation's budget was balanced by 1876, while concern for the forces that could sustain and protect the nation—in particular iron and steel industries—led to their boom across the 1880s.¹⁹ Statesmen seemed much less sure that Italians needed to be educated in order to move the nation forwards, and it was not until 1877, under the left liberal leadership of Agostino Depretis, that (in a nation with stratospheric illiteracy rates) primary education became both free and compulsory.

This is, however, a vision of the nation from above, and at best it hints at how the new Italians fashioned a space for themselves in this *laissez-faire* political environment. Accounts of the new status quo have tended—often under the influence of Antonio Gramsci—to assume straightforward links between unification and liberalism, on the one hand, and social and economic developments on the other. In this view, the middle classes should have risen to prominence as a result of commercialism, industrialization, and other forms of rapid economic change. Unification should have transformed Italian cities into urban centers like nineteenth-century Paris: centers into which “[financial] capital rushed as if into a vacuum.”²⁰

As historians such as Lucy Riall have argued, however, social, economic and political transformations were distinct processes in the Italian case, as elsewhere in Europe: there were no automatic links between them.²¹ Italians had not been hard-wired to think about middle class investment in commerce and industry. The accumulated wealth of the new middle classes tended to be directed back into the agrarian economy in the initial decades of the liberal era, and this rural investment went hand in hand with calls for Italians to resist commercial and industrial expansion. It was not unification itself, but the discourse that evolved in its wake that encouraged social and economic changes. The journalistic press, for example, both pushed the idea that the sober, Italian nation should assert itself on an international forum—*La Riforma*, for instance, had from around 1870 been the mouthpiece for future prime minister Francesco Crispi's views—and

¹⁹ Details in this paragraph can be found in standard accounts of the period. See, for instance, Christopher Duggan, “The Liberal State and the Social Question,” in *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 144-172.

²⁰ The memorable phrase is Maurice Halbwachs'. See Halbwachs, *La population et les tracés des voies à Paris depuis un siècle* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1928); cited in David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 133.

²¹ See Lucy Riall, *Risorgimento: the History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State*, in particular the chapter “Social Conflict and Social Change,” 72-99.

simultaneously allowed Italians to debate the costs of modernization.²² It was in the northern Italian cities, particularly Milan and also Turin, that social and economic changes occurred soonest and were most pronounced. This was reflected in Italian participation in the world's fairs: while the model established in England and France was one in which capital cities unfailingly hosted national and international exhibitions, the Italians used these northern cities as the background for displays of progress. Rome did not host an exhibition until 1911.²³

Milan: "capitale morale"

By the time of the 1881 National Exhibition, the Milanese had consolidated a distinct narrative about their role in the new liberal order. A sense of that narrative can be gleaned from the various books written about Milan issued that decade. One volume, penned in 1888 and entitled *Il ventre di Milano, fisiologia della capitale morale* (after the title of Émile Zola's third novel *Le Ventre de Paris* (*The Belly of Paris*)) asserts that the Milanese have "started to work seriously" [*cominciato a lavorare seriamente*] and that as a result the urban center has become the motor of Italian production, industry and commerce.²⁴ Its authors continue:

What characterizes Milanese industry, in contrast with that of other people—where everything is done through trading associations—is the personality, the courage to pursue an initiative with few means; it is the strength of talent coupled with the tenacity of purpose and the hope of making oneself rich without risking heavy expenses. More than in other Italian cities—with the exception perhaps of Turin—there are in Milan a considerable number of small establishments that could be described as autonomous, because they are born of and created by the initiative of one person alone.

[...] These small manufacturers do not envy those magnificent [superbi] plumes of smoke that leave the tall chimneys of factories lined up around Milan and

²² See Chabod, "What Prussia had to Teach," in *Italian Foreign Policy: The Statecraft of the Founders, 1870-1896*.

²³ See Della Coletta, "The Spectacle of Inventing a Nation: World's Fairs and Their Narratives in Italy, 1860-1915," in *World's Fairs Italian Style*, 3-14.

²⁴ See Aldo Barilli et al. eds., "Milano che lavora," in *Il Ventre di Milano: fisiologia della capitale morale*, 2 vols. (Milan: Carlo Aliprandi editore, 1882), 2: 167-205, here 167.

positioned in its suburbs; and it is by dint of work, of economizing, of patience, and of intelligence that they are able to compete with them.

I know certain small commercial manufacturers who are ware-house keepers, shippers, bankers, and accountants of their own business. They get up at six in winter, at four in the summer, and also work evenings. Little by little their business expands and gains in importance; the number of workers under them increases.²⁵

In the context of the book, this extract reinforces ideas that were articulated with force around the time of the 1881 exhibition. As the authors describe aspects of Milanese existence—including its industrialization—they outline what it means to be Milanese. Over hundreds of pages, it becomes clear Milanese identity has nothing to do with place of birth. (Indeed, the urban center welcomed outsiders: its population increased from 261,000 in 1871 to 321,000 in 1881 and 424,000 in 1891.) Instead, to be Milanese was to live and breathe the values of these industrialists.²⁶ The idea that Milan was home to the values of hard work and dedication led it to be known as the *capitale morale*, the moral heart of the nation.²⁷

These ideas about Milan also offered a new moral framework that could structure existence in a secularized state. Liberalism had been on a collision course with the Catholic Church from the outset: Rome had been absorbed into the new nation in 1871 under force, once the French troops who had been protecting it

²⁵ (“La caratteristica dell’industria milanese, a differenza di quella di altri popoli—dove tutto si fa per associazione—è la personalità, è il coraggio della iniziativa, con pochi mezzi, è la potenza dell’ingegno accoppiata alla tenacia del proposito e alla speranza di farsi ricchi senza arrischiare capitali ingenti. Più che in altre città d’Italia—tranne forse Torino—c’è a Milano una grande quantità di piccoli stabilimenti, che si potrebbero chiamare autonomi, perché sorti e creati dalla iniziativa di un solo. [...] Quei piccoli industriali non invidiano i superbi pennacchi di fumo, che escono dagli alti camini degli opifici schierati intorno a Milano nella regione suburbana; e a furia di lavoro, di risparmio, di pazienza e di ingegno riescono a tenerli in concorrenza. Conosco certi piccoli industriali commercianti che sono padroni, magazzinieri, speditori, banchieri e ragionieri della loro azienda. Si levano alle sei d’inverno, alle quattro d’estate a lavorano anche la sera. A poco a poco si allarga la loro industria e acquista importanza; gli operai aumentano sotto di loro.”) See Barilli et al. eds., “Milano che lavora,” in *Il Ventre di Milano*, 170-171.

²⁶ Treccani degli Alfieri, “Profilo dell’economia di Milano dall’unificazione alla prima guerra mondiale,” in *Storia di Milano*, 15: 857-878, here 866-867.

²⁷ On Milan as the *capitale morale*, see also Giovanna Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale: letteratura e pubblicistica a Milano fra otto e novecento* (Milan: Edizioni di comunità, 1982); Rosanna Pavoni and Cesare Mozzarelli, eds., *Milano 1848-1898: ascesa e trasformazione della capitale morale*, and John Foot, “Images of the City 1980-2000,” in *Milan since the Miracle: City, Culture, and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 157-180.

withdrew to contribute to efforts at home in the Franco-Prussian war. The Vatican maintained its independence from the new state, however, refusing to endorse it, and banning Catholics (who constituted most of the population) from voting. In this bitterly divided Italy, to cast Milan as the *capitale morale* was also to cast it as an alternative to Rome, the seat of political power, and symbol of the peninsula's religious past. Moreover, it was to make a case for Milan's exceptional status within the peninsula.

To be sure, there was much about Milan that was exceptional. In their book, the authors make this clear: the city was a leader in wool, cotton, silk, and pharmaceutical manufacturing; by 1888 it was home to some thirty credit unions and was an important commercial hub, situated on major railroads. The contributors detail these achievements—from silk to cotton to commerce—in a chapter entitled “Milano che lavora,” in a subsection entitled “Industria.”²⁸ And between these entries, they include a section on the nation's most successful cultural product—opera. Milan, for these men, could also count music as evidence of its robust commitment to productivity.

Across four case studies that span 1870 to 1893, this dissertation traces the role of music in an urban center obsessed with hard work and measurable progress. Chapter 1 concentrates on the first baton conductor to establish himself at La Scala, Franco Faccio, who held the podium from 1870 to 1889. Faccio's ascendancy at La Scala heralded a new musical regime and a new musical aesthetic. This chapter surveys critical reaction in order to determine how Faccio was seen to conduct, and what made audiences warm to his innovations at the theater. I demonstrate that critics loved the sturdiness of a man hailed as much for his moral as for his musical comportment. Four adjectives spilled continually from the pens of critics: “mathematical,” “precise,” “conscientious,” and “scrupulous.” This characterization contrasts with the sentimental tone of Italian dramatic criticism in the 1860s and in particular that used to describe the famous conductor Angelo Mariani. I further demonstrate that critics were drawn to Faccio's clean, reliable style of execution because it embodied a new mode of action promoted in the liberal state and in the public forum of the theater. Faccio is shown to be at the forefront of new political movements—movements far removed from the romance of the *risorgimento*.

²⁸ See Barilli et al. eds., “Milano che lavora,” in *Il Ventre di Milano*.

While mention of “precision” today almost inevitably evokes conductor Arturo Toscanini’s later stern demands for accuracy, which some claim reveal his desire to emulate Mussolini, I suggest that Toscanini also emulated Faccio, who was his chief predecessor at La Scala. Although Toscanini’s authoritarianism was unprecedented in degree, I argue that his achievements would have been inconceivable without earlier liberal ideals and their realization at La Scala under Faccio.

The second chapter concerns another material innovation at La Scala: its first use of electric illumination. The theater writ large has an important but neglected role in histories of electrification. The invention of incandescent illumination in the 1880s meant that theaters were no longer prone to the fires that ravaged them when gas burners overturned. In fact, it should not surprise that the first public building to be illuminated completely with electricity was a theater: the brand-new Savoy Theater in London was fitted with thousands of electric bulbs in 1881. But in 1883 an incandescent installation at the Teatro alla Scala outdid even the Savoy. This novel lighting set-up was the work of the Società Italiana Edison, a Milanese branch of the Edison empire, born of entrepreneurial sentiments on the rise in liberal Milan. Unlike in Paris or London, the electric illumination of streets was banned in Milan. La Scala therefore became a crucial promotional forum, where unusual measures were taken to ensure the success of the Società Italiana Edison, including the then-unprecedented darkening of the auditorium to focus audience attention on the soft stage lighting. In contrast with rival European theaters, La Scala avoided garish use of spectacular illumination, preferring instead to advance an ideal of domestic illumination, at once nonintrusive and reliable. The introduction of this innovation, in other words, was made possible by the economic bullishness and inventiveness of these liberal decades.

The third chapter broadens the focus to consider how voices were trained and used in and around the theater. In 1864 the eminent Italian vocal instructor Francesco Lamperti issued a disclaimer in his new vocal treatise that there was nothing innovative about it. A decade later, the Italian baritone Enrico Delle Sedie opened his own treatise with a remarkably similar announcement. Both methods went on to become the most influential teaching texts in Italian conservatories at the *fine secolo*, at a time when vocal instruction at these institutions was in crisis. Since the 1850s the crisis had been a recurrent topic in Italian periodicals. Commentators first attributed the crisis to Bellini, whose new and unusual *canto declamato* had threatened voices in a manner that so-called *bel canto* vocal lines did not. These antagonists insisted that conservatories hold fast to *bel canto* ideals even as the theater welcomed the fashionable *canto declamato*. The debate left conservatories unsure how to train their students.

In this climate it was hard to find a vocal treatise that did not insist on the antiquity of its principles in order to make clear its debt to so-called *bel canto*. But despite the disclaimers, Delle Sedie's treatise set Italian vocal instruction on a controversial new course, one that stimulated intense debate about vocal strain and the limits of human productivity. I reconstruct how Delle Sedie's treatise influenced vocalism at the *fine secolo* and show how the establishment of fatigue studies at this time informed all of these concerns. Anxieties about worn voices, I argue, were tied to broader concerns relating to industry, productivity, and somatic limits.

The final chapter returns to a familiar episode in operatic histories of this period—the 1893 premiere of Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff* at La Scala. The chapter argues that the very embeddedness of the event in Milan has been crucial to the narratives told about it then and since. It is a commonplace of Verdi criticism that the opera was perplexing in its newness. I reveal that several critics at the premiere chose to promote the idea of *Falstaff* as a civic innovation par excellence, thereby downplaying its links with other “less groundbreaking” repertory. The more innovative the opera seemed, after all, the more it had in common with the *capitale morale*, that center of continual work and progress. But such a narrative obscures links between *Falstaff* and the musical world that brought it to production. This chapter argues that it is only by casting off Milanese assumptions that we can appropriately position *Falstaff* in relation to the operatic efforts that immediately preceded and followed its production. If this casting-off in turn reveals that the opera is not as innovative as we have believed, it nonetheless allows us to better understand modes of listening in the *fine secolo* Italian theater.

This is an urban study—one that necessarily vacillates between conclusions about how music was enfolded in the values of the liberal state, and the particular values of its *capitale morale*. But there is little here about the formation of urban sensibilities in an expanding cityscape, or about music as seen and heard in the realities of a metropolis. Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, which is centered on 1870s and eighties Paris, therefore remains a distant influence on this dissertation, as does even Anselm Gerhard's *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*—a remarkable work conceived as *The*

Arcades Project rose to prominence in the humanities.²⁹ Milan did share some of the outward features of Paris at this time: in 1876 its narrow streets were torn down in order to create its own wide streets to accommodate its expanding population; this urban remodeling was completed with a Galleria that stretched from the Duomo to the Teatro alla Scala. But my dissertation proceeds from the basis that in these decades it was less new sensory stimuli, and more the particular circulation of ideas in this hub of journalistic discourse, as well as the momentum that political and administrative units in Milan lent those ideas, that had most influence on the transformation of musical life.

In its focus on opera as a social practice, rooted in institutions that are themselves under municipal control, this dissertation draws far more from the book introduced in the first paragraph of this chapter: Axel Körner's 2009 *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: from Unification to Fascism*.³⁰ His focus is on the local identities that Bologna assumed across this time, and a substantial part of the book deals with activities at the town's Teatro Comunale in the final decades of the nineteenth century, drawing attention to the repertoire choices made there under the influence of mayor Camillo Casarini. It is a book rooted in documentary evidence that musicologists have ignored: minutes of artistic commission meetings, for instance, and correspondence between those commissions and municipal authorities. My own archival research at La Scala stimulated me to explore the rich connections between the aims and ambitions of the urban center and those of the civic theater at the *fine secolo*.

²⁹ See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), and Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³⁰ Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy*.

Chapter 1

Conducting the Teatro alla Scala before Toscanini

It was at the Teatro alla Scala that Arturo Toscanini launched his conducting career. A cellist with the orchestra, his move onto the podium is now recalled as a fortuitous accident: while in Brazil with an Italian troupe in 1886 their orchestra found itself without a conductor for *Aida* and Toscanini took over, conducting the entire opera without a score.¹ On his return he cut his teeth on the repertoire at a series of theaters until 1898 when he became the artistic director and conductor at La Scala. He remained there until 1906 when La Scala's manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza moved to the Metropolitan Opera and hired Toscanini as the theater's conductor. Toscanini went on to conduct at the New York Philharmonic from 1928 until 1936 and he finished his career as the conductor of an orchestra formed for him alone, the NBC Symphony. He continued to conduct at Italian theaters throughout his career, however, and during the 1920s famously had a second stint as permanent conductor at La Scala. He performed with the NBC Symphony for the last time in 1954 and died two years later.

Toscanini's was a career that moved between the Old World and the New in a manner that was unusually seamless for that time. However, there is a disconnect between the Italian Toscanini and the American one in our histories. Scholarship tells us little about the circumstances that enabled his achievements at La Scala; about who conditioned the orchestra to be responsive to Toscanini's eventual demands; or indeed who handed him the baton. The conductor continues to be revered in musical circles for his obsessive pursuit of accuracy and pioneering attempts to streamline orchestral sound. And yet countless reviews from his earliest concerts at La Scala describe the iconic, mathematical sound he is now famous for (which is inscribed in recordings with the Milanese orchestra from 1921) as one with which critics at La Scala were already familiar before his

¹ On Toscanini see in particular Andrea Della Corte, *Toscanini* (Lausanne: F. Rouge, 1948); Harvey Sachs, *Reflections on Toscanini* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991); Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini: A Social History of American Concert Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Richard Taruskin, "The Dark Side of the Moon," in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 202-216.

arrival.² While scholars have debated what Toscanini meant to Italian audiences, this discussion focuses on La Scala in the 1920s and later, revealing less about what Toscanini meant to audiences at the start of his career in liberal Italy. The conditions that enabled Toscanini's success in America are well understood, thanks to cultural historians such as Joseph Horowitz; but we know much less about the Italian phase of his career.³ However instrumental Gatti-Casazza was in securing Toscanini's first American appointment, the conductor would not have made that transition without a solid record of success with Italian audiences.

This chapter fills one of those gaps, focusing on the circumstances at La Scala when Toscanini inherited the podium, and returning to a moment of innovation at the theater: the initial introduction of the baton conductor. The sole baton conductor as a permanent presence in Italian theaters was introduced in the 1860s, and it was not until 1868 that La Scala came under the baton. When Toscanini arrived, the theater had been under the direction of one man in particular—Franco Faccio—who had been sole conductor from 1871 until 1889 (Figure 1.1).⁴ It was not coincidental that the conductor was introduced to Italy in the immediate post-unification period, when cosmopolitanism was becoming central to the image of the new nation.⁵ Instrumental music was becoming increasingly popular, and the establishment of instrumental music societies in the main Italian musical centers across the 1860s and seventies was one attempt on the part of Italians to mirror musical activities abroad at this time; the innovation of the baton conductor was doubtless meant to achieve something similar.⁶ By the 1860s the baton conductor

² See the reviews collected in Guglielmo Barblan, *Toscanini e la Scala: testimonianze e confessioni a cura di Eugenio Gara* (Milan: Edizionario della Scala, 1972).

³ Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini*.

⁴ On Faccio as conductor, see Raffaello De Rensis, *Franco Faccio e Verdi: carteggi e documenti inediti con 12 illustrazioni* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1934); Raffaello Brenzoni, *Musicisti Veronesi: Franco Faccio* (Verona: La tipografia Veronese, 1934); Claudio Sartori, *Franco Faccio e venti anni di spettacoli di fiera al Teatro Grande di Brescia: carteggi e documenti inediti* (Milan: Bocca, 1938), and Michael Rose, "The Italian Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, ed. José Antonio Bowen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 146-162.

⁵ For an introduction to Italian Unification, see Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: a History of Italy since 1796* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 1-322, and Lucy Riall, *Risorgimento: the History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁶ Milan's instrumental society, the Società del Quartetto, was founded in 1864, at the instigation of publisher Tito Ricordi, together with Arrigo Boito, Franco Faccio, double director Alberto Mazzucato, and composer and critic Lauro Rossi. On this, and the establishment of instrumental societies elsewhere, see Carlo Sini, ed., *L'esperimento musicale: il 29 giugno 1864 diede primo saggio di sé la milanese Società del quartetto* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 2004).

was, after all, an established force in various European cities, and in this context Italian desire to follow suit seems both natural and inevitable.⁷ This story has usually been told in terms of Italian backwardness, the initiative figured as a bid to correct Italian belatedness and to allow orchestras to approach the standards of their more disciplined foreign counterparts.⁸

However, the Italian conductor was not as belated as we have tended to believe. “Double directors” had been the norm in most European cities at the start of the nineteenth century. One director was a violinist, the other a keyboard player, and each would use their instruments to cue and correct ensembles in rehearsal and performance. In Dresden, Kassel and Berlin, double directors did cede to sole baton conductors across the 1810s, while in London the transition occurred in the 1830s in the concert hall and the next decade in the opera house.⁹ In Paris, meanwhile, violin-bow directors who would wave the bow to indicate time, or simply play, were the norm. (They would remain so at the Opéra until the 1860s,

⁷ For a historical overview of baton conducting, see Bowen, *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*; Elliott W. Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting: In Theory and Practice* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1988), and Adam von Ahn Carse, *The Orchestra* (New York: Chanticleer Press, 1949).

⁸ While there is little research on the Italian baton conductor prior to Toscanini, Italian scholars have made important inroads on the topic. See Sergio Martinotti, “Angelo Mariani, direttore e musicista, nel suo tempo,” *Studi musicali* 2/2 (1973): 315-339, and Ivano Cavallini, “Il ‘protogestore’ e il riscatto della direzione nell’opera italiana,” in *Il direttore d’orchestra: genesi e storia di un’arte* (Venice: Marsilio, 1998), 211-239. See also Michael Rose, “The Italian Tradition.”

⁹ Carl Maria von Weber abandoned the piano, and stood to beat time with a roll of paper at the Dresden orchestras from around 1817; Louis Spohr set aside the violin and established a series of subscription concerts at the court in Kassel between 1817 and 1820, which he conducted with a baton; and at the court in Berlin composer Gaspare Spontini conducted with a thick ebony staff with knobs at either end from 1820. Felix Mendelssohn, meanwhile, started an illustrious 12-year association with the Leipzig Gewandhaus in 1835 with a baton in hand. On this see Bowen, “The Rise of Conducting,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, 93-113; and Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting*, 447-449, 459-462 and 503-520. On the earliest baton conducting in London, see Alison Winter, “The Social Body and the Invention of Consensus,” in *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 306-343; Charles Maclean, “English Conducting in 1825,” *Zeitschrift der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* (1909-10): 151-152, and J. Thomson, “Notes of a Musical Tourist,” *The Harmonicon* 8 (January 1830).

and the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire until the 1870s.¹⁰) True, when François-Antoine Habeneck was appointed *Chef d'orchestre* at the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire in 1828 he experimented with the baton, while Hector Berlioz championed the baton in France and abroad as well as in his 1855 treatise *L'Art du chef d'orchestre*. But for all Berlioz's brilliance with the baton, the lesser-known violin-bow directors Édouard Deldevez (1817-1897), Narcisse Girard (1797-1860) and Pierre-Louis Dietsch (1808-1865), as well as Habeneck, wielded more influence on actual conducting practices at the Opéra and the Société. Deldevez wrote a *L'Art du chef d'orchestre* some two decades after Berlioz, and it is this text which tells us most about orchestral direction at the time: in a treatise much lengthier than Berlioz's, Deldevez coaches readers to beat time with the *archet*, not the *bâton*.¹¹ In other words, the repertoire that was under the control of double directors at theaters such as La Scala was in Paris led by the violin-director during the same period. But thanks to the entrenched conviction that Italians never meet their appointments with history (a notion articulated by intellectuals from Giacomo Leopardi to Antonio Gramsci), the idea that the Italian conductor arrived late on the scene has remained uncontested.¹²

¹⁰ See D. Kern Holoman, "The Emergence of the Orchestral Conductor in Paris in the 1830s," in *Musical Life in 19th-Century France*, ed. Peter Bloom, vol. 4, *Music in Paris in the Eighteenth-Thirties* (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1987), 387-429; David Cairns, "The French Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, 134-145; Donna M. Di Grazia, "Rejected Traditions: Ensemble Placement in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *19th-Century Music* 22/2 (1998): 190-209, and Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting*, 466-479 and 549-563.

¹¹ Édouard Marie Ernest Deldevez, *L'Art du chef d'orchestre, 1878; De l'exécution d'ensemble, 1888*, ed. Jean-Philippe Navarre (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2005), and Hector Berlioz, *A Treatise on Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration to Which is Appended the Chef d'orchestre*, trans. Mary Cowden Clarke (London: Novello, 1882).

¹² See, for instance, Julian Budden's curt remark on the Italian conductor in the 1860s, "here too Italy was far behind the times," in Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 2, *From Il Trovatore to La Forza del Destino* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 11. On perceptions of Italian belatedness, see Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians, 1860-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), in particular 1-20.

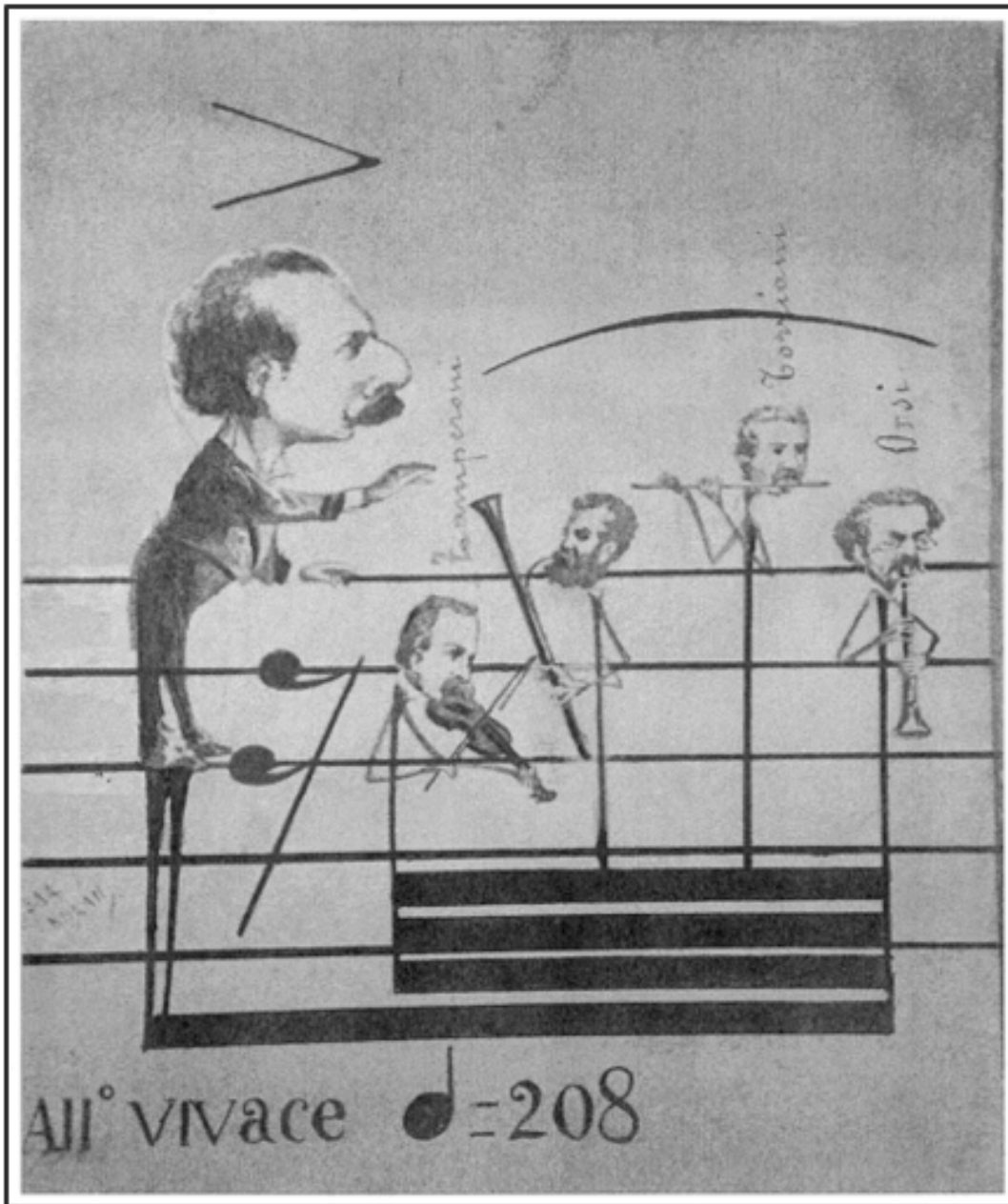


Figure 1.1 Faccio conducts Teatro alla Scala instrumentalists. Image preserved in the Raccolta Autografoteca Veronese at the Biblioteca Civica di Verona (undated).

When we examine how critics and audiences reacted to the earliest conductor to establish a name for himself in Italy—Angelo Mariani—it becomes clear that even if one motivation for introducing the conductor was simply a desire to innovate, there is a much more intricate tale to tell about what motivated new styles of musical direction. Mariani conducted at the Teatro Comunale in Bologna and the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genova from 1860, and reactions to him demonstrate the diversity of opinion à propos of the earliest baton conductors. Critics rushed to sensationalize accounts of musical performances under Mariani, and to use his presence to lend musical culture a glamour it had lacked previously. The cooler reactions to Franco Faccio in Milan demonstrate how local differences determined what the conductor meant, and to whom. This chapter traces the activities of Mariani and then Faccio, in order to establish what the baton conductor achieved at the outset and how exactly conductors influenced musical aesthetics within individual theaters. My excavation of Faccio’s achievement at La Scala also offers a suggestive framework by which to understand the subsequent success of Toscanini, and his iconic sound, at the same theater twenty years later.

Mariani, the DIVO

Born in Ravenna in 1821, Mariani trained in his hometown as both a violinist and composer, and went on to work as a violinist in Rimini, where he attracted the attention of Rossini, who admired a number of his compositions.¹³ In 1844 Mariani worked as “direttore d’orchestra”—a double director from the violin—at Messina, and it is here that his interests in musical direction seem to have been formed, although it remains unclear whether Mariani did more than direct from the violin at this time.¹⁴ More obscure still is the role that Mariani had over the next decade, when he was a music director at Copenhagen, and then at the new music theater in Constantinople. By 1852, however, he had received an Italian

¹³ Mariani’s conducting activities are outlined in Martinotti, “Angelo Mariani, direttore e musicista, nel suo tempo”; Rose, “The Italian Tradition”; and Tancredi Mantovani, *Angelo Mariani* (Rome: Ausonia, 1921). For rich insight into the stylistic and institutional implications of Mariani’s activities at Bologna’s Teatro Comunale, see two recent publications: Cormac Newark, “‘In Italy we don’t have the means for illusion’: Grand opéra in Nineteenth-Century Bologna,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19/3 (2007): 199-222, and Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: from Unification to Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), in particular the chapter “‘Viva Rossini—Morte a Wagner’? From *Campanilismo* to the Future,” 221-262.

¹⁴ Linda B. Fairtile has undertaken valuable research on double direction in Italy. See Fairtile, “The Violin Director and Verdi’s Middle-Period Operas,” in *Verdi’s Middle Period, 1849-1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 413-426.

appointment that made him a full baton conductor, at least in name. Genova's Teatro Carlo Felice appointed him their "maestro concertatore e direttore d'orchestra" although records from the theater indicate that he had to wait until the "maestro concertatore," or double director at the keyboard, had actually retired to consolidate the two roles and become the sole conductor. That moment came in 1860, and at the same time the Teatro Comunale in Bologna abolished double direction and made him their baton conductor. Mariani moved between the theaters across seasons until his death, and received particular acclaim for his *Don Carlo* in 1867, and the Italian premiere of *Lohengrin* in 1871, both at the Comunale. In the 1860s Mariani and Verdi became close friends but their friendship was to sour later in the decade. It is unclear what caused the breach, but their common infatuation with the Bohemian soprano Teresa Stolz is usually invoked as an explanation.¹⁵ The two men's last contact was in 1868; by late June 1873 Mariani had died from a disease that ravaged his intestines.

From 1860 onwards Mariani inspired awestruck reviews. His critics drew on a well-established discourse in northern Europe that construed the orchestral conductor as a literal conductor of electricity, and that used fashionable associations between materials science and the uncanny to link music to the fantastical sublime. Conductors such as Berlioz and Wagner were routinely positioned at the center of these ideas and when Mariani came on the scene the Italians set him alongside them.¹⁶ Thus, having witnessed Mariani's 1871 *Lohengrin*, the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* wrote:

Mariani was the soul of the performance, in the fullest sense of the word, and he could infuse the music of Wagner with... a *je ne sais quoi*, a certain nervous, electrical something.¹⁷

¹⁵ Mariani's personal life, in particular his interactions with Verdi, has been explored in depth by Frank Walker; see Walker, "The Breach with Mariani," in *The Man Verdi* (New York: Knopf, 1962), 283-392.

¹⁶ For instance, critic Francis Hueffer wrote in *The Times* that when Wagner raised his baton, each instrumentalist was "equally under the influence of a personal fascination, which seems to have much in common with the effects of animal magnetism. Every eye is turned towards the master; and it appears as if the musicians derive the notes they play, not from the books on their desks, but from Wagner's glances and movement." Reproduced in Winter, *Mesmerized*, 312.

¹⁷ ("Mariani fu l'anima dello spettacolo, in tutta l'estensione della parola, ed alla musica di Wagner seppe... infondere *un non so che di proprio*, un non so che di nervoso, di elettrico.") See "Lohengrin di Riccardo Wagner al Teatro Comunale di Bologna," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (5 November 1871).

When *Il mondo artistico* mourned his death in 1873, the focus was once more on his electromagnetic abilities:¹⁸

He who has not attended a musical performance conducted by Mariani cannot have an idea of his artistic potency. —We remember him at the first performance of *Lohengrin* at Bologna. He was already violently tormented by the illness that sent him to his grave. But when he was on the podium he forgot his suffering: art transformed his emaciated face. And thus his leonine profile, those deep and blazing eyes, lit up; his long hair stood on end; his entire person emanated enthusiasm. And that enthusiasm spread from Mariani to the entire orchestra: an electric current passed between Mariani and each instrumentalist, all the instruments lived one and the same life, and under the delicate quiver of his hand, under the flashes of his eyes, they united in tremendous bursts of sound, or whispered quietly and then muffled the sound into a delicate sigh like the breath of a sleeping child. Oh! Mariani, the DIVO!¹⁹

¹⁸ Critical responses to Mariani are full of similar statements. Reviewing Mariani's 1867 *Don Carlo* at Bologna's Comunale, Filippo Filippi enthused: "his genius flashed forth from the orchestra" and "he himself composed another *Don Carlo* within Verdi's *Don Carlo*, with the opulence of his coloration, his fire, and the magic of his sound." See Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 536. Historian Franco Mistrali described Mariani in 1869 as "a sorcerer: from his baton a fluid spreads that drives the submissive vocal and instrumental masses." (Un mago: dalla sua bacchetta si diffonde come un fluido che trascina le masse vocali e strumentali obbedienti.) See Mistrali, *Le ciarle Bolognesi* (Bologna: Società tipografica dei compositori, 1869), 425. In the eulogy at Mariani's funeral, Giuseppe Celli recalled: "endowed with rare communicativeness and firm will, he knew how to instill in the mass of performers the musical sentiments of his own soul, and they, obedient to the assured gestures of the magic baton, produced unheard-of wonders." (Dotato di rara comunicativa e di fermo volere, egli sapea trasfondere nelle masse esecutrici i sentimenti musicali dell'animo suo, e queste ubbidienti al cenno della sicura sua magica bacchetta, fecero portenti inauditi.) See "Elogio Funebre di Angelo Mariani, Letto in Sant'Agata Feltria, il 24 Luglio 1873 da Giuseppe Celli," reproduced in Amedeo Potito, *Angelo Mariani: Autobiografia e documenti, 1821-1873* (Rimini: Bruno Ghigi Editore, 1985), 85-92.

¹⁹ ("Chi non ha assistito ad una esecuzione musicale diretta da Mariani non può farsi un concetto della sua potenza artistica. —Ce lo ricordiamo alla prima rappresentazione del *Lohengrin* a Bologna. Egli era già fieramente travagliato dalla malattia che lo ha condotto alla tomba. Ma quand'era al suo posto, dimenticava i suoi patimenti: l'arte trasfigurava il suo volto emaciato. Allora quel suo profilo leonino, que'suoi occhi profondi ed ardenti s'illuminavano, i suoi lunghi capelli si sollevavano; tutta la sua persona spirava entusiasmo. E quell'entusiasmo si comunicava da lui all'orchestra intera, da lui a ciascun suonatore si stabiliva una corrente elettrica, tutti gli strumenti vivevano di una stessa vita, e sotto le vibrazioni delicatissime della sua mano, sotto i lampi del suo occhio si univano in tremendi scoppii di sonorità o mormoravano sommessamente ed estinguevano il loro suono in un sospiro leggero come l'alito d'un fanciullo dormente. Oh! Il DIVO Mariani!") See "Angelo Mariani," *Il mondo artistico* (19 June 1873).

It is debatable whether reviewers would have described Mariani in these exact terms had he not been one of the earliest conductors. At the outset of the 1860s music critics needed a vocabulary with which to describe the conductor, and it must have been easier to borrow discourse used abroad than to establish their own terms. But their use of these conceits across Mariani's career also indicates that the very idea of the conductor was fascinating to audiences, and that Mariani himself was able to sustain that fascination in the theater: to animate musicians and even audiences.

These reviews suggest that some of Mariani's appeal came from his status as an individual with evident power over the musicians under him, which made him an ideal candidate for cult status. Mariani came to the podium in the same moment that fan culture was on the rise in Italy. Lucy Riall has recently shown that Giuseppe Garibaldi—the man of action so instrumental in Italian unification—was surrounded with an almost unprecedented fan culture (and, indeed, worked to abet it).²⁰ When a newly constructed nation needed cultural monuments in the post-unification period, meanwhile, Italians rushed to make Verdi a national hero.²¹ And from 1860 onwards, Mariani was the object of an enthusiastic fan culture. When he died, thousands mourned him in the streets of Genova, and obituaries stressed the devotion of his audiences. The *Giornale umoristico*, for instance, celebrated Mariani thus:

Mariani was not just admired, he was loved, very much loved by all those who were able to approach him. And those who knew just how fierce his genius was, just how excellent he was in the divine art of sound, loved him all the more... And now we have lost him, and forever! We will not ever again hear his sweet voice, we will never again be able to shake his hand, that hand which produced so many miracles when he raised the conductor's baton!²²

²⁰ Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

²¹ See, in particular, Roger Parker, "*Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati*": *The Verdian Patriotic Chorus in the 1840s* (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 1997), and Laura Basini, "Cults of Sacred Memory: Parma and the Verdi Centennial Celebrations of 1913," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13/2 (2001): 141-161.

²² ("Mariani non era soltanto ammirato, era amato, molto amato da tutti coloro che potevano avvicinarlo. E lo amavano pure quei molti che conoscevano quanta fosse la potenza del suo ingegno, quanta la sua eccellenza nella divina arte dei suoni... Ed ora lo abbiamo perduto e per sempre! Non udremo più mai la sua cara voce, non potremo mai più stringere quella mano, che sapeva produrre tanti miracoli quando alzava la bacchetta del direttore d'orchestra!") See "Nelle nuvole," *Giornale umoristico* (18 June 1873); reproduced in Potito, *Angelo Mariani: Autobiografia*, 93-96.

So unreserved were these reactions that they should cause us to consider how the arrival of the baton conductor altered fundamental roles within Italian musical culture. While it remains unclear what caused the estrangement of Verdi and Mariani, the conductor's cult status likely contributed to the breach. Verdi must have realized that he had a rival on the scene in the form of the DIVO Mariani.

However effusive the written reactions to Mariani's performances were, it remains hard to imagine the orchestral sounds generated under his baton. The language critics used focused more on the visceral than the sonic—on the sensation that musicians were bound one to another by a mysterious current or force, rather than by *tempi* or articulation. To reconstruct orchestral aesthetics under Mariani, we need to cross modalities; not only to read about sensation, but to hear the sounds that inspired that imagery. It is necessarily a speculative task that at best allows us to reach broad conclusions. But if we concede that vibrant sounds would better have stimulated audiences' fantasies about electrical transmission than less vibrant sounds, then we might imagine that behind the audiences' visions of electrical wonderment was an orchestra that was more focused than listeners had been accustomed to; that under Mariani musicians performed with better balance, intonation, and ensemble.

Faccio, the Perfect Gentleman

Our second conductor was born in Verona in 1840 and moved to Milan in 1855, where he would remain for most of his career. As a composition student at the Milan Conservatory he met Arrigo Boito, with whom he would have a lifelong friendship. The two men collaborated on a series of patriotic compositions at the time of the liberation of Lombardy, *Il quattro giugno* (1860) and *Le sorelle d'Italia* (1861), which earned them respect within the salons of Milan, despite their young age. On graduation from the Conservatory Faccio worked on the opera *I profughi fiamminghi*, set to a text by Emilio Praga, but it received a cool reception at its 1863 premiere. It was at the post-premiere celebrations for *I profughi fiamminghi* that Boito delivered his infamous ode *All'arte italiana*, the toast that likened Italian art to the soiled walls of a brothel and called for a new musical style that would wash away these impurities.²³ Faccio's second opera, *Amleto*, met with little

²³ On Boito in the 1860s, see Rosa Solinas, "Arrigo Boito: the Legacy of Scapigliatura" (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 1999). Boito would eventually become Verdi's librettist, and collaborate with him on the *Inno delle Nazioni*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. On Boito and Verdi's interactions, see Marcello Conati and Mario Medici, eds., *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

more success, and by 1866 he had abandoned composition in favor of a career at the podium.

While few details are known about Faccio's next move, we know that like Mariani he trained abroad, conducting opera in Scandinavia. On his return to Italy he held appointments at Milan's Teatro Carcano as well as at regional theaters such as Brescia's Teatro Grande. Simultaneously he worked as an assistant conductor at La Scala. The theater had hired the Roman Eugenio Terziani as their baton conductor in 1868 but his success was limited, and his tenure with the orchestra short-lived.²⁴ In 1871 Faccio succeeded Terziani as permanent conductor and established his credentials in his first season when he conducted the Italian premiere of *Aida* to critical acclaim.²⁵ While at La Scala Faccio founded an instrumental concert series, impressed audiences at the 1878 Paris Exhibition, and introduced the Milanese to Wagner. In 1889 he succumbed to madness, allegedly between Acts 2 and 3 of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and was removed to a sanitarium where he died in 1891.²⁶ When Toscanini came to the podium he initiated his career as Faccio had ended his, with a performance of *Die Meistersinger*.

Critical responses to Faccio as conductor are surprisingly different from those of Mariani. However much he earned critics' respect, they described him in sober terms and seem to have been little absorbed with the man behind the conductor. One commentator summed Faccio up in the following terms:

²⁴ Terziani was the subject of divided opinions in the press. The correspondent "Il matto," who wrote for the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, agitated for his removal, claiming "Terziani reads the score continuously, or he barks orders to the right and to the left with pronounced movements, while the baton traces vicious circles, in a manner that resembles a vessel beaten by the waves of a tempestuous sea. This undulatory movement is the principal cause of the dubious, odd executions, lacking in efficacy, that have been heard now for some time at La Scala." (Il Terziani legge continuamente la partitura, o si sbraitava a destra ed a mancina in movimenti marcattissimi, mentre la bacchetta segna circoli viziosi, in modo che pare un vascello sbattuto dalle onde di un mar procelloso. Questo movimento ondulatorio è causa principale dell'esecuzione incerta, bislacca, senza efficacia che si ode da qualche tempo alla Scala.) See "La verità vera: divagazione," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1 January 1871); "Fiocchi di Neve," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (5 February 1871), and "Lucidi intervalli," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (19 March 1871).

²⁵ The appointment of a conductor for an entire season or longer was at odds with existing authorial and publishers' rights, which entitled authors and publishers to determine who conducted an opera after the first performance, so long as the work had been published in full. Faccio had the support of Casa Ricordi but not Casa Lucca; accordingly, hostilities between these two rival publishing houses increased at this time. On this, see "Notizie di Milano," *Rivista teatrale melodrammatica* (15 December 1871).

²⁶ On the *Meistersinger* incident see, for instance, "Franco Faccio," *L'Italia musicale* (23 July 1891), and "Franco Faccio," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (26 July 1891).

A perfect gentleman, entirely uncompromising in art, modest and without airs, Faccio hides, beneath a calm exterior, a steely temperament. Audiences who applaud with enthusiasm, that follow those phenomenal orchestral performances, which seem to receive the breath of life from the baton of the conductor reduced to a miracle of precision [...] audiences perhaps do not know how much strength, how much study, how much self-denial is needed in a conductor to achieve such results.²⁷

The contrast between the reception of Mariani and Faccio is nowhere clearer than in reactions to Faccio's death. His obituaries contain none of the intimacy of Mariani's, none of the desire to reach out to touch him, or hear his sweet voice. The *Rivista teatrale melodrammatica* closed its obituary in more matter-of-fact terms:

Franco Faccio, the body, the soul of many creations that found in him an interpreter who was scrupulously conscientious, intelligent to the point of being an indispensable collaborator, the man who was the pride of the foremost theater of Italy, is no longer, he passed away in the prime of life [...] Farewell!

28

What is more, while Mariani was mourned by crowds in the streets of Genova, Faccio's audiences seem not to have been all that troubled when he died. On the morning of the conductor's burial his remains arrived from Monza at Milan's Stazione centrale on a 9AM train.²⁹ A small funeral convoy headed from there to Milan's brand-new Cimitero monumentale. The Municipal Band propelled the procession forward with Amilcare Ponchielli's Op. 157, a recycled funeral march that had originally been composed in memory of the novelist Alessandro Manzoni, who had been buried in 1873 amid mass outpourings of grief. At Faccio's funeral, in melancholy contrast, no more than fifty people—functionaries and friends—

²⁷ ("Gentiluomo perfetto, punto intransigente in arte, modesto senza posa, il Faccio nasconde, sotto l'apparenza mitissima, una temprà d'acciaio. Il pubblico che applaude con entusiasmo, che segue meravigliato quelle fenomenali esecuzioni di orchestra, la quale sembra riceve il soffio della vita dalla bacchetta del direttore ridotta ad un miracolo di precisione [...] il pubblico forse ignora quanta forza, quanto studio, quanta abnegazione ci vogliono in chi dirige, per arrivare a tali risultati.") Loose sheet, 1891, Franco Faccio Papers, Raccolta Autografoteca Veronese, Biblioteca Civica di Verona, Italy.

²⁸ ("Franco Faccio, la forza, l'anima di tante creazioni che trovarono in lui un'interprete coscienzioso fino allo scrupolo, intelligente fino ad essere cooperatore necessario, l'uomo che fu orgoglio del primo teatro d'Italia, non è più, si è spento quando la vita è vigore [...] Vale!") In "Franco Faccio," *Rivista teatrale melodrammatica* (23 July 1891).

²⁹ Details of the funeral procession are reported in "Franco Faccio," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (26 July 1891).

were present; prominent members of La Scala's administration and civic government were glaringly absent.³⁰

And yet, even if Faccio was at best a very minor celebrity, the reviews from across his career leave little doubt that critics and audiences held the work that he did at La Scala in extremely high regard. When critics described Faccio's conducting, the emphasis fell squarely on his sound, and even on its status as a measurable phenomenon. The adjective of choice was "preciso," which can be literally translated as "precise" or "accurate," but in the nineteenth century also carried a connotation of mechanicity. Italian dictionaries of the period define "preciso" as a term used to describe a mechanical instrument that was exact; the phrase "di precisione" was used to describe work that was accurate and well done.³¹ Clearly, "preciso" had positive valence, both in its foremost application—to industrial domains—and in the theater, where it was an unambiguous endorsement. It became a watchword to describe Faccio, accumulating on newsprint throughout his career, so much so that modern readers are left with the impression that La Scala under Faccio had a consistent sound—even what we would now call a "house sound." In 1871, the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* commented on the orchestra under Faccio:

Various pieces of classical music for full orchestra were performed, with the exquisiteness and precision that distinguishes these concerts.³²

And in 1872, *Il mondo artistico* described the Italian premiere of *Aida* as:

³⁰ See "I funerali di Faccio," *Gazzetta teatrale italiana* (5 August 1891). The Veronese paper *L'arena* reproached the Milanese for indifference towards their native Faccio: "What a poor impression the aristocracy and the Milanese artistic world made on us. What pitiful homage to the Illustrious Maestro of La Scala!" (Che magra figura ci ha fatto l'aristocrazia e il mondo artistico milanese! Che desolante omaggio all'Illustre Maestro della Scala!) See "I funebri di Franco Faccio a Milano," *L'arena* (25 July 1891).

³¹ Niccolò Tommaseo and Bernardo Bellini, *Dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice, 1861-79), s.v. "preciso", and Giuseppe Rigutini and Pietro Fanfani, *Vocabolario italiano della lingua parlata* (Florence: Tipografia Cenniniana, 1875-6), s.v. "preciso."

³² ("Furono eseguiti colla squisitezza e colla precisione che distingue questi concerti, vari pezzi di musica classica a piena orchestra.") "Rivista Milanese," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (9 April 1871).

Executed with utmost precision, and with very powerful sonorous effects. The orchestra, and in particular the violins, in the delicate accompaniments, in the minute details with which this score abounds, played deliciously [...] indeed, they paint in miniature. In fact, I do not believe that any other theater would be able to achieve the same effects of ensemble as La Scala achieved in this performance.³³

The term “preciso” went hand in hand with claims that Faccio achieved something close to perfection: the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* described the 1876 production of *I vespri siciliani* as:

Truly irreproachable [*veramente incensurabile*]: there is something miraculous about what La Scala’s orchestra can do under Faccio.³⁴

These terms as applied to Faccio seem to put us on firmer ground than the discourse that Mariani attracted, for the phrasing is both less abstract and more familiar. Precision would after all become the cornerstone of modernist textualism in the first decades of the twentieth century, an approach which held that a clean conversion of the score into sound was not only possible, but also the surest route to the realization of the composer’s intentions.³⁵ We could imagine Faccio’s reviewers as early adopters of that same fantasy; their sonic ideal being the sound most true to the musical details in the score. But the few pieces of evidence that the score mattered in this manner to 1870s Italians cease to convince once set in context. The most famous such contextual evidence is a letter from Verdi to his publisher Giulio Ricordi about Mariani, in which he complained that the conductor had claimed too much interpretive freedom in a performance of the overture to *La forza del destino* and insisted that he wanted “one creator only” and was “content when what is written is performed simply and accurately.”³⁶ But Verdi’s remark

³³ (“Eseguiti con somma precisione, e con effetti di sonorità potentissimi. L’orchestra, e specialmente i violini, negli accompagnamenti delicati, nei particolari minuti di cui abbonda lo spartito, suonano deliziosamente [...] anzi miniano. -Per gli effetti d’insieme in nessun’altro teatro io credo si potrà uguagliare codesta esecuzione della Scala.”) See “*Aida* del M. Verdi alla Scala,” *Il mondo artistico* (16 February 1872).

³⁴ (“Veramente incensurabile: quello che sa fare l’orchestra della Scala diretta da Faccio ha del miracolo.”) “Rivista Milanese,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (2 January 1876).

³⁵ For the clearest statement on this position, see Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁶ Letter to Giulio Ricordi dated 11 April 1871, reproduced in Marcello Conati, ed., *Verdi: Intervisti e incontri* (Turin: EDT, 2000), 328.

seems to tell us less about widespread attitudes to musical texts in the 1870s than about his incipient attitude towards conductors such as Mariani.³⁷

What is more, Faccio's commentators used the terms "preciso" and "incensurabile" concerning works that were unfamiliar to them—works sometimes never before heard in Italy, and whose scores had limited circulation, even in piano reduction. There was little collective sense of these works in the Milanese consciousness when critics declared Faccio's orchestra to be precise; few sonic memories of past performances; and few obvious external standards against which Faccio could be measured. On those occasional moments when Faccio did not meet his critics' expectations, we come to understand what the ideal of precision meant in 1870s Milan. In 1871 *Il mondo artistico* related that Faccio had lost control of the tempo; that the articulation was uneven and the overall characterization of the music inconsistent.³⁸ In Faccio's case, then, precision seems to be more about clean execution and internal consistency than fidelity to the score.

Realpolitik

There is something commonsensical about this critical focus on Faccio's "precision." We can suppose that Milanese audiences were in thrall to the baton, new as it was at La Scala, and in thrall to the sounds it seemed to enable. We can also presume that the Milanese were curious about the conductor's controlling motions—the delineation of the beat, of crescendos and diminuendos—and listened for an audible trace of that pantomime. To hear precision was then—in a fundamental sense—to listen to the baton. We can turn to a more familiar episode in histories of listening—the introduction in the early twentieth century of the commercial record—to understand this process. For however modest the baton was as a material construction, these were related technologies. As Theodor Adorno claimed, the record made audiences more attuned to the complexities of sound, more committed to an "aesthetic of the detail," because the microphone could encode details that the record could deliver across repeated hearings. In turn, a fetish emerged for performance that sounded like "flawlessly functioning, metallically brilliant apparatus [...] performance [that] sounds like its own

³⁷ On Verdi's initial support for the baton conductor, see Cavallini, "Il 'protogestore' e il riscatto della direzione nell'opera italiana," 232-239.

³⁸ "Società del concerto, concerto sinfonico," *Il mondo artistico* (17 December 1871). For similar criticisms, see also "Rivista Milanese," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (3 January 1874).

phonograph record.”³⁹ With the baton, as with the record, fascination with the technology became inseparable from fascination with the sounds it most promoted: the baton, like the record, focused listeners’ aesthetic priorities on its powers of mediation.

But these ideas do not account for the marked differences in critical reactions towards Mariani and Faccio, or for how one conductor was the source of elaborate fantasies while the other caused audiences to fixate on a new level of precision. The radical shift in discourse certainly indicates that Mariani and Faccio must have been dissimilar, but it should also cause us to reflect on the fact that Mariani and Faccio’s audiences, equally, were different, and had distinct concerns. By the 1870s, when the discourse around Faccio was forming, critics were no longer so reliant on the terms used to describe the conductor abroad. But the climate had also changed since the 1860s, and especially in Milan, where Faccio’s critics were based. To understand this shift—and ultimately to comprehend what it can now tell us about musical aesthetics at La Scala at the time Toscanini was arriving—we need to consider the practical realities of Italian history, politics and economics (or rather, the bean-counting cousin of economics—statistics) as these crept into the auditorium.

Above all, we need to consider the influence of a new political realism on Faccio’s work at La Scala. In 1870s Italy, counting became *the* means to estimate value. On one level it is obvious that a measure of a nation’s force is its countable products; but fresh in the 1870s was the blinkered focus on the numerical and on measurement, to the exclusion of sentiment, character, and spirit. Something new was in the air: politicians became wired to banish dreams and fantasies and to search for all that was secure and unshakable. Deputy Alberto Blanc related this to his colleague, the former Prime Minister Marco Minghetti, with striking urgency in correspondence dated 1871:

Let us break the hold that attachments of the heart have on our ideas and our actions in the present. Germany [...] has gained such a lead on the rest of the world that we shall have to hurry our pace and pursue reality, leaving behind affections, dreams, and the sentimental ideal, and grasp hold vigorously of the

³⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Fetish-Character in Music,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 301. For more on the aesthetic of the sonic detail, see Jonathan Sterne, “Audile Technique and Media,” in *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 137-177.

only things that are solid and secure: positive science, productivity, and the force that comes from both of them.⁴⁰

This was a political realism of a Prussian stamp—a realism for which Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was becoming famous under the label “Realpolitik”—and it favored decisions based not on moral premises, or on premises at all, but on calculable gain.⁴¹ As diplomatic historian Federico Chabod has shown, in Italy “the concept of *Realpolitik*, though not the term, was by this time widespread, in the sense that the only forces to be taken into account were the tangible and observable ones, using empirical sensory apparatus and mathematical calculation to do so.”⁴² Realpolitik’s acceptance into the national consciousness was related in large measure to Bismarck’s triumph in the 1871 Franco-Prussian war: a war that left France humiliated and shaken.⁴³

If political realism was new in the 1870s, the numerical basis behind it was well-established decades earlier, and in particular within Milan. In the 1830s and forties a fascination with statistics took hold in the Italian states as the discipline came to the fore in Europe.⁴⁴ Silvana Patriarca has shown how the Milanese made a distinct contribution to the field of statistics in the work of Melchiorre Gioia and Gian Domenico Romagnosi, who believed statistics to be a tool for statesmen, administrators and those in commercial and professional fields alike. During these decades, Gioia tabulated all manner of social and civic facts—the inclines of hills, the prevalence of conflict between mothers and their daughter-in-laws, the ideal ratio of manure to the hectare. Romagnosi theorized about the ultimate use of statistics, its final purpose being to insure that individuals’ material and moral

⁴⁰ (“Les attaches du coeur [...] mais rompons—en les liens dans notre pensée et dans notre action présente. L’Allemagne [...] a pris une telle avance sur le reste du monde, qu’il faut hâter le pas et courir à la réalité, laisser là les affections, les rêves et l’idéal sentimental, et se saisir vigoureusement des seules choses solides et sûres, la science positive, la production et la force qui provient de l’une et de l’autre.”) See Federico Chabod, *Storia della politica estera italiana dal 1870 al 1896* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1962), 3. This translation is taken from Chabod, *Italian Foreign Policy: the Statecraft of the Founders, 1870-1896*, trans. William McCuaig (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁴¹ For an overview of Bismarck’s role in German history, see David Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780-1918: the Long Nineteenth Century* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

⁴² Chabod, *Italian Foreign Policy*, 6.

⁴³ On this, see Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris: The Siege and the Commune of 1870-71* (London: Penguin, 2007).

⁴⁴ Silvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Eugenio Garin, “Positivism,” in *History of Italian Philosophy*, trans. Giorgio Pinton (New York: Rodopi, 2008), 2:977-992.

needs were met. When from 1861 the Italian states were unified, and the first Italian parliament was elected, the Liberals came to power and established a Directorate of Statistics under Milanese intellectual Pietro Maestri. Maestri's directorate produced an *Annuario statistico italiano* from 1864 onwards, a yearbook that cast the achievements of the nation in clear, numerical terms and answered the Catholic Church's ideological opposition to the liberal state with its sharply tabulated "positive knowledge."

This statistical obsession, as it coincided with a political realism in the 1870s, was crucial to how Faccio's critics understood him. The extent to which his reviewers emphasized that his work with the orchestra was "preciso" indicates that he did alter orchestral aesthetics, increasing internal consistencies within the music. But in this climate of the "solid and secure," terms such as "preciso" in musical criticism also had a special appeal—both because they showed that music could be measured and cast in reassuring binaries ("accurate" / "inaccurate") and because Faccio's musicians could be situated on the better side of those binaries. In other words, critics doubtless had a role in encouraging the aesthetics that Faccio in turn promoted.

Political realism also shaped how audiences reacted to Faccio as a person. A new puritanism went hand in hand with the Italian take on Realpolitik, a fresh commitment to a moral universe in which the individual denies himself luxuries and works hard. Much as the commentator cited earlier emphasized Faccio's self-denial, critics at his death described him as "scrupoloso" (a word with its own mathematical origins in the scruple); "coscienzioso" (conscientious), and "operoso" (industrious).⁴⁵ His industriousness was also commented on in the press from the start. When in 1874 members of the La Scala orchestra complained about the demands Faccio placed on them, publisher Giulio Ricordi crushed them with a reminder in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* that this conductor was a man of hard-earned knowledge.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See for instance "Franco Faccio," *Rivista teatrale melodrammatica* (23 July 1891), and "Franco Faccio," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (26 July 1891).

⁴⁶ Faccio's stance towards his orchestra members can be glimpsed in unpublished letters from him to the artistic commission of the Teatro alla Scala, held at the Raccolta Autografoteca Veronese, Biblioteca Civica di Verona, Italy, in Busta (Envelope) 368. These corroborate the journalistic evidence that at least some orchestra members were unused to Faccio's discipline. For instance, in a letter dated 20 December 1871 (filed as the second of forty-one letters) he requests that the artistic commission formally reprimand an oboist who played some notes on his instrument while Faccio was rehearsing the prayer from Act 2 of *La forza del destino*, and ensure he is made aware such behavior will not be tolerated.

The mainspring is immediately perceptible: it is the desire of a few restless people to rid themselves of a conductor who knows how to maintain discipline and the propriety of the theater, [to rid themselves] of an artist who *knows*—*who genuinely knows*. Nowadays, *scienza* [science / knowledge] in a young man is something that is very enviable to those who have carried on in life without setting aside any at all.⁴⁷

Controlled and conscientious, Faccio was considered a man of action who delivered on his promises. In 1878, Faccio and the La Scala orchestra traveled to Paris to perform in the third Universal Exhibition, while Verdi sat at Sant’Agata, sure the orchestra would fail to impress the Parisians.⁴⁸ In the event, the Paris press allowed that their orchestral Société des Concerts du Conservatoire would have to work hard to ensure La Scala did not outdo them, while France’s Minister of Education made Faccio a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor.⁴⁹

The Italian press made much of this. One Italian periodical published a caricature of Faccio as coachman to the La Scala orchestra, careering along the “Via di Francia,” blazing a trail (Figure 1.2). The annotation drew on some of the most iconic lines in Dante’s *Paradiso*, spoken when Dante has been exiled from decadent Florence and receives counsel from his great-great grandfather, Cacciaguida. He encourages Dante to bravely face the work that lies ahead:

⁴⁷ (“La molla principale si vede subito; è il desiderio di alcuni irrequieti di sbarazzarsi d’un direttore d’orchestra che sa mantenere la disciplina ed il decoro del teatro, di un artista che sa e sa davvero. Ora la scienza in un giovane è grande oggetto d’invidia per chi ha saputo andare innanzi negli anni senza metterne da parte un gruzzolino.”) Giulio Ricordi, “Rubrica amena, I petrolieri dell’arte,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1 February 1874).

⁴⁸ Faccio asked for Verdi’s *paterno consiglio* with regards to the repertory, but he declined to comment due to his apprehension about La Scala’s involvement in the Exhibition. In a letter to Clara Maffei dated 19 June 1878, Verdi confided: “The risk is great [...] If they pull it off, they will gain little; if they do not pull it off, they will lose what little reputation and prestige the Teatro alla Scala has from a distance.” (Il rischio è grande [...] Se riescono guadagnano poco; se non riescono, perdono quel po’ di reputazione e prestigio che dà da lontano il Teatro alla Scala.) Cited in De Rensis, *Franco Faccio e Verdi*, 159.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, “Milan à Paris, La Scala au Trocadéro,” *Le figaro* (18 June 1878): “If our Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, whose reputation is universal, should fear from some competition, it is precisely from the Conservatory of Milan, which can set against us a group of teachers who are truly eminent, that who are performers of the first order.” (Si notre société des Concerts du Conservatoire, dont la renommée est universelle, avait jamais quelque concurrence à redouter, ce serait celle du Conservatoire de Milan, qui peut nous opposer un groupe de professeurs véritablement éminents, qui sont aussi des exécutants de premier ordre.)

Tu lascerai ogni cosa diletta
più caramente; e questo è quello strale;
che l'arco dello essilio pria saetta.

Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle
lo scendere e'l salir per l'altrui scale.⁵⁰

[“You shall leave everything you love most: / this is the arrow that the bow of
exile / shoots first. You are to know the bitter taste / of others’ bread, how salty it
is, and know / *how hard a path it is for one who goes / ascending and descending
the stairs of another.*”]

The caricature does away with any overtones of doubt, fear or self-reflection;
instead, it shows a Faccio who has a vision and will see it to completion: “I do not
say this for the sake of it, but with such a coachman / ‘*It is not a hard path*’ / ‘*For
one who goes ascending and descending the stairs of another.*” Nested in this is a
pun on “faccio,” the first person singular of the verb “fare”—to make, or to do.
“Non Faccio per dire” here translates as “I do not say this for the sake of it,” in
other words, “I do not say this because the pun (on Faccio’s name) is opportune.”
But the phrase “non Faccio per dire” resonates with the caricature at another level.
It also means “I’m not just saying it, I’ll do it”—or—“I don’t just talk, I act.” In a
nutshell, this was the doctrine of realism.

⁵⁰ Dante’s text appears in canto XVII, lines 55-60 of *Paradiso*. See Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. John D. Sinclair, vol. 3, *Paradise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 244. The Faccio caricature is reproduced in De Rensis, *Franco Faccio e Verdi*, 144-145.



Figure 1.2 Faccio and the Teatro alla Scala orchestra en route to Paris, 1878. In De Rensis, *Franco Faccio e Verdi*, n.pag.

The La Scala Coach / I do not say this for the sake of it, but with such a coachman... / ... “It is not a hard path” / “For one who goes ascending and descending the stairs of another.”

(Posta orchestrale della Scala / Non Faccio per dire, ma con tal cocchiere... / ... “Non è duro calle” / “Lo scendere e il salir per l’altrui scale.”)

Diplomatic Relations and the Musical Press

If political realism of a Prussian stamp had great resonance for Faccio's fans, it did not, of course, mean they were out-and-out Germanophiles. The year 1871 created renewed love for France among Italian liberals, not least because it resulted in Napoleon III's surrender and the restoration of a Republic. What is more, there was widespread sentiment among European liberals and non-liberals alike that Bismarck was a man who could upset all calculations. According to a then current expression, "Europe was losing a mistress but gaining a master" following the Franco-Prussian war.⁵¹ But as the literature on music and nationalism has shown us time and again, there is no sure connection between admiration for a particular nation and desire to emulate it; even a complete Francophile could embrace Bismarckian realism.

Indeed, sometimes the French emulated the Germans best. Scholars such as Michael Strasser and Delphine Mordey have shown that after the French defeat in 1871 Teutonic ideals rose to prominence in French performance culture. Critics and performers promoted the Société Nationale de Musique as an intellectual (read "Germanic") establishment over the Opéra-Comique, so popular in Napoleon III's glitzy Second Empire.⁵² Certain words in French musical criticism — "pureté" (purity), "netteté" (neatness, cleanness), "précision" (precision) and "scrupuleux" (scrupulous)—must have contributed to this more sober performance culture. Their use is abundant in the Parisian reviews of Faccio and La Scala in the 1878 Exhibition. *Le Gaulois*, for instance, reported:

The orchestra was marvelous, with an impact, and purity beyond compare. One simply must hear the attack of these violas and the basses, the force of the sustained sounds, the force of the *tutti*. These one hundred and twenty instruments play and vibrate *with an incomparable certainty*. The directions given by the conductor *are followed rigorously*. Not a single breakdown. An absolute submission to the letter of the score, *an ensemble scrupulous about the tiniest details*. The result is a particular warmth, a singular interpretation.

⁵¹ Chabod, *Italian Foreign Policy*, 29.

⁵² See Michael Strasser, "The Société Nationale and its Adversaries: The Musical Politics of L'Invasion germanique in the 1870s," *19th-Century Music* 24 /3 (2001): 225-251, and Delphine Mordey, "Auber's Horses: L'Annee terrible and Apocalyptic Narratives," *19th-Century Music* 30 /3 (2007): 213-229.

The melodies are set into relief, the harmonies assume *a cleanliness that astonishes*.⁵³

This tone may not have been new to France after 1871 but it was prominent, and resonated loudly with the lessons of political realism the French were absorbing. At a time when print culture was expanding, music critics in Milan doubtless learnt their lessons in political realism from multiple sources—from Italian political commentators, but also—and importantly—from the tone of French musical criticism.

Of course, identifying connections between the Franco-Prussian war and changes in musical aesthetics has become almost a musicological parlor game. For Carl Dahlhaus, 1871 is “one of the few profound breaks in political history which had clear repercussions on the history of music, repercussions which we can squarely put our finger on without having to construct vague and elaborate hypotheses.”⁵⁴ But we would do well to consider what the events of 1871 did not subsume. Even if discourse about music altered after 1871, and if Milan, as a hub for the statistical mania, was particularly affected, the new critical language did not completely sweep away the old. Soloists at La Scala were not described in the same puritanical terms applied to Faccio, even if they too could be praised for their precision on occasion. And fan culture around soloists did not decline. The fees soloists commanded indicate as much: Teresa Stolz could earn an astonishing 40,000 francs for one season at La Scala, while Faccio would receive around 5,000

⁵³ (“Elle [the orchestra] a été merveilleuse, d’un éclat et d’une pureté sans pareils. Il faut entendre les attaques des violons et des basses, la vigueur des sons tenus, la solidité des tutti. Ces cent vingt instruments sonnent et vibrent ensemble avec une incomparable sûreté. Les indications données par le chef d’orchestre sont suivies rigoureusement. Pas une défaillance. Une soumission absolue à la lettre de la partition, un esprit d’ensemble scrupuleux des moindres détails. Il en résulte une chaleur, une vie singulière d’interprétation. Les mélodies prennent un relief, les harmonies une netteté qui étonnent.”) See “Concerts du Trocadéro, L’orchestre de la Scala, de Milan,” *Le Gaulois* (22 June 1878). The italics are in the original.

⁵⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 263. Julian Budden and Gundula Kreuzer have both discussed Italian musical identity as shaped by the Franco-Prussian war. See Julian Budden, “A Problem of Identity: Italian Opera 1870-1890,” in *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 3, *From Don Carlos to Falstaff*, 263-292; and Gundula Kreuzer, “‘Oper im Kirchengewande?’ Verdi’s *Requiem* and the Anxieties of the Young German Empire,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58/2 (2005): 399-449.

francs for two seasons at the outset of his career, and some 12,000 at its close.⁵⁵ But then soloists were ephemeral, the darlings of audiences from Milan to New York; while Faccio, as a permanent conductor at La Scala, the face of the institution, was a civic representative. That audiences reacted to Faccio with moderation was perhaps because he had that civic role, and his audiences therefore wanted to make him an emblem of all that the Milanese valued most—restraint, pragmatism and competence.

Understanding Toscanini

Our discussion leads us back to Toscanini and the moment at which he assumed the baton at La Scala. Periodicals from the 1890s demonstrate that critics perceived a perfect continuity between Faccio's aesthetics and Toscanini's so-called pioneering pursuit of accuracy. Review after review described Toscanini in the terms that had been reserved for Faccio in the 1870s and eighties. The journal *Lega Lombarda* commented on an 1896 concert that:

Haydn's Symphony in D Major (no. 4) interpreted by Toscanini with that calm and equilibrium, with that moderation and sobriety of colors that form the character and the appeal of the melody [...] was rendered by the orchestra with unusual discipline [...] in the *andante*, in particular, the exquisite intuition and

⁵⁵ Faccio's contracts with La Scala, held at the Museo Teatrale alla Scala / Biblioteca Livia Simoni in Milan, detail his honorarium for the Carnival and Lent seasons from 1873 to 1890. The contracts are held in Faldone (Box) L, and are numbered 110/1-32. From 1873 until 1876 he received 5,000 lire for these seasons; in 1876-77 and 1878-9, 6,500 lire; and from 1879 until 1888, 9,000 lire. In 1888 his honorarium was increased to 12,000 lire per year, which he received until his retirement due to illness. For this summary, see Minutes from the meetings of the Commissione Amministrativa e Direttiva del Teatro alla Scala from 24 May 1890, filed as 100/1. On the fees soloists could command on Italian stages at this time, see John Rosselli, "Pay," in *Singers of Italian Opera: the History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 114-146, and Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), in particular the section "Management and Money," 179-189, which details Stolz's pay. Faccio's honorarium is listed on his contracts in lire, while most honorariums at this time are listed in francs. With the establishment of the Latin Monetary Union (LMU) in 1865, France and Italy were bound by a reciprocal obligation to accept one another's coins at par, however. While the one to one exchange rate was subject to some fluctuation, it provides an approximate measure of the currencies' relative worth at the outset of the 1870s.

scrupulous conscience of the interpreter—qualities that all the best audiences recognize by now in Toscanini—shone brightly.⁵⁶

La perseveranza reported in 1889:

Toscanini conducted the opera with the usual conscientiousness, the usual scrupulous exactness about every detail [...] The entire score was executed with an admirable assurance and the orchestra played wonderfully.⁵⁷

Toscanini took the mathematical approach to sound to its limits in the 1900s, so much so that some critics rued the loss of Faccio, who had maintained moderation as he strove for a similar sound:

If the correspondent for the *Gazzetta teatrale italiana* had never heard interpretations by Faccio he would not know how much that maestro had the warm blood of a conscientious artist. Others today can perhaps be more scrupulously faithful to the metronome; but how many times—even in recent performances of Verdi’s music—has Toscanini not made us prefer a little bit of that emphasis, of that warm passion, of that enthusiastic interpretation that was precisely the mark of the strong executions of Faccio and of his orchestra?⁵⁸

But even as critics described the Toscanini sound at its extreme, the old tone and terms of Faccio criticism remained dominant.

⁵⁶ (“La Sinfonia in Re maggiore (n. 4) [di Haydn] interpretata dal Toscanini con quella calma ed equilibrio, con quella misura e sobrietà di coloriti che formano il carattere e l’attrattiva della melodia [...] fu resa dall’orchestra con rara disciplina [...] nell’andante specialmente rifulsero l’intuito mirabile e la scrupolosa coscienza d’interprete che tutti i migliori pubblici italiani riconoscono ormai al Toscanini.”) See “Domenica 26 aprile 1896—1° concerto,” *Lega Lombarda* (27 April 1896), cited in Barblan, *Toscanini e la Scala*, 31-32.

⁵⁷ (“Il Toscanini ha concertato l’opera colla solita coscienza, colla scrupolosa esattezza ogni dettaglio [...] Tutta la partizione fu eseguita con una sicurezza ammirabile e l’orchestra ha suonato stupendamente.”) See “Il re di Lahore di Massenet,” *La perseveranza* (26 March 1899); cited in Barblan, *Toscanini e la Scala*, 49.

⁵⁸ (“Se il [cronista della Gazzetta Teatrale Italiana] non le ha udite quelle interpretazioni del Faccio non sa quanta anima calda d’artista coscienziosa c’era in quel maestro. Altri oggi possono essere forse più scrupolosamente fedeli al metronomo; ma quante volte—anche nelle recenti esecuzioni della musica verdiana—non ci ha fatto preferire un po’ di quella enfasi, di quella passione calda, di quel entusiasmo d’interpretazione che appunto era l’impronta delle forti esecuzioni del Faccio e della sua orchestra?”) See “Mefistofele di Boito,” *Gazzetta teatrale italiana* (16 March 1901); cited in Barblan, *Toscanini e la Scala*, 82.

The mere idea that there was a clear—and persistent—connection between Faccio and Toscanini will seem odd to some. The two men are rarely mentioned in the same breath; and could hardly be more dissimilar historiographical creatures. Not only is Toscanini alive in the popular imagination, but he matters so much more to historians of music than Faccio does. This is in no small measure because Toscanini’s career was enmeshed with fascism, whose politics continue to trouble us now. As Richard Taruskin demonstrated in the 1990s, the Toscanini sound, in its streamlined neatness, resonated with the total control of authoritarianism. Benito Mussolini realized as much, and in a 1931 secret circular to Italian diplomats condemned the “eternal tenor and mandolinist [...] Caruso and the like” as symbols “of the old Italy,” instead identifying the music of Fascist Italy as “symphony orchestras [...] whose performances give an idea of collective group discipline.”⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the liberal era in which Faccio lived, and into which Toscanini was born, has never attracted the same sustained historical research as has fascism; so it is no wonder that someone with the limited fame of Faccio has slipped into the folds of history. But liberalism mattered to the Milanese. Political realism defined La Scala’s sound at a time when the introduction of the baton conductor had opened orchestral aesthetics to change. It inspired Faccio, his musicians and his critics. And it was the basis for the sound that Toscanini—and we have—inherited. The very connections between Toscanini and the streamlined sound would have been inconceivable were it not for earlier liberal ideals and their scrupulous realization at La Scala under Faccio.

But if the arrival of the permanent baton conductor altered performance conditions at La Scala, these would also shift when another man arrived on the scene—Thomas Alva Edison. It is to him that we now turn.

⁵⁹ For a reprint see Taruskin, “The Dark Side of the Moon,” 202-216.

Chapter 2

“Mille e mille calme fiammelle”: Illuminating the Teatro alla Scala at the *fine secolo*

In summer 1878 Thomas Alva Edison told the *New York Herald* he would produce an electric bulb suitable for domestic use within six weeks, and would install some 500,000 electric bulbs in New York within twelve months. The claim was baseless, and in the months that followed Edison’s team at the Menlo Park laboratories worked hard to honor his bluster while others returned to their own incandescent inventions determined to beat him to the patent office.¹ William Sawyer, Hiram Maxim, and Joseph Swan all created viable incandescent bulbs in this time.² All used a carbon filament, housed it in a sealed chamber whose environment had been evacuated and ran direct current across it until it reached a heat threshold and luminesced. Those first months came and went for Edison without event, but by 1881 he was able to showcase his bulb, which could burn for a record 1,200 hours. In the race to electric illumination, Edison won out. An envious Sawyer went on to become a drunkard; Maxim, the inventor of the fully-automated machine gun; and Swan, Edison’s most insistent rival.³

In all these bulbs, the environment within the bulb remained discontinuous with the air outside as the electric current tore across the filaments: the lumens alone crossed the barrier of the encasement. Such hermeticism would be a dream in the theater, where illumination came from combustion—first from candles, later oil lamps, and then from about 1810 on, natural gas, all of which relied on

¹ For a recent take on Edison’s contributions to electric illumination, see Maury Klein, *The Power Makers: Steam, Electricity, and the Men who Invented Modern America* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008).

² On Edison’s competitors, see in particular Donald Scott McPartland, “Almost Edison: How William Sawyer and Others Lost the Race to Electrification” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2006).

³ The competition between the two men notwithstanding, the Swan United Electric Light Company and the Edison Electric Light Company merged in 1883 to increase their chances in a difficult market, becoming the Edison and Swan United Electric Light Company, or “EdiSwan,” as the newspapers dubbed it.

continuities between air in the burners and in the theater.⁴ As flames devoured the air, temperatures soared to as much as 100°F in the balconies, while the air turned thick with noxious fumes.⁵ In this environment sound traveled at a slower rate, and it was not uncommon for the combustion to overreach the bounds of the burners and devour the actors, or even the entire theater, in a ruinous fire.⁶ So endemic were these fires that at the 1882 premiere of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* in the London Savoy Theater, the Fairy Queen thanked the head of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in iambic tetrameter for turning the hose "on fire that glows."⁷

It should come as no surprise, then, that theaters were keen to install incandescence. Nor should it seem too curious that a theater was the first ever public building to be illuminated with electric incandescence alone. The date was December 1881; the location the brand-new Savoy Theater in London. The theater manager Richard D'Oyly Carte invited audiences to enjoy both the premiere of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* and the 1,200 Swan incandescent bulbs installed in the house. At the close of Act 1 audiences witnessed an embedded spectacle. On Carte's instructions, a worker held a bulb connected to electric current before the audience, covered it with muslin, and rapped it with a hammer. The filament ceased to illuminate in an instant, while the muslin was

⁴ There was considerable variation at individual theaters, however. The Paris Opéra switched to gas illumination in 1822, Venice's La Fenice in 1833, and the Teatro alla Scala in 1860; see Marco Capra, "L'illuminazione sulla scena verdiana, ovvero L'arco voltaico non acceca la luna?," in *La realizzazione scenica dello spettacolo verdiano*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta and Pierluigi Petrobelli (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 1996), 230-264. For a historical overview of nineteenth-century theatrical illumination practices, see Gösta M. Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1977); Frederick Penzel, *Theatre Lighting before Electricity* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), and Terence Rees, *Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1978). For a contribution to the matter from a cultural historian, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, "The Stage," in *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth-century*, trans. Angela Davies (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 189-221.

⁵ See Rees, "The Incandescent Carbon-Filament Electric Lamp," in *Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas*, 168-184.

⁶ As Anselm Gerhard notes in his *The Urbanization of Opera*, Pougin recorded some fifty fires that destroyed theaters between 1861 and 1881. See Arthur Pougin, *Dictionnaire historique et pittoresque du théâtre et des arts qui s'y rattachent* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1885), 368-371, and Gerhard, "Meyerbeer and Reaction," in *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 247-317.

⁷ See Rees, "Accidents," in *Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas*, 156-167.

not even discolored.⁸ The message was clear: electric illumination relied on distance from the world. Once the barrier between the filament and audience was shattered, the incandescence was unable to survive.

In 1883, one incandescent installation outdid all other installations, even the ambitious one at the Savoy. This installation was also theatrical, the tenth to date.⁹ It was monumental in scale, using two dedicated Edison “Jumbo” dynamos (named after P.T. Barnum’s famous elephant) to power 2,880 Edison incandescent bulbs, more than had ever been installed in one location. Four autonomous circuits carried current, one around the auditorium, another the stage, the third backstage, and the fourth around all other public areas. Current could be increased or decreased in each on a twenty-notch spectrum. Most adventurous of all, the installation did not source current from on-site generators but from a commercial station that could service a 600-meter electrical grid. The station was no less than the first such in Europe, built in summer 1883 on land nestled behind a cathedral, where months earlier the disused Santa Radegonda theater had stood. It was to Milan’s Teatro alla Scala that the current ran its invisible course: from one theatrical site to another (Figure 2.1).¹⁰

⁸ For the text of Carte’s full announcement to the public that evening, see Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald, *The Savoy Opera and the Savoyards* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1894), 95-98. The bulb-smashing incident is recounted in Rees, *Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas*, 168-184.

⁹ Sources on incandescent theatrical illumination tend to underreport the number of installations around this time. The most comprehensive source I have found is an article in the Parisian trade journal *La lumière électrique: Journal universel d’électricité* (founded in 1879), which lists the following installations prior to La Scala’s: the Savoy Theater in London, Brünn Theater, Gran Teatro de la Habana in Cuba, Bijou Theater in Boston, Théâtre Royal du Parc in Brussels, Residenztheater in Munich, Residenztheater in Stuttgart, Princess’s Theater in Manchester, Teatro Manzoni in Milan and the Budapest Theater. See Aug. Guerout, “L’éclairage électrique des théâtres par les lampes à incandescence,” *La lumière électrique* VI/15 (12 April 1884): 63-72.

¹⁰ For details of this installation, see Giuseppe Colombo, “Station centrale d’éclairage de Milan: éclairage électrique du théâtre de la Scala,” *La lumière électrique* VI/2 (12 January 1884): 116-117; R. Ferrini, “L’éclairage électrique du Théâtre de la Scala à Milan,” *La lumière électrique* VI/14 (3 April 1884): 12-17, and Colombo, “Illuminazione elettrica,” in *Milano tecnica dal 1859 al 1884*, ed. Francesco Ajraghi (Milan: Hoepli, 1885), 459-473. I base all technical discussion of the La Scala installation in this paragraph on these sources. Capra has published the only extensive discussion of theatrical illumination at La Scala to date; see Capra, “L’illuminazione sulla scena verdiana,” 230-264.

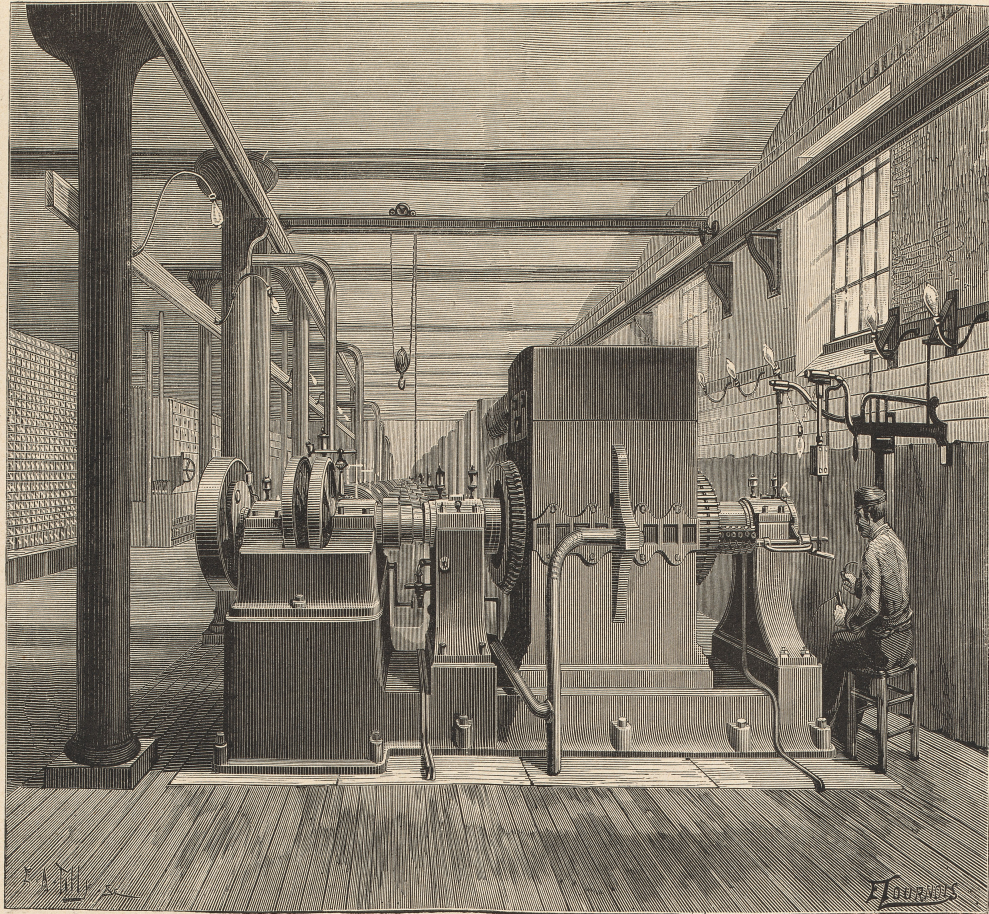


FIG. 2. — SALLE DES MACHINES DE LA STATION CENTRALE DE MILAN

Figure 2.1 The machinery room at the Santa Radegonda central station, 1883. In Ferrini, “L’éclairage électrique du Théâtre de la Scala à Milan,” 15. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Most literature on innovation in nineteenth-century theatrical illumination has focused not on fundamental mechanisms of illumination, but on isolated, sensational effects such as the electrical sunrise at the Paris Opéra premiere of Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Le prophète* in 1849, achieved with devices developed for that production alone.¹¹ But permanent mechanisms of illumination have their own rich histories and these are arguably more fundamental to understanding how late-nineteenth-century audiences experienced opera than the occasional special effects.¹² For instance, in contrast with the rise of silent listening in Paris, which James H. Johnson has documented so richly, we have afforded scant attention to the incursion of darkness into the nineteenth-century auditorium. Without a clear sense of when it occurred where, we take darkness to be a natural correlate of silence: as audiences became taciturn, and sutured into the illusion, the need for darkness arose.¹³ The implication is that the theater passed into darkness with such spontaneity that it was biblically preordained. But how in practice was darkness achieved? Did someone turn a stopcock, or flip an electric switch? Did it even matter that gas and electric illumination were in use at the time in Europe, and that the fall of darkness in theaters corresponded with the innovation of electric incandescence? What did illumination mean in the first place, and what values were displaced when the house lights were dimmed?

To tell the tale of these permanent mechanisms and their installation is also to push La Scala to the center of a discourse on the earliest incandescent theatrical illumination—a slot that is usually occupied by the Opéra, an institution where

¹¹ Gerhard has paid particular attention to such special effects; see Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 298-303.

¹² Invaluable sources of information about the earliest electric illumination in theaters are the technical and polemical manuals about electricity published in the 1880s, which tended to feature a chapter on theatrical installations. Representative is Émile Alglave and J. Boulard, *La lumière électrique, son histoire, sa production et son emploi dans l'éclairage public ou privé, les phares, les théâtres, l'industrie, les travaux publics, les opérations militaires et maritimes* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1882), which features the chapter "La lumière électrique au théâtre" (418-428).

¹³ James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Johnson himself skirts over the complexities of auditorium darkening: see for instance page 240.

visual innovation was so common it threatened to become routine.¹⁴ As trade manuals such as the Parisian *La lumière électrique* celebrated La Scala's installation as one without rival, contributors revealed their shame about the illumination at architect Charles Garnier's new Opéra. As of 1884, illumination at Paris's premiere venue was an embarrassing mix. The seven-ton bronze and crystal chandelier at the auditorium center supported around two hundred incandescent bulbs and the footlights were fitted with some Edison bulbs (Figure 2.2); the rest of the cavernous auditorium, however, was illuminated with old burners:¹⁵

For nearly two months a small installation of Edison incandescent bulbs has operated at the Paris Opéra [...] Unfortunately here in France we are timid about realizing new practices. Love of routine and attachment to old habits block the avenues of progress for us, and it is only in the long run, long after we have seen others lead the way, that we decide to make an effort to follow the path they have blazed, but always too late to be in the lead. At the moment the Paris Opéra provides a sadly perfect proof for this theory.¹⁶

¹⁴ Nineteenth-century accounts often overstated how pioneering the Opéra's systemwide illumination was. In one issue of the Milanese *Rivista illustrata settimanale* a critic described some experimental illuminations in the foyer of the Paris Opéra, but incorrectly informed the reader that the entire Opéra was illuminated with electric lights. See *Rivista illustrata settimanale* (18 December 1881). In the American *Proceedings of the National Electric Light Association* from 1886, the Paris Opéra was described as the "godmother" of electric lighting in the playhouse, even as the report provided a comprehensive list of other (earlier) theatrical installations; see *Proceedings of the National Electric Light Association at the Second Annual Convention*, in *Proceedings of the National Electric Light Association Convention*, ed. National Electric Light Association (Baltimore, The Baltimore Publishing Co., 1886), 32.

¹⁵ The delay in the installation of electric illumination must in part be attributed to Garnier himself, who expressed reluctance to shift from gas lighting in his 1878 memoir: see Charles Garnier, "Des candélabres du perron et des illuminations," in *Le nouvel Opéra* (Paris: Éditions du Linteau, 2001), 247-255. For more details on the Opéra's experimentation with electrical lighting, see Christopher Curtis Mead, "Building the Opéra," in *Charles Garnier's Paris Opéra. Architectural Empathy and the Renaissance of French Classicism* (Cambridge (Massachusetts): The MIT Press, 1991), 135-198.

¹⁶ ("Depuis deux mois bientôt fonctionne à l'Opéra de Paris une petite installation de lampes à incandescence Edison [...] Malheureusement, en fait d'applications nouvelles, nous sommes timorés en France. L'amour de la routine et l'attachement aux vieilles habitudes, viennent sans cesse nous barrer le chemin du progrès, et ce n'est qu'à la longue, qu'après avoir vu depuis longtemps les autres nous montrer l'exemple que nous nous décidons à faire un effort pour suivre la voie tracée; mais toujours trop tard pour être en tête. Actuellement l'Opéra de Paris fournit à ce que nous avançons une preuve malheureusement complète.") See C.-C. Soulages, "L'éclairage électrique des théâtres: à propos de l'installation de l'Opéra," *La lumière électrique* VI/38 (20 September 1884): 454-457.

La Scala's unexpected preeminence on the electrical scene upends some of our most firmly-held historiographic assumptions about the interplay of geography, progress, and theatrical life in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century. As I will show, the Milanese theater was placed in its unaccustomed vanguard by a unique and historically contingent collision of civic and theatrical aims.



Figure 2.2 Footlights at the Paris Opéra fitted with Edison incandescent bulbs, 1884. In Ferrini, “L’éclairage électrique du Théâtre de la Scala à Milan,” 455. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Glittering Boulevards: Paris and London

But let us first turn back for a moment to Paris, where the language of electric illumination was formed around arcs. These were an earlier form of electric illumination made from two carbon candles set about three millimeters apart; as the current flowed, the material that insulated them heated until it reached the same temperature as the candles, fused with them, and conducted current across the breach. The arc had been invented around 1808, and it was this device that was used in 1849 for the sunrise in Le Prophète. Like the incandescent bulb, it had limited use until 1870, when Zénobe Gramme created a viable dynamo that would free electric devices from battery power, and thus enable economies of scale.

In 1878 Russian inventor Pavel Jablochhoff collaborated with Gramme on the earliest arc street illumination: an installation of more than one hundred lanterns at the Avenue and Place de l'Opéra in Paris (Figure 2.3).¹⁷ Émile Zola alluded to this installation in his 1883 novel *Au Bonheur des Dames* in a scene at dusk in which department store owner Octave Mouret stares out the store's window onto Paris' second arrondissement, and marvels at the arcs' "blinding fixity, like the reflection of some colorless star, which was killing the dusk."¹⁸ He goes on to note how the illumination bedazzles his consumers, like the shimmering blaze of the merchandise on show. Witnesses with much less creative inclination than Zola also insisted that arcs had tremendous control over onlookers: the idea that arcs would harm those who looked at them directly and could cause horses to rear in pain was common.¹⁹ When decades later Walter Benjamin linked the enchantment of illumination to consumerism in *The Arcades Project*, he enlivened the belief that arcs had a primal force.²⁰ These

¹⁷ See Lyon Playfair (Baron), "Appendix: The Jablochhoff System of Electric Illumination," in *Report from the Select Committee on Lighting by Electricity, Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (London: s.e., 1879), 231-233, and Robert Hodson Parsons, "The Beginnings of the Power Station Industry," in *The Early Days of the Power Station Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 1-20.

¹⁸ For an English translation, see Émile Zola, *The Ladies' Paradise*, trans. Brian Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 426.

¹⁹ On this, see Sasha Archibald, "Blinded by The Light," *Cabinet* 21 (Spring 2006), 97-100. Some contemporary reports tried to dispel fears that arcs were overpowering; see, for instance, Playfair, *Report from the Select Committee on Lighting by Electricity*, 233, where it is reported that "all colors illuminated by [the Jablochhoff light] are as pure as if in the light of the sun, and the idea of its being frightening to horses or dazzling to drivers, is altogether exploded at the very first sight of such a street as the new Avenue de l'Opéra, which is illuminated from end to end by the Jablochhoff light."

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge (Massachusetts): Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

ideas have bled into our conventional wisdom about the earliest incandescence as well, enveloping both forms of illumination in deterministic discourse. But the two were not alike: while both could be used for outdoor illumination, arcs had some ten times the candlepower of the earliest incandescent bulbs and banished all trace of shadows for yards around them.

The lanterns around the Opéra each contained four candles, one illuminated and three in reserve, as well as an automatic shunt that rotated the unit after ninety minutes, once the candles had burned down.²¹ From the Avenue de l'Opéra the lanterns led to the indomitable stone columns of the Palais Garnier. Parisians who continued into the theater would have sunk into the obscurity of the auditorium within, into the dark recesses of its neoclassical arches. By the time incandescence was eventually introduced to the interior of the Opéra, the electric illumination on Paris's boulevards and avenues would already have been iconic.

The approach to London's Savoy Theater was not dissimilar. In 1879 Jablochhoff had fitted his arcs on the Victoria Embankment, one mile either side of Savoy Place, where the theater was later erected. In January 1881 Edison made moves to corner the London electrical market with an incandescent installation on the new and acclaimed Holborn Viaduct, a landmark less than a mile from the theater.²² For audiences approaching from the south or east, the Savoy and its incandescence would be the end point in an excursion that featured electric illumination.

But audiences en route to La Scala would have seen almost no glimmer of electric light in their streets and piazzas.

²¹ See Playfair, *Report from the Select Committee on Lighting by Electricity*, 231-233.

²² On electrification in England, see Stephen Inwood, "The End of Darkest London," in *City of Cities: The Birth of Modern London* (London: Macmillan, 2005), 277-294, and Thomas Parke Hughes, "Edison's System Abroad: Technology Transfer," in *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 47-78.



(FIG. 1. — L'AVENUE DE L'OPÉRA ECLAIRÉE PAR LES LAMPES JABLOCHKOFF.)

Figure 2.3 The Avenue de l'Opéra in Paris illuminated with Jablochhoff arc lamps, 1878. In Frank Géraldy, "L'éclairage électrique par le système Jablochhoff," *La lumière électrique* III/38 (10 August 1881), 185-188: 186. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Illuminating Milan

Milan's central electricity station was the brainchild of Edison. Some months prior to the 1881 Paris International Electrical Exhibit Edison had sent his technical assistant Charles Batchelor to Paris. There, Batchelor established the *Compagnie Continentale Edison*, the firm that would oversee the sale of Edison patents in Europe, and used the exhibition to convince some of the finest technical minds in Europe to run Edison franchises.²³ The German mechanical engineer Emil Rathenau took real interest in Edison's work (Rathenau would go on to form the German Edison Company, later known as the German General Electric Company) as did the Milanese *consigliere comunale* and academic Giuseppe Colombo (1836-1921).²⁴ Colombo returned from Paris determined to mobilize interest in an Edison franchise.

With the mention of the venture, Milanese and Italian financial institutions such as the Banca Generali, Banca di Milano and Credito Lombardo rushed to be involved. Colombo established a committee for the formation of an Italian Edison company, and the bankers made sure that powerful entrepreneurs represented their interests on the committee. Colombo then secured the patents from Batchelor that allowed exclusive control over Edison illumination in the peninsula, formed the *Società Italiana Edison* (La Edison), and sold the majority of shares to Italian banks. The theatrical site of Santa Radegonda was selected for the station because of its location at the center of Milan's main commercial district. The central station was built under the guidance of Edison's collaborator John Lieb and Colombo himself, who had travelled to New York to observe the sole commercial station in existence at the time: Edison's Pearl Street station. The station went into operation on the 28 June 1883, powered by four Jumbo dynamos. The firm would operate in, and only in, Milan for the next decade.

²³ See Hughes, *Networks of Power*, 47-78.

²⁴ In 1881 Colombo was a professor of Industrial Mechanics at the Istituto Tecnico Superiore di Milano—now the Politecnico di Milano—and author of the bestseller *Manuale dell'ingegnere*. He also became a *consigliere comunale* (a member of the Milanese city council) in 1881, around the time he became involved with Edison. On his ideas about Italian industry, see Colombo, *Industria e politica nella storia d'Italia. Scritti scelti, 1861-1916*, ed. Carlo G. Lacaita (Milan: Cariplo, 1985). On the formation of the *Società Italiana Edison* see in particular *Società Edison*, ed., *Nel cinquantenario della Società Edison, 1884-1934*, vol. 4, *Lo sviluppo della società Edison e il progresso economico di Milano* (Milan: Riviste industrie elettriche, 1934); in particular the chapters "L'inizio, 1881-1883," 133-144 and "La fondazione e il primo decennio di sviluppo della società, 1884-1893," 145-162. See also Claudio Pavese, "Le origini della Società Edison e il suo sviluppo fino alla costituzione del 'gruppo' (1881-1991)," in *Energia e sviluppo. L'industria italiana e la Società Edison*, ed. Bruno Bezza (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), 23-169.

In most respects, this venture was well-conceived. As historian Alberto Banti has shown, between the 1860s and the eighties Italian attitudes to industrialism had warmed decisively, under the influence of statesmen such as Pasquale Villari.²⁵ To counter common worries that industrialism would lead to an unnatural “meccanicità,” Villari had linked technical progress to the near-sacred Italian value of “civiltà.” The nation, he claimed, was an “organismo vivente” that needed continual nourishment in order to be civilized and cultured; and that food must be sought in industrial expansion. In the 1870s the state had begun to incentivize financial institutions to invest in industrialists’ activities. In this economic environment, La Edison was almost sure to have a secure financial basis for the venture. But as the central station was completed in June 1883, the firm was unable to iron out a troublesome kink in its plans.²⁶ The Santa Radegonda central station was poised to power thousands of incandescent bulbs within a six-hundred-meter radius, and the columns of the *Corriere della sera* were thick with talk of the venture.²⁷ Yet in 1876, long before electric street illumination seemed like a concrete possibility, the Comune di Milano had bound themselves into a contract that allowed the Union des Gaz exclusive right to illuminate the streets. In 1881 Colombo had tested the Union des Gaz with a small generator-powered installation under the *portici* at the northern end of the Piazza del Duomo, but the Union had insisted it be concealed. By June of 1883 the central station was illuminating a small number of residences and stores, as well as a modest number of bulbs at Milan’s Teatro Manzoni alone.²⁸ This was in no sense a demonstration of all the station could achieve.

Because of this, in August 1883 the Comune di Milano made an emergency decision that La Scala must rescue the operation. The Comune chose to outfit the theater for incandescence at their own cost in order that La Edison could use La Scala to showcase electric illumination. The theater then was illuminated in lieu of the streets, an incandescent installation at the boundaries of the Union’s control. The Edison committee minutes from 1884 make clear how crucial La Scala’s involvement was:

²⁵ See Alberto M. Banti, “Avamposti della trasformazione industriale,” in *Storia della borghesia italiana: l’età liberale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996), 143-179.

²⁶ Details here, and in the remainder of this section, can be found in Pavese, *Le origini della Società Edison*, 23-169, and Società Edison, ed., *Nel cinquantenario della Società Edison, 1884-1934*, 4: 33-144 and 4: 145-162.

²⁷ See “Corriere della città. Luce elettrica,” *Corriere della sera* (2, 3, 27 July and 4, 11, 27 December 1883).

²⁸ See Colombo, “Illuminazione elettrica,” 459-473.

A sense of caution, as is absolutely necessary in a business as new as ours, led us to proceed with much care and without haste in the development of the Milanese installations. An error, an interruption in the illumination, above all at the Teatro alla Scala, would have had fatal consequences; perhaps would have even irreparably compromised our future. We therefore waited for the (operatic) season at La Scala to finish before taking on new customers.²⁹

La Edison and the Comune di Milano staked all on the theatrical tour de force.³⁰

Projecting the Future, Imagining Electric Light

The theater seems like the ideal venue for incandescent promotion—an intimate environment to which the wealthiest Milanese of the 1880s would gravitate. And unlike venues such as train stations that were used to promote the new illumination elsewhere, the theater had a rich culture of visual attention.³¹ Yet illumination tends towards the condition of the invisible, of an unnoticed means for vision; a medium rather than a focus. Before examining the incandescent debut at La Scala, I want then to turn to some simulations of theatrical vision in and around Milan for clues about how audiences viewed theatrical illumination and how visual attention at the theater slowed its inevitable slide into transparency.

²⁹ (“Ragioni di prudenza assolutamente necessarie in un’impresa così nuova come la nostra, ci consigliarono di procedere con molta cautela e lentezza nello sviluppo delle installazioni di Milano. Un errore, una interruzione dell’illuminazione, soprattutto nel Teatro alla Scala, avrebbe avuto conseguenze fatali, avrebbe forse compromesso irreparabilmente il nostro avvenire. Noi abbiamo dunque lasciato passare la stagione della Scala prima di accogliere nuovi consumatori.”) See Pavese, *Le origini della Società Edison*, 49.

³⁰ It would not be anachronistic to label this promotion of illumination at La Scala a form of product placement, a practice that was pursued with deliberate calculation around now. A classic example of product placement can be found in Jules Verne’s 1873 novel *Around the World in Eighty Days*, in which Jules Verne had characters Phileas Fogg and his valet Jean Passepartout take to the seas on carriers that bore noticeable resemblance to ones in real life. Their evocation was rumored to be the result of clandestine deals between Verne and the owners of the liners, who had calculated that readers’ interest in the liners in the novel would lead to real-world claims to them: readers, in other words, would become consumers, and make their own demands for cabins in the liners. See Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days: The Extraordinary Journeys*, ed. William Butcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a historical perspective on product placement, see Jonathan Gil Harris, “Properties of Skill: Product Placement in Early English Artisanal Drama,” in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 35-66.

³¹ For a discussion of nineteenth-century visual attention, see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge (Massachusetts): The MIT Press, 2000), in particular “Modernity and the Problem of Attention,” 11-80.

The first simulation is from the 1873 novel *Nel 2073! Sogni d'uno stravagante* (*In 2073! The Dreams of an Eccentric*) in which author Agostino Della Sala Spada describes a scene at the theater in Turin.³² The novel is a classic utopia, in which the author envisions Turin as a harmonious urban center, whose inhabitants live streamlined lives without waste (in 2073, once-discarded artichoke stems are found to contain fibers that rival steel as durable construction materials), without tension (once the Torinese start to rotate their beds to run parallel to the earth's electromagnetic currents, much domestic conflict is eliminated), and without the tediously slow pace of the 1870s (houses are all-electric, trams are air-bound, and global communication is instant). The reader learns all this from the novel's hero, a native of Turin named Saturnino Saturnini, who travels from 1873 to 2073.

Naturally, one modern convenience that captures Saturnini's attention in 2073 is electrical lighting, and it is when he attends the opera that the fictional avatar is moved to describe the effect of incandescence. Perhaps significantly, he couches the visual experience of sitting in a lighted theater in synaesthetic terms, as analogous to hearing "blissful music." Attending the opera in Turin with his twenty-first century love interest Evangelina, Saturnini is at first underwhelmed:

The vast hall was filled with tiers of seats and balconies, but I did not see a great difference with the theaters of my time and, in fact, it did not seem to me all that well illuminated. I did not hesitate to tell this to Evangelina, but she replied that if I waited I would be satisfied [...].

While I looked around and continued to reason in this manner [...] all of a sudden the enormous hall was flooded with an incredible, brilliant, and ever so slightly pale blue light, which made everything resplendent.

'See?' – Evangelina said, alluding to her earlier promise to me— 'see?'

³² Agostino Della Sala Spada, *Nel 2073! Sogni d'uno stravagante*, ed. Simonetta Satragini Petruzzi (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1998). Scholars tend to view Jules Verne as a pioneer in science fiction, and to trace the development of Italian science fiction as a genre to the period immediately after World War II (while also conceding that two writers prefigured this development: Emilio Salgari (1862-1911), who was christened the "Italian Verne", and Enrico de' Conti Novelli da Bertinoro (1876-1943), who used the pen name Yambo). Della Sala Spada and these writers were but three Italian contemporaries of Verne who contributed to futuristic and science fiction literature, however. Librettist Antonio Ghislanzoni wrote the futuristic novel *Abrakadabra* (Lecco: Piantini, 1874), and *La contessa di Karolystria* (Milan: Cioffi, 1883); other contemporaneous works include Guglielmo Folliero, *I misteri politici della luna* (Naples: Marghieri, 1863); Ulisse Grifoni, *Dalla terra alle stelle: Viaggio meraviglioso di due italiani ed un francese* (Florence: Nicolai, 1887), and Paolo Mantegazza, *L'anno 3000* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1897). On this literature, see Nicoletta Pireddu, "Introduction: Paolo Mantegazza, Fabulator of the Future," in Paolo Mantegazza, *The Year 3000: a Dream*, ed. Nicoletta Pireddu, trans. David Jacobson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 1-53.

‘It’s true’—I replied, my eyes sparkling from the reflection of the light—‘I certainly could not have imagined illumination such as this’ [...].

And immediately in that vast theater I heard a music so sweet, so mellifluous, that my heart seemed unable to tolerate such sweetness. I do not know where the music came from, from which orchestra [...]; it seemed as if the very molecules in the air, while dancing in the immensity of that hall, were conveying those blissful notes [...].

‘This music and this light is enough for me’—I replied— ‘and should anything more be added, I will surely swoon and faint from its sweetness’ [...].

The scene, with its electrical marvels, made [the drama] come alive before my eyes.³³

Della Sala Spada describes a theatrical viewer who wants to isolate illumination as a component: to look at illumination as much as use illumination to see. It is not the brilliance of a scene illuminated with electric lighting that Saturnini describes here, but the light itself as it lusters on his retina. And it is the abundance of illumination that Saturnini relishes most. This simulation is of course, a futuristic one, suffused with fantasy. But Della Sala Spada molded that future from the realities around him. As Martha Feldman has demonstrated in the context of the late 1700s Italian theaters, courts and impresarios continued to increase illumination in brightly lit auditoriums in order to exceed the amount needed to view and be viewed. The residue’s value was its own excess—its non-utility—for it was produced in order to be squandered.³⁴ And while economics and aesthetics meant individual theaters would reach for their own balance between

³³ (“L’immenso salone era a logge e a gradinate, ma io non ci trovai una gran differenza dai teatri de’ miei tempi ed anzi non mi parve troppo bene illuminato e lo dissi tosto ad Evangelina, ma questa mi rispose che attendessi e sarei rimasto soddisfatto [...]. Mentre così io guardava intorno e andava facendo i miei ragionamenti e le mie osservazioni [...] ad un tratto lo stragrande salone si riempì d’una luce straordinaria, vivissima, leggermente azzurrognola, che diede ad ogni cosa un vaghissimo aspetto. ‘Vedi?’—mi disse Evangelina accennando a quanto poco prima m’avea promesso—‘vedi?’ ‘È vero’—risposi io scintillando negli occhi pel riflesso di quella luce—è un’illuminazione di cui non poteva certo formarmene idea’ [...]. E subito per quel grandissimo teatro si senti una musica così dolce, così soave che il cuore pareva mi venisse meno per la dolcezza; da che parte venisse quella musica, da quale orchestra, non so [...]; era come un’onda sonora che s’era sparsa per tutto, un’atmosfera melodiosa; pareva fossero insomma le medesime molecole d’aria che mandassero quelle note di paradiso nel danzare per l’immensità di quella sala [...]. ‘Mi basta questa luce e questa musica’—risposi io— ‘e se altro vi s’aggiunge, finisco per isvenire dalla dolcezza.’ [...] La scena con prodigi d’ottica e d’elettricità, vivi vivi me li porse innanzi.”) See Della Sala Spada, *Nel 2073! Sogni d’uno stravagante*, 257-259.

³⁴ Martha Feldman, “Festivity and Time,” in *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 141-187.

functional and surplus illumination, the hyperproduction of illumination remained a feature of nineteenth-century theatrical culture as well.³⁵ This practice meant that audiences were thrust into a liminal state in the theater, conditioned to understand illumination as at once a vehicle for, and a focus of, theatrical sight.

The second simulation comes from an article in the national broadsheet *Corriere della sera* in which a correspondent describes the concealed Edison installation in 1881, the sheen of the *portici*'s white arches under the incandescence, and the dance of shadows in the distance, where illumination came from gas burners. Then his mind races to the theater:

The light those small flames emit is vivid, limpid, and clear and does not offend the eyes even slightly. The comparison with the rest of the arcade illuminated with gas is the most exquisite demonstration in favor of the electric light: turning behind one's shoulder towards Piazza Mercanti, it seems as though one is seeing the subterranean vault in the fourth act of *Aida*, since the arches are cast in dark shadows and tinged with bluish hues.³⁶

Verdi's *Aida* had premiered at La Scala in 1872. Taken at face value, the critic's sudden recourse to *Aida* indicates there were concrete similarities between the "luminotechnics" of the Piazza Mercanti and those of *Aida*'s final scene. In what was an unusual and lavish move, Verdi had asked that a horizontal division allow the main characters, Radamès and Aida, to be seen breathless in a vault as their death ritual unfolded in the gilded temple above.³⁷ But the anecdote also invites us to consider the dominant role the theater had in nineteenth-century visual culture: the critic's mind raced back to the theater in part because that was a forum in which he would have learned to parse complex scenes of illumination. For those invested in La Edison's venture, the Teatro alla Scala must have promised much.

³⁵ See, for instance, the discussion about illumination and splendor at La Scala in L.V., "La grande lumiera dell'I.R. Teatro alla Scala," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (30 June 1821). Reproduced in Pompeo Cambiasi, *La Scala, 1778-1906. Note storiche e statistiche* (Milan: Ricordi, 1906), 66-69.

³⁶ ("La luce che producono tali fiammelle è viva, chiara e limpidissima e non offende gli occhi né tanto né poco. Il confronto con tutto il resto del portico illuminato a gas è la più bella dimostrazione a favore della luce elettrica: voltandosi indietro verso piazza Mercanti, pare di vedere il sotterraneo del quarto atto dell'*Aida*, tanto i pilastri s'inombrano di tinte nere e si tingono di lividi riflessi.") See "Corriere della città. La luce elettrica," *Corriere della sera* (19 November 1882).

³⁷ The production manual for *Aida* is reproduced in Hans Busch, *Verdi's Aida: the History of an Opera in Letters and Documents* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 558-618.

“Mille e mille calme fiammelle”

Incandescence was introduced to audiences at La Scala on the 26 December 1883, the all-important start to Carnival season. The audience arrived at a theater lit from the entrance hall to the corridors and even to the lavatories with incandescence, and pressed themselves into an auditorium that heaved with bodies folded into the stalls.³⁸ The crowd would have scanned the auditorium with the curtain down and seen hundreds, even a thousand, bulbs casting a clear and constant stream of light that did not even waver when dimmed or raised. *Il teatro illustrato* described an illumination “if not extremely bright, soft, even” (“se non vivissimo, blando, uniforme”) while the *Corriere della sera* described “thousands and thousands of calm flames” produced with an electric illumination that “lasted with the same intensity, the same stillness and luminosity” (“con uguale intensità, con uguale immobilità e chiarezza.”)³⁹

But this convivial crowd was soon to be insulted. The most visceral sensation was the rude chill around them, which numbed the more scantily dressed members of the audience. Electric bulbs administered lumens alone, when once lumens and heat had radiated as a nexus. The critics chided the administration: someone should have turned the heat on earlier to compensate.⁴⁰ Chilled, and at one remove from the source of illumination, the audiences could not have found the illumination to be “vivissimo.” Unlike the sun, the bare flame, or the commercial burner, electric illumination turned light into a visual matter alone. The lack of

³⁸ See “Teatro alla Scala. La sera di Santo Stefano,” *Il mondo artistico* (29 December 1883), and “Teatri di Milano,” *Il teatro illustrato* (January 1884); cited in Capra, “L’illuminazione sulla scena verdiana,” 233-234.

³⁹ See “Teatri di Milano,” *Il teatro illustrato* (January 1884), and “Corriere teatrale. Il Santo Stefano alla Scala. La luce elettrica,” *Corriere della sera* (27 December 1883).

⁴⁰ On this, see “Teatri di Milano,” *Il teatro illustrato* (January 1884), and “Corriere teatrale. Il Santo Stefano alla Scala. La luce elettrica,” *Corriere della sera* (27 December 1883).

heat was inadvertent; a classic oversight. The auditorium was also uncommonly dark.⁴¹ As a malcontent critic for the journal *Asmodeo* recorded it:

There's a [...] part of the public who must not have welcomed the innovation too readily, and that's the Olympian female—as a group, they are quite bony, if you will—not only because it left the boxes in complete darkness [“una completa penombra,”] but also because Edison lights do not supplement the heaters, which the firm remembered to switch on a bit too late.⁴²

While a history has still to be written of the darkening of auditoriums and all its intricate variation from theater to theater, letters and memoirs from this time reveal that a “completa penombra” at La Scala would have been unusual.⁴³ Nor are there technical reasons why the darkened theater would be yoked to the electrical debut. Darkness could also have been easily achieved with gas illumination, which could be dimmed and raised, even if it did cause a flicker, and could be switched off in an instant from a central gas plate. It would seem that the intention was to introduce darkness with electric incandescence; to usher in one innovation quietly alongside another.

⁴¹ The current narrative about the darkening of the auditorium relates that the Parisians were drawn to illumination in the theater in order to see and be seen, but tolerated occasional and non-sustained darkness across the nineteenth-century to better view illusions. In contrast, Nordic audiences were inclined towards darkness in the earliest decades of the nineteenth-century. Towards the close of the century darkness crept into most auditoriums. Italian court theaters, meanwhile, had for centuries been illuminated generously to reflect the splendor of the court. But in public theaters auditoriums would sometimes lie in darkness or semi-darkness once the spectacle had begun until Unification, for reasons of economy. On this, see Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre*, 298-300, and Nicholas Peter Ridout, “Stage Fright: The Predicament of the Actor,” in *Stage Fright, Animals and other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35-69.

⁴² (“C’è una [...] parte di pubblico che non deve aver accolto con troppa compiacenza l’innovazione, e cioè l’Olimpo femminile—alquanto ossuto, se si vuole, nel complesso—non solo perché lasciava i palchetti in una completa penombra, ma anche perché la luce Edison non supplisce ai caloriferi, che l’impresa forse troppo tardi s’è ricordata di far accendere.”) See “Cronaca Milanese,” *Asmodeo* (29 December 1883). On the darkening of La Scala’s auditorium see also “Teatri di Milano,” *Il teatro illustrato* (January 1884).

⁴³ In an 1876 letter to Count Opprandino Arrivabene, Verdi contrasted practices at La Scala to those in other prominent theaters, and noted that at the Vienna Staatsoper, darkness (as well as subpar singers) induced audiences to sleep: “In Vienna [...] I was present at various productions [...] the Public (they put them in the dark during the performance) sleeps and gets bored, applauds a bit at the end of every act, and at the end of the performance goes home neither repulsed nor enthusiastic.” (A Vienna [...] ho assistito a diversi spettacoli [...] il Pubblico (lo mettono all’oscuro durante lo spettacolo) dorme e s’annoia, applaude un po’ alla fine d’ogni atto, ed alla fine dello spettacolo se ne va a casa senza disgusto e senza entusiasmo.) See Annibale Alberti, ed., *Verdi intimo: carteggio di Giuseppe Verdi con il conte Opprandino Arrivabene 1861-1886* (Milan: Mondadori, 1931), 185-187; cited in Capra, “L’illuminazione sulla scena verdiana,” 236.

A distraction from this environment came in the form of Amilcare Ponchielli's opera *La Gioconda*, followed by Peter Hertel and Romualdo Marengo's ballet *Flik e Flok*.⁴⁴ In an article for *La lumière électrique* Colombo described the deep blue lights used for the nighttime scene in Act II of *La Gioconda*, as well as those used in *Flik e Flok*, and praised these as the finest moments in the evening.⁴⁵ But neither artistic periodicals nor broadsheets troubled to describe these effects. Indeed, the aesthetics of the illumination featured little in critical accounts. Critics described the installation more as a fixed element in the theater than a means to an aesthetic end; more in terms of the "mille e mille calme fiammelle" as a whole than their varied use from one moment to another within *La Gioconda* or *Flik e Flok*.

It must have been easier for critics to announce the arrival of an innovation than to find the words to describe it, not least in the case of illumination, an element about which it was not conventional to comment in the musical review. *La Gioconda* and *Flik e Flok* were understated works with which to introduce such an innovation, and made the task no easier. Neither called for storm scenes that could have showcased the installation's slickness, or multi-level sets with contrasts of illumination that drew attention to incandescent brilliance. In this context, continuities with the older illumination must have been much more obvious than breaks with it. These were, after all, considerable: even if gas had been a crude fire hazard, it had also anticipated much of what the new electric illumination could do. Not only could it be dimmed and raised from a central control center, it could also be filtered to produce colors, and was even distributed in a similar manner to the later electric illumination: incandescent bulbs and burners would have lit similar paths.

The Milanese electrical miracle takes on a slightly different perspective once we realize that, all claims of civic primacy aside, the Paris Opéra achieved its own, very different kind of visual coup at almost exactly the same moment. In Paris it was not the contentious chandelier that held the audience's attention, but illumination that used the human form—the human female form—as its scaffold.

⁴⁴ Neither work was new to La Scala. *Flik e Flok* had premiered at La Scala in 1862, while *La Gioconda* received its debut under Franco Faccio in 1876. Some confusion exists about the repertoire performed on the 26 December 1883. Philip Gossett, for instance, reports that electric incandescence was first used at La Scala on 26 December 1883 in Meyerbeer's *La stella del Nord*; that opera was actually performed on the 26 December the previous year: see Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006), 599.

⁴⁵ Colombo, "Station centrale d'éclairage de Milan: éclairage électrique du théâtre de la Scala," 116-117.

The event soon made the rounds of Milanese periodicals. *Il mondo artistico* described it in the most detail:

At the Paris Opéra the application of electricity to the body of the ballerinas in the new ballet *Farandole* has been highly successful. Let us explain. In the second act of the ballet, amid widespread astonishment of onlookers, as if by magic the ninety sylphs appeared with sparkling, electrically-illuminated stars on their heads. How is such a singular application of electricity possible? Every ballerina carries in her belt two tiny electrical batteries, invisible to the eye of the spectator. Those batteries are charged with electricity prior to the start of the performance; owing to a wire hidden in their hair and attached to a small star fashioned from reflective stones, it is sufficient that the artist carefully touches the battery in order that the star on her head is magically illuminated. This extraordinary application of electricity is the craze of the moment in the Parisian theatrical world.⁴⁶

The idea of emulsifying the human form with electrical illumination came from America, where Louisa Morgan, daughter of Edison's banker and shareholder J. Pierpont Morgan, had recently used such effects on her Halloween costume.⁴⁷

The fact there was such contrast between the Opéra and La Scala's use of the illumination mechanisms then available to them could have been a mere coincidence. And since it must have been easier to comment on accessories, used to create isolated effects such as electric stars, than on permanent installations whose illumination could slide so quickly into transparency, we might dismiss the differences in critical reactions between Milan and Paris as reactions to the distinct implementation of electrification, rather than being indicative of localized patterns of reception. But Carnival season came and went at La Scala, and with it went the chatter around incandescence. The entire innovation fell into a discursive void

⁴⁶ ("All'Opéra di Parigi ha avuto un gran successo nel nuovo ballo *Farandole*, l'applicazione dell'elettricità al corpo delle ballerine. E ci spieghiamo. Al secondo atto del ballo, come per incanto, in mezzo allo stupore generale degli astanti le 90 silfidi ebbero sul capo una stella scintillante di luce elettrica. Come fu possibile un'applicazione così singolare dell'elettricità? Ogni ballerina porta alla sua cintura due piccolissimi accumulatori d'elettricità, invisibili all'occhio degli spettatori. Quegli accumulatori sono caricati d'elettricità, prima che incominci lo spettacolo; grazie a un filo conduttore nascosto nei capelli e attaccato a una piccola stella in pietre riflettorie, basta che l'artista con un dito preme sensibilmente l'accumulatore perché le stelle sul capo siano illuminate come per incanto. Questa applicazione straordinaria di elettricità è l'avvenimento del giorno nel mondo teatrale parigino.") See "Cose diverse," *Il mondo artistico* (29 December 1883). See also "I gioielli elettrici luminosi," *Asmodeo* (7 January 1884).

⁴⁷ See McPartland, "Almost Edison," 198.

within a matter of months in the artistic periodicals. Critics must have had less and less to comment on as time went by.

The void is not as troublesome as it first seems, however. From the “completa penombra” to the “mille e mille calme fiammelle,” the debut seems to have been calculated to maximize the Comune di Milano’s investment and to turn audiences into electrical consumers. With audiences bathed in an uncommon darkness, the illumination could be seen at its best; audiences could assess how intense the bulbs were as well as how consistent. For audiences to leave with the impression that the illumination “lasted with the same intensity, the same stillness and luminosity” was also for them to leave with the conviction that La Edison could control, and master, the electrical force it wielded.

This was a considerable feat, both at a technological level and at a cultural one. In recent decades it had been common to find the electrical associated with esoteric forces within the opera house. In particular, the Italian conductor had been construed as a literal conductor of electricity, someone at the center of a discourse that used fashionable associations between materials science and the uncanny to link music to the fantastical sublime.⁴⁸ The “mille e mille calme fiammelle” distanced electrification from these esoteric associations and domesticated it. It was no wonder then that the matter fell into a discursive void once critics had commented on the installation at its debut. Artistic innovation was not, and was never meant to be, the aim of the La Scala installation. It was in the very absence of remarkable and sensational illumination effects that audiences could best envision the theater’s electric incandescence in their own homes.

In his posthumously published memoir *La grande Milano tradizionale e futurista*, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) would describe the Milan of his adolescence as “the central power plant of the energies and optimism of Italy.”⁴⁹ This was an idea that circulated at the time of Marinetti’s adolescence in the

⁴⁸ See, for instance, “‘Lohengrin’ di Riccardo Wagner al Teatro Comunale di Bologna,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (5 November 1871), and “Angelo Mariani,” *Il mondo artistico* (19 June 1873). For a broader, European, perspective on this, see Ellen Lockhart, “Giuditta Pasta and the History of Musical Electrification,” Conference Paper, American Musicological Society Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA, 13 November, 2011.

⁴⁹ (“Sempre per tutti gli italiani la centrale della energia e degli ottimismo d’Italia.”) See Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Let’s Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings*, ed. R.W. Flint, trans. R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1991), 173; cited in Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 68.

1880s, when intellectuals had fashioned Milan as the heart of the nation, the center of its initiative and drive, and thus—in contrast with the nation’s nominal capital, Rome—its steadfast *capitale morale*.⁵⁰ To nineteenth-century commentators, the electrical venture was a beautiful instantiation of this notion. Once the 1883 Carnival season was over, La Edison connected hundreds of domestic clients to the station; within two years the station ran at a 3.5 percent profit; and within a decade over 25,000 bulbs drew from its current (Figure 2.4).⁵¹ But La Edison’s most visible achievement came in the 1890s, with an electric tramway that cut across the urban center, from the Piazza del Duomo to the Corso Sempione.

Of course, the Scala-Edison collaboration is not a tale of civic achievement alone; or of aesthetic choices in the theater forever tethered to commercial interests. Incandescent brilliance did become a production value over time at La Scala. This started in 1884, when the theater strove for excess at the premiere of the revised *Don Carlo*, using some 2,062 bulbs in the auditorium, in contrast with the usual 1,600.⁵² *Otello* was another important marker on this route. The *disposizione scenica* written for the La Scala premiere on the 5 February 1887 reveals Verdi and La Scala’s scenographers to be increasingly interested in what incandescence could achieve.⁵³ The manual devotes a section to “Illuminazione e luce elettrica” which starts with the instruction:

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Aldo Barilli et al. eds., *Il ventre di Milano: fisiologia della capitale morale* (Milan: Aliprandi, 1888). John Foot discusses the term “capitale morale” in his *Milan since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001). See the chapter “From Boomtown to Bribesville: The Images of the City, 1980-2000,” 157-180.

⁵¹ Pavese, “Le origini della Società Edison,” 23-169.

⁵² Ferrini, “L’éclairage électrique du Théâtre de la Scala à Milan,” 12-17. Giulio Ricordi wrote to Verdi on 2 November 1883: “I have had a meeting with the stage designer and another with the engineer responsible for arranging the electric lights [for *Don Carlo*]; and I think that we have found beautiful effects that could not be achieved earlier with gas lighting.” (Ho avuto una seduta col scenografo ed altra coll’ingegnere incaricato del collocamento della luce elettrica [per il *Don Carlo*]: e credo che abbiamo trovato bellissimi effetti, come prima non si avevano colla luce del gaz.) See Franca Cella, Madina Ricordi and Marisa Di Gregorio Casati, eds., *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi 1882-1885* (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 1988), 157-158; cited in Gossett, *Divas and Scholars*, 469-470.

⁵³ The *disposizione scenica* for *Otello* seems to be unique in that it is the only one written for an electrically-illuminated theater at this time. While I have not been able to examine all the libretti for productions at La Scala in the earliest years of electric illumination, I have established that not all libretti included the name of the firm that provided electric illumination for the production. Perhaps significantly, the Società Edison was however credited in the libretto at the premiere of *Otello*.

Before the orchestra begins, the lighting in the hall must be very considerably lowered. On the stage it must be the darkest night, so that the effects of the storm can be all the more impressive.⁵⁴

What follows in this darkened auditorium is the solution to a longstanding issue: how to simulate lightning. A French book *Lumière électrique* from 1882 documents two solutions that were available prior to incandescent illumination.⁵⁵ The most recent was to use a concave mirror held in the hand and shaken back and forth while a voltaic arc was positioned in front, and a switch was used to create the sudden apparition of light. The older solution was to cut slits into a cloth and hold flames behind it. Verdi's solution shows him relishing the control that an installation like La Scala allowed:

In large theaters there should be four electric lamps placed high up in the wings; in the smaller theaters two should suffice. At the rise of the curtain they should produce repeated and prolonged flashes which gradually become less; when the overcast sky on the movable backcloth remains only on the right the flashes on the left will cease; those on the right will continue for a while, ceasing completely about a minute after the sky has become clear. Behind the movable backcloth the electric lamp will produce lightning flashes in the manner indicated for those in the wings, now in one place, now in another, wherever the clouds are transparent. Lamp Number 12 should emit a full flash across the entire backcloth. During the tempest it should be switched on no more than three times; at the same time a stage operator with a reflector of about 40 square centimeters will hold this toward the electric lamp and with

⁵⁴ (“Prima che incominci l’orchestra, si abbasserà moltissimo l’illuminazione della sala. Sul palcoscenico si farà notte buia, onde così risaltino meglio tutti gli effetti dell’uragano.”) See James Hepokoski and Mercedes Viale Ferrero, eds., *Otello di Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Ricordi, 1990), 9.

⁵⁵ See Alglave and Boulard, *La lumière électrique*, 418-428.

rapid movements will transmit the reflected beam from top to bottom along the transparent lines of the backcloth to represent forked lightning.⁵⁶

Until the stage operator is mentioned, it is a scenario with a mechanical brilliance about it, the four electric lamps tearing across the backcloth at set intervals as the music unfolds. These were moments when the new installation at La Scala would create effects that could not have failed to be remarkable: moments when the critics took note.⁵⁷ But such moments were not the norm. The tale of the earliest electrical illumination at La Scala is less one of artistic innovation than a rare instance in which opera led the way towards an electrically-wrought modernity.

⁵⁶ (“Nei grandi teatri vi saranno apparecchi elettrici disposti fra le quinte in alto; nei teatri più piccoli basteranno due: all’alzarsi del sipario produrranno lampi ripetuti e prolungati, i quali andranno poco a poco diminuendo; quando il cielo nebuloso del fondale mobile si troverà quasi tutto a destra, cesseranno i lampi di sinistra e continueranno ancora per loco i soli lampi di destra, finché cesseranno completamente circa un minuto dopo che sarà apparso il cielo completamente sereno. Dietro il fondale mobile, l’apparecchio elettrico si regolerà pei lampi come si indicò per quelli fra le quinte, portando l’effetto ora da una parte, ora dall’altra del fondale, ove si trovano le nubi in trasparenza. L’apparecchio 12 sarà invece una lampada completa, col riverbero verso il fondo del palcoscenico: durante l’uragano si accenderà non più di tre volte; in pari tempo un illuminatore con uno specchio di circa 40 centimetri quadrati, lo presenterà ai raggi della lampada e con rapido movimento trasmetterà i raggi luminosi ripercossi dallo specchio, dall’alto al basso lungo le linee trasparenti del fondale che rappresentano i fulmini.”) See Hepokoski and Viale Ferrero, eds., *Otello di Giuseppe Verdi*, 9. On Verdi’s interest in the use of illumination in his earlier operas, see Marcello Conati, “Prima le scene, poi la musica,” *Studi musicali* XXVI/2 (July-December 1997): 519-541.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Filippo Filippi, “Otello,” *La perseveranza* (15 February 1887).

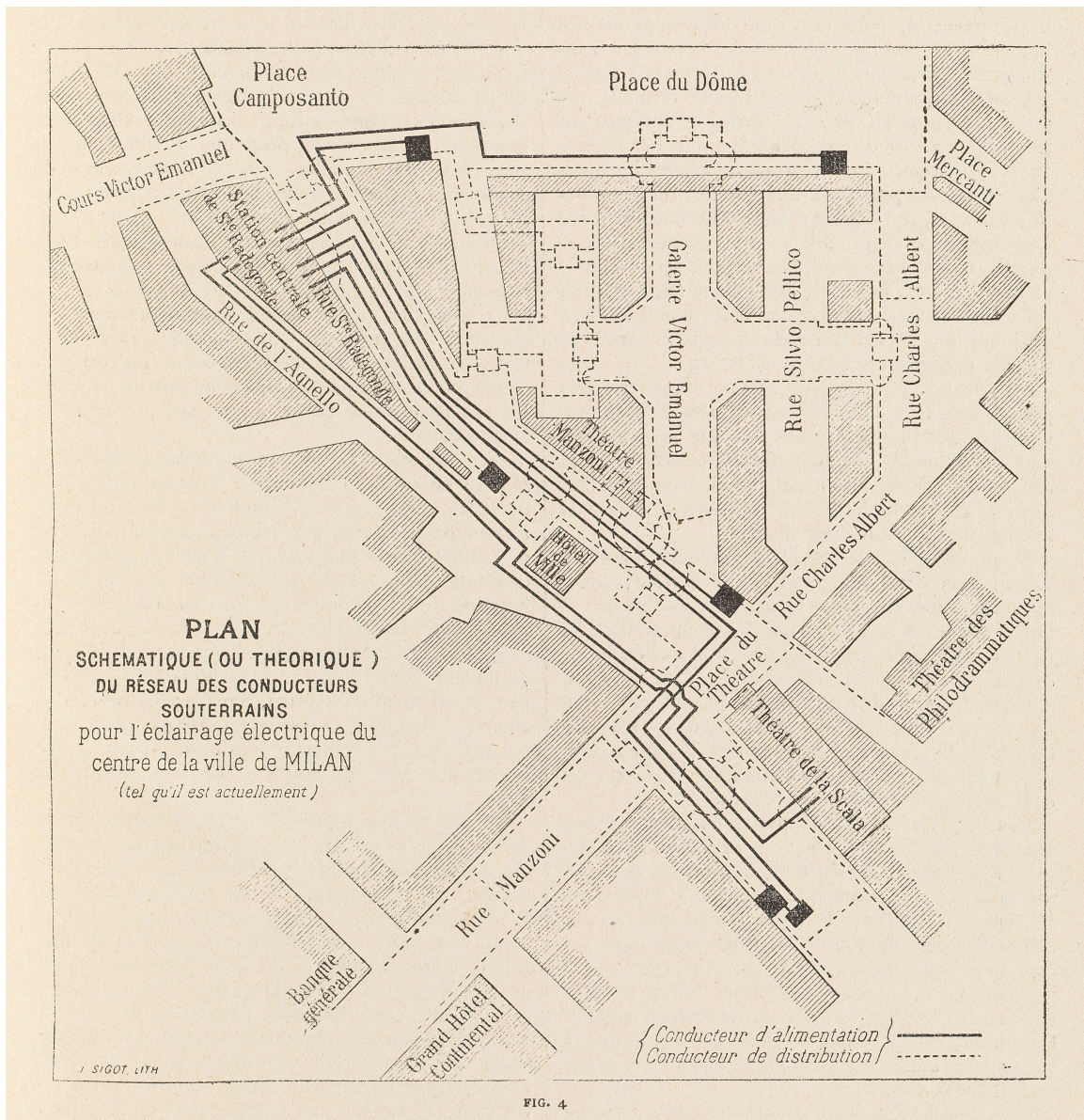


FIG. 4

Figure 2.4. Planned cable networks between the Santa Radegonde central station and surrounding areas, 1885. Such plans for expansion are indicative of the success of the initial venture. In Colombo, “Station centrale d’éclairage électrique de Milan,” *La lumière électrique* VII/9 (28 February 1885), 385-398: 391. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Chapter 3

Tired Voices, Worn Bodies: Vocal Lessons at the *fine secolo*

A French journalist [...] once said that the blame for all the shouting that is done nowadays, and that is so prevalent in the art of song, is the fault of Bellini, who first promoted it in I Puritani, and precisely in the final movement of the duet for two basses, on the words: Gridando lealtà.

An Italian journalist, when he read of this [...] responded that the Frenchman had blundered, and that while the flaw undeniably came from Bellini, it came not from I Puritani, but La straniera, and more precisely from the final aria: Or sei pago, o ciel tremendo.¹

If the standard musicological story is to be believed, operatic voices were deployed in new ways in the nineteenth century; voices apparently cut into the auditorium with unprecedented force. These accounts tell us that vocalists in Italy and France used violent timbres as never before, that there was a trend towards a less delicate sound, and that in prominent cases vocalists used new anatomical knowledge to achieve this. These accounts also detail a complementary set of compositional innovations. Ornamented (or *bel canto*) vocal lines fell out of favor and *declamato* lines took their place, while voices were made to ascend higher than before in order to be heard above an increasingly powerful orchestra.² These reductive narratives are neat, perhaps even accurate. But what they cannot reveal is just how these innovations in the use of voice interacted with innovations in writing for voice. Did the art of singing work in tandem with the art of

¹ (“Un giornalista francese [...] disse che la colpa di tutto quel gridare che si fa adesso, e che occupa tanto posto nell’arte del Canto, è imputabile a Bellini, il quale ne diede la prima spinta ne’ *Puritani*, e precisamente nell’ultimo tempo del duetto a due bassi, su le parole: Gridando lealtà. Un giornalista italiano quando lesse [...] di questo giudizio, rispose che il francese spropositava, e che se il vizio moveva innegabilmente da Bellini, non moveva però dai *Puritani*, ma bensì dalla *Straniera*, e precisamente dall’aria finale: Or sei pago o ciel tremendo.”) See “Dei cantanti e dei maestri di canto,” *L’Italia musicale* (1 February 1854). The article is continued in subsequent issues: see *L’Italia musicale* (4, 18 and 25 February 1854).

² John Rosselli has detailed these shifts. See in particular Rosselli, “Grand Opera: Nineteenth-Century Revolution and Twentieth-Century Tradition,” in John Potter, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Singing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96-110.

composition as the standard narrative would have us believe, or was their route to a similar end marked with tension?

Italian reactions to these innovations in the mid-1800s have received little sustained attention, but what documentation exists reveals much about the connections between these two narrative threads. A cascade of articles about the transformation of vocal production appeared across the 1850s in artistic periodicals, and this was merely the first wave in an avalanche of alarmist commentary that would recur intermittently into the 1870s and eighties. The dominant tone of these journalistic diatribes is resistance to change; writers again and again voice their fears: the new vocalism threatens to strain voices, even ruin them. These articles approach the question of cause and effect methodically: insisting on a clean division between new directions in vocal technique on the one hand and new directions in vocal composition on the other, writers aim to understand how the two are related, and which is most to blame for the current rash of vocal failures. The consensus is that the problem is above all the fault of composers, and, for the author of the article “*Dei cantanti e dei maestri di canto*” with which this chapter started, the fault of one in particular: Vincenzo Bellini.³ Our critic seems to have heard echoes of the demanding, *declamato* lines of *Il pirata* (1827) and *La straniera* (1829) in the repertoire that emanated from theaters and to have decided that Bellini was the first to lead voices from so-called *bel canto* towards the new sounds that threatened vocal extinction.⁴

There is something flimsy about this conclusion, a sense in which Bellini seems to serve as a smokescreen. While *Il pirata* and *La straniera* were marked with a new *canto declamato*, Bellini quietly recanted in the operas that followed: *La sonnambula*, *Beatrice di Tenda*, *Norma* and *I Puritani*, for instance, abound in vocal lines just as ornate and delicate as those of Bellini’s earliest works. And it was Verdi, of course, who was shaping current vocal conditions, far more than Bellini. By the mid-1850s vocalists certainly would have encountered his music just as frequently as Bellini’s and must have altered their vocal production most

³ See, “*Dei cantanti e dei maestri di canto*,” *L’Italia musicale* (1, 4, 18 and 25 February 1854); Giuseppe Lo Basso, “*Principali cagioni della decadenza dell’arte del canto*,” *L’Italia musicale* (1, 8 and 26 March 1856), and V. Meini, “*Considerazioni sull’arte del canto*,” *L’armonia* (1 December 1858), the authors of which ultimately conclude that compositional changes are the fundamental cause of the current problems. There were those who insisted that the new methods of composing for the voice would not necessarily ruin vocal organs; on this see “*Ciarle sulla musica del giorno*,” *Gazzetta musicale di Firenze* (24 August 1854).

⁴ On Bellini’s role in these shifts, see in particular Melina Esse, “*Speaking and Sighing: Bellini’s canto declamato and the Poetics of Restraint*,” *Current Musicology* 87 (2009): 7-46, and Mary Ann Smart, “*Bellini’s Fall from Grace*,” *Opera* (March 2002): 278-284.

drastically in response to its demands—much more so than for Bellini’s two operatic experiments with a harsher vocalism. The search for a historical source for the troublesome innovation seems to have been a diversion: it must have been easier to exhume Bellini and hold him to account than it was to blame Verdi; indeed, these authors seem to avoid mentioning Verdi’s name as much as possible.⁵

More notable still in these reactions from the 1850s are the schemes their authors devised to halt vocal innovation. While they energetically probed the origins of what they perceived as the contemporary degradation of the operatic voice, in the end these writers counseled a sharp separation between modes of vocal production—and instruction—and the changing demands of the music these singers were called upon to sing. According to this line of thought, conservatories were under no obligation to teach their students to produce vocal sounds that matched the vocal force of the new repertoire. As institutions that were meant to conserve, they could hold fast to traditional methods even as the theaters embraced declamation.

In time the concentration of alarmist articles about vocal innovation lessened, until a new stimulus set a second wave of reactions in motion. But the work of these commentators for the meantime had been done. Conservatories and voice teachers promulgated the same resistance to modern composition well into the *fine secolo*. Vocal treatises reveal this best: it is hard to find a method issued at this time that does not insist on its antiquity in order to make clear its debt to *bel*

⁵ Verdi was not entirely exempt from blame, however. The author of “Dei cantanti e dei maestri di canto” pointed out, for instance, that while Bellini had set voices on a troubling new course, Verdi could have done more to correct it. On this, see “Dei cantanti e dei maestri di canto,” *L’Italia musicale* (4 February 1854). Moreover, while critics were reluctant to blame Verdi for the entire vocal crisis, critics did express concern about the vocal demands of individual Verdi operas. See, in particular, the critical reactions to *Macbeth* (1847), reproduced in David Rosen and Andrew Porter, eds., *Verdi’s Macbeth: a Sourcebook* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 368-420.

canto.⁶ The two vocal treatises that students at the Milan Conservatory would have learned the most from in the 1870s and eighties both began with the disclaimer that their methods were not new. Francesco Lamperti (1813-1892) released his *Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto* in 1864, in the middle of his tenure as a voice teacher at the Milan Conservatory, where he worked from 1850 until 1875. It was to his students—who included Maria Waldmann, the Austrian mezzo-soprano who was the first Amneris in Verdi’s *Aida*, Teresa Stolz, who created the role of *Aida*, and celebrated tenor Italo Campanini—that the treatise was addressed.

Lamperti began by asserting “this is not a method that I mean to impose on others, nor an innovation that I am attempting to introduce in the area of pedagogy.”⁷ There is no evidence that Lamperti’s method was in fact received as an innovation, least of all by the conservatory’s director, Lauro Rossi. In a letter to Lamperti intended for publication as a preface to the treatise, Rossi stated:

I have read your *Guida-teorico-pratica per lo studio del canto* with care [...] and I cannot but heartily congratulate you (as I am doing) for your conscientious work. Your work is the fruit of experience, and for that reason has considerable merits for me, and it is an approach that is utterly essential—based on a method that maintains, exercises and develops the vocal organ without running the risk of *ruining it through study*. Perhaps your method will

⁶ See, for instance, Francesco Florimo, *Breve metodo di canto, diviso in tre parti* (Naples: Stabilimento musical partenopeo, 1853); Alfonso Guercia, *L’arte del canto italiano: metodo per le voci di soprano o mezzo-soprano, tenore e basso-baritono* (Milan: Ricordi, 1880); Francesco Lamperti, *Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto* (Milan: Ricordi, 1864); Lamperti, *Studi di bravura, in chiave di sol* (Milan: Ricordi, 1870); Enrico Delle Sedie, *Arte e fisiologia del canto* (Milan: Ricordi, 1876); Lamperti, *L’arte del canto in ordine alle tradizioni classiche ed a particolare esperienza: norme tecniche e consigli agli allieve ed agli artisti* (Milan: Ricordi, 1883), and Delle Sedie, *Estetica del canto e dell’arte melodrammatica* (Livorno: n.p., 1885). The sheer number of treatises published around this time was related to changes in Italian print culture during the nineteenth century. On this, see Nelson Moe, “The Geography of Textual Production in Postunification Italy,” in *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 194-197.

⁷ (“Non è questo un metodo che io intendo imporre nè un’innovazione ch’io tento introdurre nella sfera dell’insegnamento.”) Lamperti, *Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto*, ix.

not be all that satisfying for those who since the start of their study have wanted to accustom themselves to the genre of brute, shouted song.⁸

The other extremely influential treatise of the period, Enrico Delle Sedie's *Arte e fisiologia del canto* (1876), began with a similar disclaimer.⁹ Delle Sedie (1822-1907) had made his name as a baritone in the 1850s, earning fame especially for an interpretation of Rigoletto at Florence's Teatro della Pergola which rivaled that of the celebrated Felice Varesi, who had created the role.¹⁰ Verdi followed Delle Sedie with interest, recommending him for the role of Renato in *Un ballo in maschera* at the Théâtre Italien.¹¹ There, he would be a mainstay throughout the 1860s, and at the same time a voice teacher at the Paris Conservatory; later he would remain in Paris as a private voice teacher. Delle Sedie's introduction to *Arte e fisiologia* read, in part:

My aim [in *Arte e fisiologia*] was to awaken in some, develop in others, the taste and the respect for those old traditions that have produced a notable multitude of eminent artists. I have always been of the opinion that the decline of the *scuola lirica* [...] has its origins above all in the oblivion of those

⁸ ("Ho letto attentamente la sua *Guida-teorico-pratica per lo studio del canto* [...] e non posso che fare (come faccio) i più sinceri elogi del suo coscienzioso lavoro. Esso è frutto dell'esperienza, e per ciò ha per me rilevanti pregi, ed uno essenzialissimo, cioè—esser basato sul sistema di mantenere, esercitare e sviluppare l'organo vocale senza correre il rischio di *rovinarlo studiando*. Forse il suo metodo non riuscirà gran che soddisfacente a quelli che fino dai primordi dello studio vogliono avvezzarsi al genere di canto energumeno e gridatorio.") Lamperti, *Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto*, iii. The italics are in the original.

⁹ See Delle Sedie, *Arte e fisiologia del canto* and a second volume, *Estetica del canto e dell'arte melodrammatica*. The former was first published in French, in 1874: see Delle Sedie, *L'Art lyrique: Traité complet de chant et de déclamation lyrique* (Paris: Escudier, 1874).

¹⁰ On Delle Sedie, see Arnaldo Bonaventura, *Musicisti livornesi* (Livorno: S. Belforte & C., 1930), 49-51; Daniel Brandenburg, "Enrico Delle Sedie: La presenza scenica e la cultura vocale dell'ottocento," in *Una piacente estate di San Martino: studi e ricerche per Marcello Conati*, ed. Marco Capra (Lucca: Libreria musicale italiana, 2000), 338-347, and Francesco Izzo, "I cantanti e la recezione di Verdi nell'ottocento: trattati e corrispondenza," in *Verdi 2001: atti del convegno internazionale*, Parma, New York, New Haven, 24 gennaio-1 febbraio 2001, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Fabrizio della Seta (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2003), 173-187.

¹¹ In a letter to Léon Escudier on 28 October 1863 after Delle Sedie's performance in *La traviata* at the Théâtre Italien, Verdi wrote: "E Delle Sedie? Va dunque di bene in meglio! E il Sig. Bagier [director of Paris' Théâtre-Italien] sarà ora persuaso che si poteva fidare della mia raccomandazione?" (And Delle Sedie? He gets better and better! Will that now convince Signor Bagier that my recommendations can be trusted?) See Marcello Conati, *Verdi: interviste e incontri* (Turin: EDT, 2000), 51-52.

traditions, rather than in the defects of artists, who are naturally equipped with sufficient means to properly interpret the works of composers.¹²

Delle Sedie did not teach at the Milan Conservatory, but the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* vigorously promoted this work and its sequel, *Estetica del canto e dell'arte melodrammatica* (1885).¹³ The first volume was preserved in the Milan Conservatory's library, quite possibly under the oversight of Alberto Mazzucato, an editor of the journal, and the school's director at the time. When the second volume was released the conservatory's new director Antonio Bazzini attested in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* that Delle Sedie's method was an indispensable classroom textbook at the conservatory.¹⁴

This chapter explores what students in 1870s and eighties Milan—and Italy more broadly—would have learned, and traces how innovations in the use of voice intersected with innovations in composition for voices. However much both Lamperti and Delle Sedie claimed that maintenance of tradition was their aim, the repertoire that their students were increasingly exposed to called for new deployments of voice. In the drive to conserve, vocal aesthetics were in fact being pushed in striking new directions, in ways that mobilized fears about the limits of human production. And Delle Sedie would promulgate an unusually innovative kind of invented tradition, one for which he appropriated the term *bel canto*.

¹² (“Mio scopo sarebbe stato quello di destare in alcuni, sviluppare in altri, il gusto e il rispetto per quelle antiche tradizioni che crearono una schiera considerevole di eminenti artisti. Fui sempre d’opinione che la decadenza della scuola *lirica* [...] trovi origine principalmente nell’oblio di quelle tradizioni, piuttosto che non sia nel difetto di artisti dotati di mezzi naturali sufficienti ad interpretare degnamente le opere dei maestri.”) Delle Sedie, *Arte e fisiologia del canto*, 5. The italics are in the original.

¹³ Promotional articles included Oscar Comettant, “L’arte lirica di Enrico delle Sedie,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (15 November 1874); “Bibliografia musicale,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (10 October 1886); A. Bazzini, “Estetica del canto e dell’arte melodrammatica di Enrico delle Sedie,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (21 November 1886), and “Arte e fisiologia del canto di Enrico delle Sedie,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1 April 1887).

¹⁴ On the preservation of these treatises in the Milan Conservatory library, see A. Bazzini, “Estetica del canto e dell’arte melodrammatica di Enrico delle Sedie,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (21 November 1886). Letters from the directors of the Liceo musicale di Bologna, the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and the R. Scuola di musica in Parma published in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* reveal that it was an essential textbook at these institutions as well. See “Arte e fisiologia del canto di Enrico delle Sedie,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1 April 1887).

Disciplining the Vocal Tract

The unstated models for Lamperti and Delle Sedie were the vocal treatises of Giovanni Battista Mancini (1714-1800) and Nicola Vaccai (1790-1848), the second of whom had been a voice teacher at the conservatory in Milan.¹⁵ The fundamentals taught by Lamperti and Delle Sedie have much in common with the methods outlined in these earlier manuals. The vocalist should stand in a “natural” position without raising the shoulders, form a smile with the mouth, hold the tongue flat, and inhale so that air slides across the throat without wear and settles deep in the base of the chest. The sound should have either a *timbro aperto* or a *timbro chiuso* and be smooth and consistent. The means to achieve this are *vocalizzi* that coach the vocalist to sustain sound, then to smooth out the links between one tone and another, while cultivating the characteristic timbre of different registers. Vaccai’s treatises contained numerous *vocalizzi*—ones still used in vocal instruction now—and Lamperti and Delle Sedie followed suit, building their own approach to vocalization around a series of graded *vocalizzi*. The earliest exercises are scalar: the vocalist links one tone to another a half-step above and then allows that timbre to blend into the next half-step above that. With time *crescendi* and *decrescendi* are added, but with moderation, so as not to wear the muscles and other tissues of the throat. Once this has been mastered, the vocalist is directed to increase the intervals between the notes, until he is able to rehearse *vocalizzi* for *agilità* that demand smooth transition between tones, a consistent timbre, and attention to intonation.

Delle Sedie’s *Arte e fisiologia* sets out these *vocalizzi* in meticulous detail across its first one hundred pages. But in the next section the implicit model switches to the work of Manuel García (1805-1906), Delle Sedie’s (retired) senior at the conservatory.¹⁶ In his influential 1847 treatise *Traité complet de l’art du chant* García advanced elaborate taxonomies of vocal sound, which included

¹⁵ See Giambattista Mancini, *Riflessioni pratiche sul canto figurato* (Bologna: Forni, 1996); and Nicola Vaccai, *Metodo pratico di canto italiano per camera* (Turin: Giancarlo Zedde, 1999). Mancini’s treatise was first published in 1774; Vaccai’s treatise circa 1832.

¹⁶ García worked as an assistant in French military hospitals in the 1830s, where he was able to observe soldiers with open neck wounds. This enabled him to discover that timbre is created at the center of the vocal box as the vocal folds meet, either with minimal contact and thus loose closure or with deep contact and firm closure. The former created what he called the *timbre sombré*, the latter the *timbre clair*. He also noted another mechanism acting on the sound: a high larynx would shorten the vocal tract and push the sound towards the *timbre clair*, whereas a lowered larynx would allow for more resonance in the vocal tube and encourage the *timbre sombrée*. On García, see James A. Stark, *Bel canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), and Gregory W. Bloch, “The Pathological Voice of Gilbert-Louis Duprez,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19/1 (2007): 11-31.

timbres that resulted from the misuse of the vocal tract.¹⁷ In *Arte e fisiologia*, Delle Sedie describes the *timbro aperto* and *timbro chiuso* in similar anatomical terms to García's *timbre clair* and *timbre sombre*.¹⁸ Much more significantly, he reproduces García's taxonomies. As García had done, he instructs his readers—in the fourteenth lesson—as to which timbres must be avoided: nasal, guttural, veiled and white sounds as well as weak, uneven, trembling, hoarse and choked sounds. Following García, he trains students to locate the coordinates in the vocal tract needed to create these, so that the student can avoid them. He reminds readers how repellent these sounds are, and warns that veiled sounds, in particular, will do irreversible harm to the vocal mechanism.¹⁹

The most interesting parts of Delle Sedie's treatise break away from past models altogether. In the later sections of the treatise, Delle Sedie aims to show students how to become a consummate actor-vocalist, training the student in the art of expression. The strangest moment of his method occurs in the sixteenth and seventeenth lessons, with a set of *vocalizzi* that allow the student to rehearse different sentiments. Each is framed with verses (taken from fashionable poets) to incite emotion, and sprinkled with annotations that tell the student which specific timbres to use in each and every measure, in order that the *vocalizzi* can be “studied passage by passage, sentiment by sentiment, until the perfect execution [is] achieved” (Figure 3.1).²⁰ Exercises in emotional expression were not unheard of—as J.Q. Davies has demonstrated, for much of the nineteenth century singers in fact sought to cultivate not one homogeneous voice, but many voices that could be drawn on as musical circumstances required.²¹ But the annotations that Delle Sedie used were unique. All the sounds Delle Sedie once denounced make an

¹⁷ Manuel García, *Traité complet de l'art du chant: en deux parties* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1985). For an English translation, see García, *A Complete Treatise on the Art of Singing*, ed. Donald V. Paschke (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975).

¹⁸ The anatomical basis for these timbres is outlined in an introduction to Delle Sedie's treatise by the physician Luigi Mandl. The explanations Mandl provides are consistent with those of García but less detailed. See Luigi Mandl, “Introduzione: meccanismo della voce,” in Delle Sedie, *Arte e fisiologia del canto*, 7-11.

¹⁹ See Delle Sedie, “Lezione quattordicesima: dei difetti della voce,” in *Arte e fisiologia del canto*, 81-93.

²⁰ (“Studiati periodo per periodo, sentimento per sentimento, fino a raggiungerne la perfetta esecuzione.”) Delle Sedie, *Arte e fisiologia del canto*, 96.

²¹ See J.Q. Davies, “In Search of Voice: Nourrit's *Voix Mixte*, Donzelli's Bari-Tenor,” in *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 123-151. The *vocalizzi* that Delle Sedie adapts from Vaccai must be understood in this light. While Delle Sedie seems to promote the production of a smooth and homogeneous sound consistently across the range, these later exercises reveal him to be at least as concerned with variety of timbre.

appearance in these annotations, with the sole exception of the nasal voice. To express profound pain in the first *vocalizzo* the singer is directed to alternate between a guttural voice and a forced voice, and to color the phrase with agonized accents (Example 3.1); to express physical suffering in the fourth, one must use the weak voice, with a hint of a forced sound, then the weak voice must cede to a guttural one (Example 3.2).

The flexibility of timbre drilled in these *vocalizzi* was conceived for transfer to the operatic repertoire, and in the treatise's final section *Delle Sedie* shows how canonical scenes can be annotated and studied following the same instructional method. Among the scenes he discusses is the Act 2 aria "Cortigiani, vil razza dannata" from Verdi's *Rigoletto* (1851). Prior to this aria, courtiers have stolen an innocent Gilda from her hunchbacked father, and at the moment we hear the aria, the Duke of Mantua is presumably ravishing Gilda, somewhere in the palace. A four-measure theme built for the most part on descending half tones is heard in the violins, which Rigoletto hums to himself while behind the scenes. Concealing his distress, the hunchback stumbles onto the stage—a space outside the ducal palace where the courtiers are gathered—and repeats the theme as he searches for Gilda.

Delle Sedie maintains that nuanced articulation is crucial here: each time Rigoletto sings the theme, the vocalist should alter his delivery (Figure 3.2). The first time the theme is vocalized, *Delle Sedie* instructs that each syllable be "lamenting and distressed"; in the second iteration, the notes should have accents "that sound broken." Further contradicting his own earlier teachings, in each statement of the theme, *Delle Sedie* somewhere calls for a timbre that is either closed and suffocated or guttural. All of these are timbres that the author had earlier counseled eliminating from the vocalist's palette, since their emission necessitated unhealthy movements in the vocal mechanism. The implication is that, as the baritone rehearses and his vocal mechanism is disciplined, it becomes more and more misshapen. Yet this aria is included in *Delle Sedie*'s treatise because it was a scene that baritones needed to master, a core moment from an opera that was solidly ensconced in the repertory. *Delle Sedie*, in other words, counseled baritones under his care to work towards the disabling of their own voices. For all of his stated desire to pursue a healthy and lasting *bel canto*, his methods here could not have been much more innovative, or more controversial.

TAVOLA PER LA SPIEGAZIONE

DEI

SEGNI POSTI AL DISOPRA DELLE NOTE.

<p>Aa <i>Accento d'abbandono</i></p> <p>Ac » <i>di collera</i></p> <p>Aca » <i>carezzevole</i></p> <p>Acad » <i>cađenzato</i></p> <p>Ad » <i>di disprezzo</i></p> <p>Ae » <i>d'entusiasmo</i></p> <p>Af » <i>di furore</i></p> <p>Ag » <i>grave o severo</i></p> <p>Al » <i>lamentevole o querulo</i></p> <p>Am » <i>marcato</i></p> <p>Ar » <i>di rabbia</i></p> <p>As » <i>straziante</i></p> <p>Asp » <i>spezzato</i></p> <p>Av » <i>violento</i></p> <p>Ea <i>Espressione affettuosa</i></p>	<p>Ed <i>Espressione di dispiacere</i></p> <p>Eg » <i>di gioia</i></p> <p>Es <i>Esclamazione</i></p> <p>R <i>riso</i></p> <p>Sf <i>Suono flautato.</i></p> <p>Sn » <i>nasale</i></p> <p>St » <i>trascinato</i></p> <p>Si <i>Singulto</i></p> <p>So <i>Sospiro</i></p> <p>Tb <i>Tono beffardo</i></p> <p>Tbe » <i>di benevolenza</i></p> <p>Te » <i>enfatico</i></p> <p>Ti » <i>d'ironia</i></p> <p>Tl » <i>lusinghiero</i></p> <p>Tm » <i>di minaccia</i></p> <p>Ts » <i>supplichevole</i></p>	<p>Tr <i>Tono di rimprovero</i></p> <p>Tla <i>Timbro aperto</i></p> <p>Tlc » <i>chiuso</i></p> <p>Vc <i>Voce cupa</i></p> <p>Vf » <i>febile</i></p> <p>Vg » <i>gutturale</i></p> <p>Vp » <i>piena</i></p> <p>Vr » <i>rauca</i></p> <p>Vs » <i>serrata o soffocata</i></p> <p>Vt » <i>tremolante</i></p> <p>Vv » <i>velata</i></p> <p>Voa <i>Vocale aperta</i></p> <p>Voc » <i>chiusa</i></p> <p>8b <i>Ottava bassa</i></p> <p>8a » <i>alta</i></p>
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<p>Aa = accented with abandon</p> <p>Ac = accented with anger</p> <p>Aca = accented with affection</p> <p>Acad = rhythmical accent</p> <p>Ad = accented with contempt</p> <p>Ae = accented with enthusiasm</p> <p>Af = accented with rage</p> <p>Ag = accented in a severe manner</p> <p>Al = accented in a mournful manner</p> <p>Am = accented in a marked manner</p> <p>Ar = accented with fury</p> <p>As = accented as if agonized</p> <p>Asp = accented in a broken manner</p> <p>Av = accented with violence</p> <p>Ea = expression of affection</p>	<p>Ed = expression of displeasure</p> <p>Eg = expression of joy</p> <p>Es = exclamation</p> <p>R = burst of laughter</p> <p>Sf = dulcet sound</p> <p>Sn = nasal sound</p> <p>St = dragged / pulled sound</p> <p>Si = sob</p> <p>So = sigh</p> <p>Tb = with a mocking tone</p> <p>Tbe = with a tone of benevolence</p> <p>Te = with an emphatic tone</p> <p>Ti = with an ironic tone</p> <p>Tl = with a tempting tone</p> <p>Tm = with a threatening tone</p> <p>Ts = with an imploring tone</p>	<p>Tr = with a reprimanding tone</p> <p>Tla = open timbre</p> <p>Tlc = closed timbre</p> <p>Vc = with a dark / sombre voice</p> <p>Vf = with a weak voice</p> <p>Vg = with a guttural voice</p> <p>Vp = with a full voice</p> <p>Vr = with a hoarse voice</p> <p>Vs = with a closed or choked voice</p> <p>Vt = with a trembling voice</p> <p>Vv = with a veiled voice</p> <p>Voa = open vowel</p> <p>Voc = closed vowel</p> <p>8b = at the octave below</p> <p>8a = at the octave above</p>
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Figure 3.1 Delle Sedie's key to the annotations used in his vocal method. With translations in the table beneath. In Delle Sedie, *Arte e fisiologia del canto*, 97.

Example 3.1 Delle Sedie, *Arte e fisiologia del canto*, First vocalizzo.

PRIMO VOCALIZZO.
Dolore tristo, concentrato e quasi senza speranza.
DOLORE PROFONDO.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8)

Vg
St
Tie
As

Andantino.

DISPERAZIONE.

(9) (10) (11) (12) (13) (14) (15) (16)

Tie
Vc
Vc
St

ine.....
s
rall

RIMPROVERO ALL' AVVERSITÀ.

(17) (18) (19) (20) (21) (22) (23) (24)

Tie
Vc
Vg

Si Au
Si Vc Vs

p.....*p*.....*mf*.....*f*.....
ine.....

F. S. 104

The image shows a page of a musical score for voice and piano. It is divided into three sections: 'PRIMO VOCALIZZO', 'DISPERAZIONE', and 'RIMPROVERO ALL' AVVERSITÀ'. The first section is marked 'Andantino' and features a vocal line with notes numbered 1-8 and a piano accompaniment. The second section is marked 'DISPERAZIONE' and features a vocal line with notes numbered 9-16 and a piano accompaniment. The third section is marked 'RIMPROVERO ALL' AVVERSITÀ' and features a vocal line with notes numbered 17-24 and a piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'p', 'mf', and 'f'. The page number 'F. S. 104' is visible at the bottom.

IMPRECAZIONE.

(25) (26) (27) (28) (29) (30) (31) (32) (33) (34) (35) (36)

Tra Ar Tie
Vda Af Vs Am Ve VDa

ff *mf* *p* *mf* *f* *ff* *rall* *mf*

RITORNO DEL PENSIERO VERSO UN PASSATO RIMPIANTO.

(37) (38) (39) (40) (41) (42) (43) (44) (45) (46) (47) (48) (49) (50)

Vs Al Aa
Vda Aca

mf *sp* *inc* *aff* *s*

ABBANDONO DELL' ANIMO AD UN PENSIERO PIACEVOLE.

(51) (52) (53) (54) (55) (56) (57) (58)

Na Sa
An Ae
Aca Aca Vp

inc *s*

Example 3.1 continued

RIMPIANTO DEL PASSATO.

(59) (60) (61) (62) (63) (64) (65) (66)

AlTia
 VocVoc

mf *p*

TRISTE ABBANDONO.

(67) (68) (69) (70) (71) (72) (73) (74)

TicTia
 Voc
 An
 St As

p

SCORAGGIAMENTO.

(75) (76) (77) (78) (79) (80) (81) (82)

VgSt Si
 ViAs
 VfSt

inc *ff* *st* *roll*

Example 3.1 continued

Example 3.2 Delle Sedie, *Arte e fisiologia del canto*, Opening of the fourth vocalizzo.

QUARTO VOCALIZZO.
Le ultime ore di un morente.

SOFFERENZA FISICA.

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Lento". The key signature has one flat. The score includes various dynamic markings such as "Vf", "Vg", "Aa", "St", "pp", "sp", and "Al". There are also performance instructions like "Lento" and "f". The score is divided into measures numbered (1) through (8).

E. S. 401

Figure 3.2 Delle Sedie, annotated scene from *Rigoletto*. In *Arte e fisiologia del canto*, 209-216.

Scena ed aria nel RIGOLETTO di Verdi.

Diamo qui l'analisi che lo stesso Vittor Hugo fa del suo dramma: *Le Roi s'amuse*, nella quale il carattere di Rigoletto è maestrevolmente dipinto.

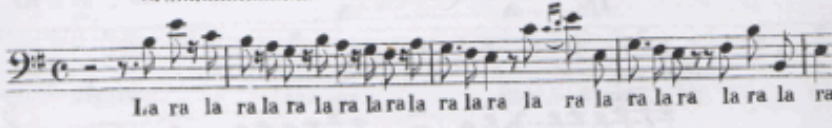
Sarà d'uopo tener conto de' cambiamenti nei nomi dei personaggi, che nello spartito di Verdi diversificano da quelli del dramma. Francesco I vi diventa il Duca di Mantova; Triboulet, Rigoletto; Bianca sua figlia, Gilda; il signor di Saint-Vallier, il Conte di Monterone; Marot il poeta, Marullo; il signor di Cossè, il Conte di Ceprano; ecc.

« Triboulet è deforme, Triboulet è infermiccio, Triboulet è buffone di corte; tre miserie che lo fanno maligno. Triboulet odia il Re, odia i signori, perchè sono signori, e gli uomini perchè non hanno tutti una gobba sul dorso. Il suo miglior passatempo è quello di aizzare senza posa i signori contro il Re, spezzando il più debole contro il più forte. Egli pervertisce il Re, lo corrompe, lo abbrutisce, lo eccita alla tirannide, alla ignoranza, al vizio; sguinzaglia i gentiluomini in seno alle famiglie, segnando loro a dito la donna da sedurre, la sorella da rapire, la fanciulla da disonorare. Fra le mani di Triboulet il Re non è che un fantoccio onnipotente, che infrange le esistenze fra le quali lo fa muovere il buffone. Un giorno, nel fervore di una festa, nel momento appunto in cui Triboulet spinge il Re a rapire la moglie del signor di Cossè, si presenta il signor di Saint-Vallier, che altamente rinfaccia al monarca il disonore di Diana di Poitiers. Questo padre, cui il Re ha rapito la figlia, è da Triboulet insultato e deriso. Il padre alza la mano e maledice Triboulet. Da questo punto comincia lo svolgimento del dramma, il cui vero soggetto è la maledizione del signor di Saint-Vallier. Questa maledizione su chi si rovescia? su Triboulet buffone del Re? No; su Triboulet che è padre, che ha un cuore, che ha una figlia. Triboulet ha una figlia: ecco il supremo interesse del dramma. Tutto il mondo di Triboulet si concentra in Bianca; egli la nasconde agli occhi di tutti, in un rione deserto, in una casa solitaria. Quanto più s'adopera a spargere nella città il contagio della dissolutezza e del vizio, e più tiene sua figlia isolata e chiusa fra quattro mura. Egli la educa nell'innocenza, nella fede e nel pudore. Il suo terrore più grande è che sua figlia abbia a cadere nel male; egli, malvagio, ne conosce i tormenti. Or bene! la maledizione di quel vegliardo colpirà Triboulet nella sola cosa che egli ama a questo mondo, cioè sua figlia. Quello stesso Re che Triboulet spinge al ratto, rapirà la figlia a lui, a Triboulet. Il buffone sarà dalla Provvidenza percosso nello stesso modo del signor di Saint-Vallier. Non basta; dopo aver avuto sedotta e perduta la figlia, per vendicarla tenderà al Re un agguato, ma ne cadrà vittima la sua stessa figliuola. Triboulet si fa maestro a due creature: al Re ed alla figlia; al Re che addestra nel vizio, a sua figlia che cresce nella virtù. L'uno perderà l'altra. Egli vuol rapire, a profitto del Re, la signora di Cossè, e ruba invece la propria figlia. Egli vuol assassinare il Re per vendicare la figlia, ed è la figlia che uccide. Il castigo non si ferma a mezza via; la maledizione del padre di Diana si rovescia completa sul padre di Bianca.

Nella scena 3.^a del 2.^o atto, Rigoletto entra simulando indifferenza; sul suo volto però si scorgono le tracce della notte terribile, nella quale, senza saperlo, prestò mano al rapimento di sua figlia. Coll'angoscia nell'animo, la cerca in ogni luogo, non pensa, non anela che a ritrovarla e strapparla dalle mani di quei vili Cortigiani ch'egli odia; poi la vendicherà. Gli è perciò che la sua voce, mentre affetta la calma e l'indifferenza, ha però un timbro cupo e l'accento querulo. Il suo gesto e l'incedere sono di noncuranza, ma lasciano intravedere l'agitazione dell'animo;


Tie.....
Al.....

All.^o assai
Moderato



Tie.....
Vs.....

entra in iscena, e cercando di leggere negli occhi dei Cortigiani, grida con voce serrata e cupa:



p.....

Rispondendo in seguito alla domanda di Ceprano

Ti.....
Al.....

Alla risposta di Marullo, il quale finge d'ignorare ogni cosa, egli aggiunge con tono di disprezzo,

e con voce serrata e nasale:

Si ah! fu il bel colpo

E dopo la replica — *se ho dormito sempre*, — esclama con un sorriso malizioso:

Ah voi dor - mi - ste! a - vrò dunque so - gua - to!

L'angoscia di Rigoletto aumenta; egli, voltando il dorso a Marullo, s'allontana riprendendo la cantilena con voce assai più commossa, e quasi piangendo di rabbia:

la ra la ra la ra la ra la ra la ra la ra

Scorgendo un fazzoletto sulla tavola, lo afferra con movimento rapido e convulso, lo esamina ansiosamente, e quindi, gettandolo sulla stessa tavola con disprezzo, esclama con tono querulo e la voce velata:

Non è il su - o.

Mentre l'orchestra ripiglia la cantilena, Rigoletto, soffocando i singulti per nascondere ai Cortigiani il suo dolore, appoggiandosi alla tavola, riprende lena, e con tono di noncuranza interroga i signori della Corte:

Dorme il Du - ca tut - tor?

La scena che segue fra il paggio della Duchessa e i Cortigiani, è spiata da Rigoletto colla più grande ansietà. Il Duca, che poco prima trovavasi in quella stessa sala coi suoi Cortigiani, non è più visibile adesso!... Dunque Gilda si trova chiusa nella camera del Duca!... Durante il dialogo che ha luogo fra il Paggio e i Cortigiani, Rigoletto, colla scena muta, rileva al pubblico l'agitazione dell'animo suo. La verità terribile è che Gilda sta là nella camera del Duca!... Rigoletto non può più frenare il suo furore, e d'improvviso battendo colla mano un colpo violento sulla tavola alla

Figure 3.2 continued

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Ar.
Vs.....

la vo-gl'i-o, la rende-re-te.

Il suo furore non ha più freno; l'odio suo, per tanti anni represso, trabocca. La voce assume un timbro aperto, il tono minaccioso, l'accento anelante, spezzato e secco.

Tla.....
Tm.....

And^{te} mosso
agitato

Cor-ti-giani, vil razza danna-ta, per qual prezzo vendeste il mio

Vo.....
8b.....

bene? a voi nulla per l'oro scon-viene, ma mia figlia è impaga-bil te-sor.

poi con voce serrata e tono di minaccia:

Vs.....
Ad.....

La ren-de-te o se pur disar-mata que-sta man per voi fo-ra cru-enta;

quindi con tono grave, solenne e largo, e il movimento alquanto sostenuto:

Vs.....
Ad.....

nulla in ter-ra più l'uomo pa-ven-ta, se dei fi-gli difen-de l'o-nor!

Si slancia di nuovo contro la porta, e, lottando coi Cortigiani che lo respingono, grida con accento violento e di rabbia impotente:

Av.....
Ar.....

Quella porta, assas-sini, assassini, m'apri-te, la porta, la porta, assassini m'aprite.

Giunto al parossismo del furore, Rigoletto tenta di nuovo sforzare la porta della camera del Duca, ma è sempre respinto dai Cortigiani, e va a cadere sulla scranna vicina alla tavola; l'angoscia lo soffoca, egli prorompe in singulti e piange; la voce è velata e leggermente gutturale, l'accento anelante.

Figure 3.2 continued

Vv.....
Vg.....

Meno mosso

Ah! voi tutti a me contro ve_nite! tutti, contro me! ah! ebbena_piangio.

La natura umana rifiuta quasi sempre di credere in un grande disastro, in una grave sventura. E per vero quando si è sotto l'impressione di un profondo dolore, si prova in qualche momento come una vaga speranza che quanto è accaduto sia l'effetto di un'allucinazione, di un cattivo sogno; si vorrebbe incontrare alcuno che vi dicesse: *la tua sventura è una chimera*. Gli è sotto l'influenza di questo sentimento che Rigoletto, nel *meno mosso* che segue, dopo aver pronunciate le parole — *Ebben piango*, — si alza come spinto da una molla, e tremante nelle membra, ma con passo fermo e risoluto, e con tono supplichevole e dolce, che gradatamente si anima e si converte in ansia, s'avvicina a Marullo, e lo interroga:

Ts.....
Vg.....

Marullo, Signore tu ch'hai l'almagentil come il core, dimmi tu, dove l'hanno nascosta?

p. cres. mf. cres. f.

poi con accento anelante ed interrotto:

Ts.....
Vg.....

Marullo, Signore, dimmi tu, dove l'hanno na-

f. cres. dim. mf.

Ts.....
Vg.....

scosta? È là? non è vero? è là! non è vero? è là! non è vero?

f. cres. dim. mf.

Il silenzio di Marullo toglie ogni dubbio, ogni speranza a Rigoletto, cui la sventura si presenta in tutta la cruda realtà. Allora con accento straziante esclama:

St.....

tu ta_cì!

f.

quindi, dopo un silenzio lugubre e triste, aggiunge con voce cupa e tremolante:

Tlc.....
As.....
Vt.....

Ahi_mè!

pp.

— È là!... — ecco per Rigoletto la tremenda, la funesta verità, che in un istante distrugge per lui il presente e l'avvenire, che spezza sullo stelo il delicato fiore coltivato con tanta cura e tanto amore

Figure 3.2 continued

religioso, per rovesciarlo, appassito, nel vortice delle umane calamità. Rigoletto ha perduto ogni energia, è ridotto all'impotenza; è infelice. Gli resta ancora qualche lagrima colla quale spera intenerire il cuore dei Cortigiani, per abbreviare, se è possibile, il suo supplizio e quello di sua figlia. Egli, l'insultatore dei signori della Corte, ora chiede pietà; egli, minaccioso poco prima, cade ora ai loro piedi supplichevole e singhiozzante! Il suo gesto è lento e scorato, la sua voce gutturale e tremolante, il tono supplichevole, l'accento straziante. V' hanno dei momenti in cui trova ancora qualche slancio, ma gli è solo per rendere più fervida la sua preghiera; e ciò avviene principalmente nella cadenza finalé, che noi riportiamo precisamente come fu scritta.

Vg.....
Ts.....
As.....

Miei Si - guo - ri, perdo no, pie - tà - de, al ve - gliardo la fi - glia ri -
mf.....p.....cres.....p.....mf.....p.....cres.....

Vg.....
Ts.....
As.....

Acad.....

da - te; ri - do - nar - la a voi nul - la o - ra co - sta, a voi nulla ora
dim.....mf.....cres.....dim.....p.....

Vg.....
Ts.....
As.....

co - sta, tut - to al mondo è tal fi - glia per me! Signo - ri per -
mf.....cres.....mf.....p.....mf.....sp.....rall.....

Vg.....
Ts.....
As.....

Acad.....

don, perdo - no, pie - tà, rendete a me la fi - glia, tutto al mondo è tal figlia per
mf.....mf.....cres.....f.....mf.....dim.....mf.....

Vg.....
Ts.....
As.....

Al.....
Aa.....

me; ri - da - te a me la figlia; tut - to almon - do ell'è..... per me,
mf.....cres.....f.....mf.....rall.....dim.....p.....pp.....dim.....

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Dopo una lunga pausa, volgendosi rapidamente con passo incerto al primo gruppo di Cortigiani, grida con voce forte e straziante:

As.....
As.....
Acad.....

emette poi un singulto;

pie - tà, f.....

pie - tà, Signo - ri, f.....
f.....dim.....

quindi dirigendosi al secondo gruppo, e cadendo piangente in ginocchio nel mezzo della scena:

Vg.....
Vf.....
Vg.....
Vf.....

pie - tà, Signo - ri, pie - tà!
f.....mf.....p.....rall.....pp.....

Figure 3.2 continued

Human Shells

It was Delle Sedie's *Arte e fisiologia* that set the second wave of debates about vocal innovation in motion. The treatise incensed the esteemed baritone Filippo Coletti (1811-1894), who in 1880 published a short tract in response.²² In turn, Delle Sedie issued two printed statements directed at Coletti.²³ The latter's main claim was that the modern school of singing turned the opera house into a forum for the soulless pursuit of sonic effects:

The moderns [...] *unconcerned about anything other than the force of the voice*, are unable to produce even the appearance of a tear in the eyes of listeners, or any other sentiment, other than surprise and wonder at the acoustic force of the notes they hear. It is worth repeating that most modern artists do not cherish the beautiful and the natural anymore, but rather the false [il falso], the defective [il vizioso] and the artificial [lo artefatto], which has reduced them to the condition of automatons[...].

Their skill amounts to no more than pushing out extremely high and violent notes like the shots of a saddle gun and snatching applause, which in turn causes damage to the voice which strains to provoke it. The public which is no longer used to song that "one feels in one's soul," that is, to those modulations and inflections based on the natural beauty of the vocal organ, is content with

²² See Filippo Coletti, *La scuola di canto in Italia. Pensieri dell'artista Cav. Filippo Coletti* (Rome: Forzani, 1880). Coletti also published a nationalistic tract about Italian composition entitled *L'Arte melodrammatica italiana. Considerazioni dell'artista Cav. Filippo Coletti* (Rome: Forzani, 1883). Coletti made a successful debut in Rossini's *Il turco in Italia* in 1834 and was soon engaged at Her Majesty's Theater in London to replace the expensive but hugely popular Antonio Tamburini, thereby provoking the famous Tamburini riots of 1840. Coletti went on to create the roles of Lusignano in Donizetti's *Caterina Cornaro* (1844), Gusmano in Verdi's *Alzira* (1845) and Francesco in Verdi's *I Masnadieri* (1847). He was also Germont in the 1854 Venetian restagings of *La traviata* (1854).

²³ See Delle Sedie, "Lettera," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (5 June 1881), and Delle Sedie, *Riflessioni sulle cause della decadenza della scuola di canto in Italia* (Paris: Paolo Dupont, 1881). On the Coletti-Delle Sedie interactions, see Izzo, "I cantanti e la recezione di Verdi nell'ottocento: trattati e corrispondenza."

the surprise, and aids the melodramatic performance, as if it is a hazardous game that hinges on the outcome of these vocal gymnastics.²⁴

Much here resonates with concerns voiced in the articles from the 1840s and fifties. Those authors had also warned that as vocalists lost their way the audience would follow them, exchanging “il bello per brutto, e il brutto per bello” until all that had value would be lost, the singer’s delicate vocal mechanism included.²⁵ Coletti outlines another scenario in which even more is lost in the transaction between vocalist and audience. When the crowd cheers, the vocalist increases the acoustic force of his utterances, becoming little more than a crude machine. Such unreflective brutes, apparently, are incapable of reflection; these vocalists sing without fantasy or nuance until ultimately they falter and fail.

Coletti likely had the stories of Delle Sedie’s recent adventures in Paris in mind when he penned these thoughts. A correspondent for *The Musical World* had related these in some detail in 1870:

We have heard of singers ‘electrifying’ their audience. It appears that to do this with effect they ought first to be electrified themselves. Dr. Poggioli, the physician attached to the Théâtre Italien, addressed a letter to M. Bazier [the director of the theater], in which he says that for fatigue, hoarseness, sore throat, and other ailments, there is no remedy comparable to electricity. Five pupils of the Conservatoire had been treated by him—three for hoarseness and loss of voice, two for some malady affecting the larynx. He electrified them, and all were cured. That there might be no mistake as to the efficacy of the process, Dr. Poggioli made his patients sing before subjecting them to it, and again immediately afterwards. The difference, he says, was marvelous. After

²⁴ (“I moderni [...] *non curando che la sola forza della voce* si sono resi inabili a poter promuovere neppure l’apparenza di una lagrima sugli occhi degli uditori, o qualsiasi altro sentimento, all’infuori della sorpresa e meraviglia per la forza acustica delle note. Giova ripetere che la maggior parte dei moderni artisti non vagheggia più il bello ed il vero naturale, ma il falso, il vizioso, lo artefatto che li ha ridotti allo stato di automi [...] Tutta la loro abilità la fanno consistere nello spingere una nota acutissima e veemente come un colpo di antica postola d’arcione, e così strappare un applauso di cattivo gusto, e che riesce a danno della voce che si sforza provocarlo. Il pubblico disusato al canto che “nell’anima si sente” cioè a quello delle modulazioni ed inflessioni basate sulla bellezza naturale dell’organo, si contenta della sorpresa, ed assiste alla rappresentazione melodrammatica, come ad un giuoco azzardoso che lo tiene in altalena sull’esito della ginnastica vocale.”) Coletti, *La scuola di canto in Italia. Pensieri dell’artista Cav. Filippo Coletti*, n.pag. Reproduced in Augusto Giovanetti, “La scuola di canto,” *La musica popolare* III/I (15 January 1884). The italics are in the original.

²⁵ The quotation comes from “Dei cantanti e dei maestri di canto,” *L’Italia musicale* (25 February 1854).

being electrified ‘their respiration was better and deeper, their voices were stronger, fuller, and more pure.’²⁶

These experiments occurred at a theater where Doctor Poggioli—in his role as house medic—treated the throats of countless singers, although until now with more conventional remedies. Few details remain about his experiments with the Paris Conservatory students: it is unclear what amount of current was introduced, where the electrodes touched their skin, or which students submitted themselves to the medical wonder. We do know, however, that two of the students were in the *canto italiano* class of Delle Sedie at the Paris Conservatory.²⁷

Delle Sedie himself would try this cure on an evening in 1870. The story goes that the baritone found himself in the consulting room of Doctor Poggioli with a voice that was too hoarse to perform, on the eve of a performance of *Rigoletto* at the Théâtre Italien. *The Musical World* went on to relate that:

Electricity [...] soon set him to rights, and he went through the part triumphantly [...] Whether he had been over electrified or not does not appear; but soon after his performance of the part of Rigoletto, Delle Sedie lost his temper, quarreled with M. Bagier, and has now broken his engagement.²⁸

The treatment had some limited basis in scientific evidence. Doctor Poggioli had discovered that when current was passed through plants, it made them hardier; he thus concluded that these botanical achievements could be extended to the human voice.²⁹ His results were unpredictable: however much electricity enhanced life, it could also end it in an instant. The ultimate demonstration of the danger of electricity came in 1889, with the introduction of the electric chair in the state of New York across the Atlantic.³⁰ Even in 1870 it would have been clear to those

²⁶ “Occasional Notes,” *The Musical World* 48/20 (14 May 1870).

²⁷ “Occasional Notes,” *The Musical World* 48/20 (14 May 1870).

²⁸ “Occasional Notes,” *The Musical World* 48/20 (14 May 1870).

²⁹ In an address to the British Academy of Medicine entitled “The Physical and Intellectual Development of Youth by Electricity,” Doctor Poggioli described how he arrived at the idea of electrification of the human body. See William J. Johnston, *Telegraphic Tales and Telegraphic History: A Popular Account of the Electric Telegraph, its Uses, Extent and Outgrowths* (New York: W.J. Johnston, 1880), 214.

³⁰ Graeme Gooday, “Electricity as Danger: the Many Deaths of Lord Salisbury’s Gardener,” in *Domesticating Electricity: Technology, Uncertainty and Gender, 1880-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), 61-119.

who read about Delle Sedie's electrification that to submit oneself to such a cure was to concede authority over one's self to someone else. Like an automaton, or indeed like the modern vocalist that Coletti described, Delle Sedie relied on a source outside himself to come into action, to restore the strength of his voice.³¹

Coletti's discussion of these mechanistic vocalists is notable for the harshness of the words aimed at them. He was not alone in such forthright criticism of vocalists. Whereas most earlier commentators concurred that it was composers who had set the crisis in motion, now the blame was directed more squarely at vocalists themselves. This second wave of commentary tends to claim that the decline of the art of singing is due to indolent vocalists who refuse to condition their voices to meet the demands of the modern repertoire. Criticism of those demands is scarce.³² Most of these commentators believe that *bel canto* should prevail, and that vocalists are in need of a traditional education, but one that is more sustained and rigorous than ever before. *Bel canto*, here, is invoked less as a form of resistance to the modern repertoire, but rather to the coarse sound that willful vocalists bring to it. One commentator made the case so forcefully in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* that it is worth reproducing at length:

When Verdi started to write music from which agile passagework was almost entirely banished, except for the sopranos, and that, due to the simple and accented rhythms that abounded and the character of the melody [...], [music that] was easy to learn by ear after only a few hearings [and] could be easily understood and performed by all, it seemed as if all that was necessary to perform that music was a voice, a good ear and a certain amount of emotion, and that the usual slow and careful study [...] would be of no use. Add to this the fact that the accompaniment used by Verdi in his earliest operas is often loud, that the voice is oftentimes supported by an instrument that doubles the melody, and, moreover, that extremes of pitch are often exploited to create the

³¹ *Perpetuum mobile* experiments in the 1700s had consolidated the notion that what set natural phenomena apart from automata were their abilities to create and maintain their own power. Jacques de Vaucanson had submitted a mechanical flautist to the Académie Française in the 1700s, and Pierre Jaquet-Droz had submitted a "pianoforte player," but these had failed to achieve this. For musicological discussions of these inventions, see David Yearsley, "Bach the Machine," in *Bach and the Meanings of Counterpoint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 173-208, and Annette Richards, "Automatic Genius: Mozart and the Mechanical Sublime," *Music & Letters* 80 (1999): 366-389.

³² See, for instance, F. Campanella, *Sulla decadenza del canto in Italia: osservazioni* (Naples: G. Angelis e figlio, 1885); A. Guagni-Benvenuti, *L'odierna scuola di canto in Italia* (Rome: tip. Metastasio, 1886), and Liberio Vivarelli, "Ancora della decadenza dell'arte del canto, delle sue cause e del modo di provvedervi," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (14, 21 and 28 July and 4 August 1889).

vigorous and almost violent expression that predominates, and all this encouraged singers to trust in the force of their lungs, neglecting every subtlety, every characteristic manner of so-called *bel canto*.

[...] One could blame modern music for the greater fatigue that the singer must endure in order to perform it [...] But the number of justly celebrated artists who have managed, even in advanced years, to render this modern repertoire with dignity, demonstrates the falseness of this assertion.³³

The turn seems almost predicable now. It was, after all, far from the only time in the nineteenth century that composers were granted immunity from blame and vocalists made to bear the brunt.

Delle Sedie issued two statements in response to Coletti. In June 1880, he sent a letter to the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* and in November of that year he published his own short tract, *Riflessioni sulle cause della decadenza della scuola di canto in Italia*.³⁴ Both situate his work as consistent with the drive to increase vocalists' investment in *bel canto* methods. The main issue that divides Coletti and himself, Delle Sedie claims, is their assessment of where the boundaries of *bel canto* begin and end. Delle Sedie's *bel canto* is a *bel canto* for the current times. In his words:

³³ (“Quando il Verdi incominciò a scrivere della musica dalla quale i passi d’agilità erano quasi affatto sbanditi, tranne che per i soprani, che per i ritmi semplici e marcati che vi dominavano e per la natura della melodia [...] riusciva facile ad apprendersi ad orecchio dopo poche udizioni, l’espressione della quale [...] poteva essere da tutti facilmente compresa e riprodotta, si crede che per eseguire quella musica bastasse avere voce, orecchio sicuro ed una certa dose di sentimento, e che lo studio lungo ed accurato solito [...] fosse per questa inutile. Si aggiunga che l’accompagnamento usato dal Verdi nelle sue prime opere è spesso fragoroso, che la voce vi è molte volte sostenuta da qualche strumento che ne raddoppia la melodia, e che per di più le note estreme vi ricorrono di frequente per servire a quel modo d’espressione vigoroso e quasi violento che vi regna, e tuttociò incoraggiò sempre più cantanti ad affidarsi principalmente alla forza dei polmoni, trascurando ogni finezza, ogni maniera particolare del cosiddetto *bel canto*. Di qui un modo di cantare rozzo e sforzato, la ricerca studiata degli effetti volgari [...] Si potrebbe far carico alla moderna musica della maggior fatica che il cantante deve sopportare per eseguirla [...] Ma l’esempio di parecchi artisti meritamente celebrati che col moderno repertorio hanno potuto e possono anche in età avanzata sostenersi sulle scene con onore, è là per dimostrare la falsità di questa asserzione.”) Liberio Vivarelli, “Ancora della decadenza dell’arte del canto, delle sue cause e del modo di provvedervi,” *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (14 July 1889). The article is continued in subsequent issues: see *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (21, 28 July and 4 August). The italics are in the original.

³⁴ See Delle Sedie, “Lettera,” and Delle Sedie, *Riflessioni sulle cause della decadenza della scuola di canto in Italia*.

The singing school cannot base itself solely on the limpid, exact, and uniform emission of sound: this principle is certainly one of the most important in vocal instruction; nonetheless, it is necessary to admit that, on its own, it is not enough to meet the demands of today's musical compositions.

[...] A singer trained in such a school would make a pitiful impression performing today's musical compositions, which demand emotion in the voice, force of accent, and inflections in the sound corresponding to the sentiment [of the moment] and to the dramatic situation.³⁵

Delle Sedie understood that the whole notion there could be a *bel canto* school and a *scuola moderna* was nonsensical: the labels did not mean much, not least when so much expressive possibility resided in the liminal space between the two methods. He seems also to have understood that others wanted to maintain inviolable boundaries around *bel canto*, and that in this context all innovation was controversial because it made those boundaries permeable. This is clearest in his discussion of *Arte e fisiologia's vocalizzi* in the letter and tract. While he admits that there is no written evidence that such *vocalizzi* had ever been taught before, he nonetheless insists that “the *vocalizzi* in the sixteenth and seventeenth lessons of my treatise are not [...] an innovation in the art of song.”³⁶ Delle Sedie, in other words, declared a commitment to *bel canto* while ushering in innovation through the back door.

This was not a bad tactic: what mattered was not whether a method was old or new, but what it achieved. But for Coletti and others, this was where Delle Sedie failed. Whatever he achieved was tainted in the moments where he succumbed to the allure of a vocalism that threatened the integrity of the vocal organs. Once all the rhetoric was set aside, his *vocalizzi* still turned voices into mechanisms that wore down and faltered.

³⁵ (“La scuola di canto non può basarsi unicamente sull’emissione limpida, corretta ed uniforme del suono vocale: questo principio è certamente uno dei più importanti dell’insegnamento vocale; nullameno, è forza convenire che esso, da solo, non basta a corrispondere all’esigenze delle odierne composizioni musicali [...] Un cantante educato a così fatta scuola farebbe miseranda figura eseguendo le odierne composizioni musicali, le quali esigono emozione nella voce, forza nell’accento, ed inflessione del suono corrispondenti al sentimento ed alla situazione drammatica.”) Delle Sedie, *Riflessioni sulle cause della decadenza della scuola di canto in Italia*, 7-9.

³⁶ (“I vocalizzi descrittivi delle lezioni 16.^{me} e 17.^{me} nel mio Tratto non sono [...] una innovazione nell’arte del canto.”) See Delle Sedie, “Lettera.”

Productivism

That a vocalist should strain to produce sound is at once a familiar notion, and one that fascinates with ideas about the voice that vanishes, the organ of *jouissance* gone mute.³⁷ There was none of this attendant sensationalism in the accounts of Coletti and his contemporaries. Far too much was at stake. For them, such vocal wear was a national issue, one that threatened Italian vocal preeminence. Over and over commentators articulated their concern that because Italians were unfit to sing, their theaters had become overrun with foreign vocalists.³⁸ It was no wonder then that Delle Sedie's treatises stimulated the second wave of debates. One reason why the second wave of debates became so heated was because a vivid discourse was unfolding at the time about the need to observe somatic limits. It had first gathered pace in the 1840s, when German physicist Hermann von Helmholtz demonstrated that while it was impossible to create energy, it could be converted, and—moreover—that energy could not be destroyed. As historian Anson Rabinbach has argued, these demonstrations became responsible for the pan-European fantasy that bodies, both natural and industrial, would be able to create without limits, that the universe was charged with an invincible force that could motor perpetual production. The world now seemed to be “a vast and protean reservoir of labor power awaiting its conversion to work.”³⁹ But this dream of modern productivism was shortlived. In 1850 fellow-German Rudolf Clausius showed that in all conversions some energy would be dissipated, and that small amounts were irrevocably lost. Clausius's work caused anxiety: apparently the universe was in a state of continual entropy.⁴⁰

These ideas stimulated fears about human bodies that over-exerted themselves: concern that bodies were fragile, and once exhausted, would be

³⁷ Ideas about vocal *jouissance* derive from Jacques Lacan. See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1998), and Mladen Dolar, *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). For an application of Lacan's ideas to the singing voice see, in particular, Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

³⁸ See for instance an article about foreign singers at Rome's Teatro Apollo in the *Gazzetta d'Italia* (28 December 1874), and Guagni-Benvenuti, *L'odierna scuola di canto in Italia*.

³⁹ Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 3.

⁴⁰ A discussion of these laws can be found in Thomas S. Kuhn's classic essay “Energy Conservation as an Example of Simultaneous Discovery,” reprinted in Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 66-104.

unable to recover.⁴¹ It mobilized a new line of research into the science of fatigue. Italian neuroscientists were at the forefront of this research, and their work would be popularized in the 1891 bestseller *La fatica* [*Fatigue*] by Angelo Mosso.⁴² The book told readers about recent studies in the field, such as ones in which carrier pigeons were removed hundreds of miles from their homes in order that scientists might measure the levels of exhaustion that led to inevitable death.⁴³ *La fatica* also examined modern Italian political figures. It reminded readers that the first prime minister, Camillo Cavour, had died just months into his term because he had not paced himself; that he had abandoned the nation because he had tried too hard to serve it.⁴⁴ And it warned readers that industrial workers risked similar fates: that while Italy wanted to commercialize and industrialize with unprecedented force, it should take care not to exhaust its citizens in the process. The book reminded its readers of those thousands of Sicilian child workers, who having been sent to the mines to extract minerals were deformed, their backs permanently hunched, their bodies broken.⁴⁵

The central message of the book was clear: the health of the nation should not be squandered due to a failure to observe the body's physiological laws. This message had a real hold on Italians across the *fine secolo*, Verdi included. In 1893 he revealed to a confidant how much he had absorbed the lessons in *La fatica*, when he disclosed that, having read the book, he had limited how much he worked on *Falstaff* each day. In the words of Italo Pizzo:

One day he told me that he had read the book *Fatigue*, by professor Angelo Mosso, and that it had an enormous impact on him. So as he was composing *Falstaff*, he further remarked (since I asked him whether *Falstaff* would be finished soon) that 'I work on it every day, but only a little. After I read Mosso's book, I do not work very much anymore. Our brain becomes too

⁴¹ For literature that traces the concept of fatigue in the nineteenth century in a broader context, see, in addition to Rabinbach, Patrick Brantlinger, ed., *Energy and Entropy: Science and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays from Victorian Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), and Alan Hyde, *Bodies of Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), in particular the chapter "The Fatigued Body," 34-47.

⁴² See Angelo Mosso, *La fatica* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1891). This was translated into English a few years later as *Fatigue*, ed. Margaret Drummond and William Blackley Drummond (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1904).

⁴³ See Mosso, "The Migration of Birds—Carrier Pigeons," in *Fatigue*, 1-29.

⁴⁴ See Mosso, "Overpressure," in *Fatigue*, 315-334; see in particular 328-329.

⁴⁵ See Mosso, "The Law of Exhaustion," in *Fatigue*, 150-176; see in particular 163-168.

anaemic when pushed too hard, and we do not have blood as vigorous as that which farmers have.⁴⁶

Verdi was not alone in his reaction. Mosso was an authoritative voice, and someone who could be found in contemporaneous lists of the top one hundred illustrious Italians.⁴⁷ For those who read *La fatica*, the worn voices that caused so much distress to commentators were a reminder of the ineluctable fact that humans had limits, limits that needed constant observation. And at a time when it was common to discuss music as a national product in the same breath as silk, or steel, these worn voices must also have been a reminder of the broader consequences of human labor.⁴⁸ A vocalist unable to sustain sound across a slow movement was not much different from a worker who had exhausted himself such that he could no longer pound an iron sheet. Both had failed to heed warning signs; both no longer contributed to the nation's wealth. For those who saw music-making on a continuum with other industrial activities, then, the tired vocalist was much more than one more theatrical failure, or cause for national shame: he was also one more illustration that human fatigue threatened the achievement of modern productivism.

⁴⁶ (“Un giorno mi disse ch'egli leggeva il libro del professore Angelo Mosso *La Fatica*, e che quel libro l'aveva fortemente colpito. Egli allora lavorava intorno al *Falstaff*, e perché appunto io gli aveva domandato se esso *Falstaff* sarebbe stato finito presto, mi rispose: ‘Io vi lavoro attorno ogni giorno, ma poco. Dopo che ho letto il libro del Mosso, non lavoro più tanto. Il nostro cervello per la troppa fatica diventa anemico, e noi non abbiamo il sangue tanto vigoroso quanto quello dei contadini.’”) The explicit contrast that Verdi makes between himself and farmers is notable given his propensity to emphasize his *paesano* roots. See Conati, *Verdi: interviste e incontri*, 381.

⁴⁷ When publisher Ulrico Hoepli wanted to publish a book that listed the favorite books of one hundred illustrious Italians, he did not fail to include Mosso. See Hoepli, *I migliori libri Italiani, consigliati da cento illustri contemporanei* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1892).

⁴⁸ Opera within Italy was looked on without pretension as a business: indeed, with the increasing numbers of singers entering the profession, and the expansion of operatic circuits, it was understood to be a veritable industry. On Italian opera as a business, see John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: the History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For documents that discuss opera and hard industries in the same breath, see, for instance, “Milano che lavora,” in Aldo Barilli et al. eds., *Il Ventre di Milano: fisiologia della capitale morale*, 2 vols. (Milan: Carlo Aliprandi Editore, 1882), 2: 167-205, in particular the section “Industria,” 171-202.

Broken Bodies

History does not record the names of particular students who used Delle Sedie's treatise, nor the particular performers who studied his annotated scenes. But in view of the method's wide circulation, it seems probable that within a few years, the treatise started to influence how the scenes it referred to were performed in the theater. I want to close this chapter then with some more thoughts about that scene from *Rigoletto* as performed on stage. The Delle Sediean *Rigoletto* encompassed, on the one hand, an actor disabled under considerable vocal demand—strain that doubtless surfaced in some performances—and on the other a character whose famous hunched back indicated that his own somatic condition was precarious. Outside the opera's narrative world, that hunched back was a salient form: as a whole generation of Rigoletti limped across the Italian stage, hunched-back workers emerged from Sicilian mines, harnessed to motor production and incapacitated. It was this scandal to which Mosso referred in *La fatica*, but the issue had come to public prominence in the 1870s, the same decade in which Delle Sedie's *Arte e fisiologia* was released, and hence the same decade in which his approach to *Rigoletto* was disseminated.

In March of 1875, the eminent scholar and member of parliament Pasquale Villari discussed mining conditions in *L'opinione*, a magazine published in Rome. The full article, entitled *Lettere meridionale ed altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia* (*Letters on the South, and Other Writings on the Social Question in Italy*) is an impassioned plea, one indebted to the new science of work.⁴⁹ Villari reported:

It is well known that sulphur mining is carried out in such a manner that much of the time, it can be described as wicked.... Human beings [...] are subjected to labor, which described every day, seems every day more cruel and impossible. Hundreds upon hundreds of boys and girls descend by steep slopes or difficult stairways dug out of crumbling earth, which is frequently wet. Arrived at the bottom of the mine, they are loaded with the mineral, which they must carry up, on their backs, in danger if they slip on this steep and treacherous ground, of falling down and losing their lives. It is known to every one, and has been a thousand times repeated, that this kind of work imposes indescribable butchery

⁴⁹ The letters were reprinted as a book in 1878. See Pasquale Villari, *Le lettere meridionale ed altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia* (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1878).

upon these people. Many of them die, very many are mangled, deformed, or diseased throughout life.⁵⁰

Like Villari, numerous scholars went to witness these conditions for themselves. Among them were Leopoldo Franchetti (1847-1917) and Sidney Sonnino (1847-1922), whose publications, alongside Villari's, are considered to be the earliest works of Italian anthropology.⁵¹ The mine issue became the concern of Italian intellectuals: the hunched backs produced in mines were discussed in the science, literature and art periodicals that abounded at the time. Such was the case in one 1894 publication, in which the quadcentenary of composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's death was discussed in the same issue as a lengthy article on the mines.⁵² For audience members reminded of this national scandal at the theater, the incredible scene that Delle Sedie coached baritones to create could have had a distinct effect. Like the miners that Rigoletto's hunch evoked, the vocalist is undone as he harnesses his force, ruined as he fails to observe well-established physiological limits. These Delle Sedian Rigoletti, in other words, could even on occasion have been curious reminders of the troubling links between vocal exhaustion and modern productivism.

⁵⁰ (“È noto che il lavoro del solfare è fatto in un modo che assai spesso si può dire iniquo.... La creatura umana [...] è sottoposta ad un lavoro che, descritto ogni giorno, sembra ogni giorno più crudele e quasi impossibile. Centinaia e centinaia di fanciulli e fanciulle scendono per ripide scarpe e disagevoli scale, cavate in un suolo franoso e spesso bagnato. Arrivati nel fondo della miniera, sono caricati del minerale, che debbono riportare su a schiena, col pericolo, sdrucciolando su quel terreno ripido e mal fido, di andar giù e perder la vita [...] È noto a tutti, è stato mille volte ripetuto, che questo lavoro fa strage indescrivibile fra quella gente. Molti ne muoiono; moltissimi ne restano storpiati, deformati o malati per tutta la vita.”) Villari, *Le lettere meridionale ed altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia*, 21-22.

⁵¹ Franchetti and Sonnino co-authored a publication on Sicily, *Inchiesta in Sicilia* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974). Their southwards trip is discussed in Laura Basini, “Masks, Minuets and Murder: Images of Italy in Leoncavallo's Pagliacci,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 133/1 (2008): 32-68.

⁵² See Jessie V.^a Mario, “Le miniere di zolfo in Sicilia,” in *Nuova antologia di scienze, lettere ed arti*, Series 3, vol. 49 (Rome: Direzione della nuova antologia, 1894), 441- 466 and 719-743.

Chapter 4

“Fortunata Milano!”—*Falstaff* and the Work of the Premiere¹

Premieres could transform cities. In 1887 the American Blanche Roosevelt wrote a series of letters to the London-based author Wilkie Collins that she never sent. Later that year she would collate the letters into one volume and dedicate them to Collins with the words:

When I left England for Italy you said, ‘Do write me all about Verdi, Milan, and the new opera *Othello*.’ I have taken you at your word; only the letters, like most feminine epistles, have stretched away into limitless pages, and from a few vagabond sheets have grown into a volume. I am sure you will never again ask a woman to write you, even from Paradise; but in the meantime, here is the result of your amiability.²

Roosevelt was in her thirties at the time; once a soprano who trained in Milan, she had since moved to London and dedicated herself to literature, journalism and her husband.³ Her letters reveal far more about the premiere of Verdi’s *Otello* at La Scala than most conventional reviews, not least because she casts herself as a special correspondent, concerned to tell Collins about the event as a whole. The premiere in 1887 was more drawn out than most. *Otello* was meant to debut on 29 January, but the illness of the tenor Francesco Tamagno necessitated postponement

¹ “Fortunata Milano!” was the title of *La sera*’s review of the premiere of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Falstaff*. For a reproduction of the review, see “*Falstaff*,” *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera* (Milan: Ricordi, pl.n. 96423 [1893]), 69-71:71.

² Blanche Roosevelt, *Verdi, Milan and Othello. Being a Short Life of Verdi, with Letters Written about Milan and the New Opera of Othello. Represented for the First Time on the Stage of La Scala Theatre, Feb. 5, 1887* (London: Ward and Downey, 1887), n.pag.

³ On Roosevelt, see Charles Matz, “Blanche Roosevelt,” *Opera News* 27 (20, 23 March 1963): 26-28, and Marcello Conati, ed., “La mia prima intervista a Verdi (1875),” in *Verdi: Intervisti e incontri* (Turin: EDT, 2000), 95-106. On her reactions to *Otello*, see periodic discussion of the soprano-turned-journalist’s views in Susan Rutherford, *Verdi, Opera, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

until 5 February.⁴ Roosevelt was fascinated by what occurred in between. She understood that in a real sense the event started on the eve of the canceled premiere. From that time, the audience members were all in Milan, their lives intersecting in the streets and coffee houses around its center. This created a buzz in the city, but the week would also be marked with *ennui*, with a tired sense that the critics and others detained there had lost control of their schedules.

One Verdian opera had drawn hundreds of international critics to Milan and Tamagno's illness would detain them there. Without work, or other business to undertake, critics stared into an uncertain future, awaiting announcement of the recovery of the tenor's voice. Roosevelt would recount their fate in a letter written from "Otellopolis," marked "February 1st":

DEAR FRIEND,—Another month begun—how time flies! [...] After devouring the morning papers—the tenor is better, and the opera positively announced for the 5th—I had as good a cup of tea as I could get in London, and began to wonder what I should do with my day. I dressed and strolled out. Via Alessandro Manzoni, unusually alive, was filled with reporters, floating about like clouds in the heaven: there were hundreds of strange faces which said plainly, 'We are the critics come to hear *Othello*.' These individuals wore anything but happy expressions, explained by the reason that as Verdi will permit no one to attend rehearsals, and the opera having been again retarded, correspondents who have put off important work and come thousands of miles to write up this opera, find themselves shut up in Milan wasting time in prowling and growling.⁵

The critics were now confined to a version of Milan that would not last, that was built around the new networks of interactions and transactions that surrounded the premiere. Otellopolis, as it was dubbed, was in essence a tourist mecca; time was on everyone's hands.

This situation is a vivid reminder that premieres could do tremendous work for cities. Milan had other effective means to attract tourists. The 1880s would see its

⁴ More than one explanation for the postponement of *Otello* was circulated: *The Daily Telegraph*, for instance, told its readers that Verdi continued to make last-minute alterations to the score, and thereby delayed the premiere. On this see Julian Budden, "Indian Summer," in *Verdi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 127-140:134.

⁵ Roosevelt, "Second Book: Milan and 'Othello.' Chapter Three," in *Verdi, Milan and Othello*, 114-121: 114.

most coordinated venture to do this to date with the 1881 National Exhibition, at which the city hosted some seven thousand exhibitors and around one and a half million visitors within a central exhibition zone.⁶ The *Otello* premiere was a much smaller affair, but it had also proved more economical: that one voice that needed to heal had turned the center of Milan into a tourist hub. And in a real sense, the 1887 *Otello* would achieve similar discursive results to the National Exhibition. Roosevelt would see in the faces of those around her, even in their tamed and straightened locks of hair, evidence of a future she had not seen a decade earlier. “Innovation comes hard,” she would tell Collins. The Milanese meant business, and in this town where commerce now ruled, the romance of the past had been banished. Electric illumination had eliminated its distant shadows. Soon the Italians would “let out the blue heaven by contract to some advertising company.” “Where we once saw a Dante’s prophecy, or dreamed a Guido’s Aurora,” she would muse, “we will see visions of angels running patent sewing-machines.”⁷ But as those who would attend the Exhibition in 1881 had done, she conceded that this innovation was necessary, and that Milan in particular was on a remarkable path towards modernization. “I had thought the Italians always Italians,” she would write in one letter, “but in Milan they are now become cosmopolitans.”⁸

The Otellopolis case reminds us how crucial operatic premieres were to cities, and how much accounts of premieres have tended to efface the distinction between their national and local significance. This is most obvious with accounts of the later Verdian premieres, which tend to be concerned with the status that Italians as

⁶ For a recent discussion of the 1881 Milan Exhibition, see “Simon Boccanegra, the 1881 Milan Exhibition, and the Late Nineteenth-Century Operatic Museum,” in Francesca Vella, “Verdi Reception in Milan, 1859-1881: Memory, Progress and Italian Identity” (PhD diss., King’s College London, 2014), n.pag, and Ilaria M. P. Barzaghi, *Milano 1881: tanto lusso e tanta folla. Rappresentazione della modernità e modernizzazione popolare* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2009). On Italian exhibitions more broadly, see Cristina Della Coletta, *World’s Fairs, Italian Style: The Great Exhibitions in Turin and their Narratives, 1860-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁷ Roosevelt, “Second Book: Milan and ‘Othello.’ Chapter One,” in *Verdi, Milan and Othello*, 95-105: 101.

⁸ Roosevelt, “Second Book: Milan and ‘Othello.’ Chapter One,” in *Verdi, Milan and Othello*, 95-105:99.

a national group accrued with each new success.⁹ To be sure, Italian critics at the premieres themselves overlooked the distinction between the civic and national at times, in their desire to link successful artistic endeavors to the new nation. But the local dimension never receded far from their accounts. An accumulation of material detail about cities in these reviews tied the event to the civic center. Reviewers worked hard to locate works such as *Otello* within Italian cities, in the actual streets, and hotels, where their success was celebrated.¹⁰ In their accounts, in other words, the abstract notion of the nation was balanced against that of the urban center.

It is not the abstraction of Otellopolis on which this chapter will focus, however, but on the equally imaginary idea of a city, and of civic culture, that arose in connection with the premiere of *Falstaff* six years later. It is well known that Verdi remained silent about his work on *Falstaff* until late 1890, and that this evasiveness was then transformed into an insistence that the opera remain in the realm of the ideal, never to be realized in performance. Less well known is that his fascination with the ideal was also a smokescreen created in order to avoid one scenario in particular: the opera's premiere at La Scala. Verdi wanted no contact with the current manager there, Luigi Pontielli. As the composer started to concede to the publisher Giulio Ricordi that *Falstaff* might indeed premiere somewhere this resistance to the theater became ever clearer.¹¹

Most Italians would have seen La Scala as the obvious choice for the premiere; to not have it there could therefore never be a neutral act, as Ricordi reminded

⁹ Representative is Emanuele Senici, "Verdi's 'Falstaff' at Italy's fin de siècle," *The Musical Quarterly* 85/2 (2001): 274-310. Some recent work has started to redress this imbalance, however. See in particular Laura Basini, "Cults of Sacred Memory: Parma and the Verdi Centennial Celebrations of 1913," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13/2 (2001): 141-161; Cormac Newark, "'In Italy we don't have the means for illusion': Grand opéra in Nineteenth-Century Bologna," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19/3 (2007): 199-222, and Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: from Unification to Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), in particular the chapter "'Viva Rossini—Morte a Wagner'? From *Campanilismo* to the Future," 221-262.

¹⁰ See, for instance, *La perseveranza* and *La sera*'s reviews of the Milanese premiere of *Falstaff*, reproduced in "*Falstaff*," *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 5-19 and 69-77, in particular 76-77.

¹¹ See in particular the letter from Verdi to Ricordi dated 2 June 1891, reproduced in Hans Busch, ed., *Verdi's Falstaff in Letters and Contemporary Reviews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 138-139, as well as the letter from Ricordi to Verdi dated 6 June 1891 and the response, dated 9 June 1891, both reproduced in Busch, 140-141 and 142 respectively. The tension between Verdi and Pontielli seems to have begun with Pontielli's alleged claim that Verdi would achieve nothing more after *Otello*. This dismissive remark understandably made Verdi reluctant for Pontielli to profit from his subsequent work.

Verdi in correspondence dated June 1891:

If La Scala were deprived of this fortune, isn't it clear as day that it would be a true artistic disaster for that house? [...] Hence declining prestige, immediate and lasting damage.¹²

But the next month Verdi made an announcement in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* which confirmed that the theater's status was resting in the balance.¹³ These words were folded into a mini-interview conducted with Ricordi:

Giulio Ricordi: Since we're here together, would you allow me to [...] ask you if it is true that *Falstaff* is finished, and if it will be performed this coming year at La Scala?...

Giuseppe Verdi: No... *Falstaff* is not completed, and I am confirming what I have already declared. At my age artistic obligations are not held to a definite deadline; I am working for my own entertainment, because Arrigo Boito's merry libretto cheers me up, because every once in a while it makes me break into the most agreeable laughter. Could I bring *Falstaff* to completion?... Who knows! Even less can I say if and where I shall have it performed; I am afraid that the ambience of La Scala may be too vast for a comedy in which the rapid flow of the dialogue and the play of facial expressions are the principal features. But I can't tell you anything certain about this, because I haven't yet given it any definite thought.¹⁴

¹² See the letter from Ricordi to Verdi dated 12 June 1891, reproduced in Busch, ed., *Verdi's Falstaff in Letters and Contemporary Reviews*, 142-143. The Italian original is unavailable.

¹³ Roger Parker's work on the elaborate narratives Verdi told the world about this final work before he completed it is essential reading. See Parker, "*Falstaff* and Verdi's Final Narratives," in *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 100-125.

¹⁴ (Giulio Ricordi: "E poiché ci siamo, mi permetta chiederle [...] se è vero che *Falstaff* è compiuto, e si darà nel venturo anno alla Scala?..." Giuseppe Verdi: —"No... *Falstaff* non è compiuto, e vi confermo quanto ho già dichiarato. Non è alla mia età che si prendono impegni artistici a scadenza fissa; lavoro per mio divertimento, perché il gaio libretto d'Arrigo Boito mi esilara l'animo, perché di quando in quando ne faccio le più amene risate. Potrò condurre a componimento *Falstaff*?... chi lo sa! Tanto meno posso dire se e dove lo farò rappresentare; temo che l'ambiente della Scala sia troppo vasto per una commedia nella quale la rapidità del dialogo ed i giuochi di fisionomia sono la parte principale. Ma su ciò nulla posso dirvi di positivo, perché nessun pensiero fisso vi ho ancora fatto.") See Giulio Ricordi, "Verdi!," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (5 July 1891).

With this Verdi seemed set to reverse the momentum that the *Otello* premiere had created.¹⁵

But on 9 February 1893 *Falstaff* did, of course, receive its first hearing at La Scala, in what became for the Milanese the most crucial premiere in decades.¹⁶ As the event became an occasion to discuss both work and city, the stories critics told about both shared a remarkable amount: critics celebrated both in the same breath, using the same phrasings. The premiere in Milan thus came to seem natural and inevitable, however uncertain it had once been.

Crucial to this shared tale was a sense that *Falstaff* was far more innovative than any of Verdi's other works. The *Corriere della sera* even dared to state this before the premiere. The composer's return to the comic mode, which he had last essayed in 1840 with *Un giorno di regno*, almost automatically validated advance notices that hailed the new opera as a departure and a novelty.¹⁷ The broadsheet announced:

Within a few hours we will have heard *Falstaff*, we will have been witness to a glorious celebration of art, been the audience at the most imposing musical performance possible in theaters across the world [...]

What form will this Verdian comedy take? —*Falstaff* arouses intense interest because this question remains. Without a doubt, it will be an

¹⁵ *Otello* had in fact been the first Verdian premiere at the theater since 1843 and *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*: until the later premiere, the association between Milan and Verdi was more brittle than we tend to remember. That Ricordi issued vocal scores of Verdi operas with the familiar image of La Scala on their cover for several decades in the 1900s has perhaps created the impression that the composer's operas premiered at La Scala more often than was the case. The theater did however premiere the revised versions of *La forza del destino* (1862, revised 1869), *Simon Boccanegra* (1857, revised 1881) and *Don Carlos* (1867, revised as *Don Carlo*, 1884).

¹⁶ Verdi started to discuss plans for the work to premiere at La Scala in earnest around June 1892. See, for instance, the letter from Verdi to Ricordi dated 13 June 1892, reproduced in Busch, ed., *Verdi's Falstaff in Letters and Contemporary Reviews*, 206-208.

¹⁷ As Laura Basini has argued, the comic genre had been losing ground to romantic *melodramma* since the 1820s in most Italian cities, while retaining a following in some Southern cities. As a result there were few immediate precedents for *Falstaff*. See Basini, "After Revivalism," in "Reviving the Past: Italian Music History and Verdi" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2003), 181-206.

original and characteristic form. Verdi nowadays is an innovator.¹⁸

After the premiere, the *L'Italia del popolo* described the opera in similar terms:

The triumph of this opera was the apotheosis of the Maestro's work. If the opera had amounted to little or nothing, not been understood, or been ruined by the performance, the celebrations for Verdi would have been huge and distinguished all the same; imagine, then, the effect when the opera turns out to be a revelation, a great work, when this old man—adored and venerated, unique in his greatness because he straddles the epochs—reveals, at almost eighty years of age, a new physiognomy of his imposing individuality, and gives us almost a new kind of art.¹⁹

So innovative was *Falstaff* that some insisted they could perceive no discernible authorial thread connecting it to the works that had come before. The work was “absolutely new: a musical creation until now never conceived, never imagined, never glimpsed, not even with the most vivid imagination.”²⁰ And this meant it was an “isolated monument in the history of art.”²¹

¹⁸ (“Fra poche ore avremo udito il *Falstaff*, saremo stati testimoni di una gloriosissima festa dell’arte, pubblico del più solenne spettacolo musicale che i teatri del mondo oggi possano avere. [...] Quale sarà la forma della commedia verdiana? —In questa domanda sta la ragione dell’immenso interesse destato dal *Falstaff*. Per certo sarà una forma originale e tipica. Verdi oggi è innovatore.”) These remarks were first published in Milan’s *Corriere della sera* and are reproduced in “*Falstaff*,” *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 19-41, here 19-20.

¹⁹ (“Il trionfo dell’opera fu l’apoteosi del Maestro. L’opera fosse stata poco o niente, oppure non fosse stata capita, o fosse stata rovinata dall’esecuzione, la dimostrazione, le feste a Verdi sarebbero state egualmente grandi, imponenti; figurarsi poi quando quest’opera è una rivelazione, quando questo lavoro è un grande lavoro, quando questo vecchio che si adora e si venera, e che è grande soltanto perché sta sulla breccia, vi rivela, vicino agli ottant’anni, una nuova fisionomia della sua grandiosa individualità, vi dà, per così dire, quasi un nuovo tipo d’arte.”) The article, entitled “Gloria! (Per la prima del *Falstaff*),” was published in *L'Italia del popolo* and is reproduced in “*Falstaff*,” *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 48-57, here 51.

²⁰ (“Nuovo, assolutamente: la creazione di musica mai immaginata, mai sospettata, mai intravista neppure con la fantasia più accesa.”) This remark was made by Vice-S.T. Felius in Rome’s *Il parlamento*; the article is reproduced in “*Falstaff*,” *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 91-92, here 92.

²¹ (“Monumento isolato nella storia dell’arte.”) The remark was made by A. Ricchetti in Venice’s *L’adriatico*; the article is reproduced in “*Falstaff*,” *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 128-129, here 129.

All this talk of renewal was soon worked into an ethical narrative as well. As we have seen in earlier episodes of Milan's encounter with progress and technology, innovation at the time was considered as much a moral as an intellectual and creative imperative. An innovative composition was testament to the earnest work of its creator. And one that was issued from the hand of someone almost in his ninth decade of life told of even more profound resolve. The journal *La perseveranza* would describe *Falstaff* as "possessing outstanding originality" and as a "joyous display of a spirit *that knows his conscience is pure*, a striking page in the life story of a man who is deservedly happy, because happiness for him is borne of hard work [operosità] and of a sense of civic virtue [civili virtù]." ²² For these commentators, the most visionary of enterprises stemmed from the most solid of values.

This made it all the easier to tie *Falstaff* and Milan into one broader tale. The more innovative *Falstaff* was, the more it had in common with the *capitale morale*. *Il pungolo* would for instance write:

The greatest artist alive is an Italian, Giuseppe Verdi; the greatest Italian city is Milan, which honors the genius.

This is not the lustful city maligned by Ugo Foscolo, and nor is it the political capital of Italy. It is a center of economic industriousness and of elevated culture, and this drew the Genius to it. Music is considered a serious matter: the production of great talent is the most important matter of the time, and this (it should be said) in a city in which everyone works, everyone is occupied with fruitful business, with remunerative activity. [...] But the body and the mind rest through art, after they have tired themselves amid the diurnal and never-ending trade that has made Milan rich, industrious, commercialized, her own agent, and an example to all of Italy. [...]

It is not the extravagances of a patron to whom he is indebted that drew the Maestro of the future to Milan, nor rejection by a country unappreciative of its great men, but conscious contemplation of the Glory that now renders the Lombard city magnificent and proud.

²² ("D'una originalità spiccata," and a "gioconda manifestazione di un'anima *che ha la coscienza di sentirsi pura*, pagina eloquente del libro di un uomo meritamente felice, perché la felicità per lui è frutto di operosità e di civili virtù.") See G.B. Nappi's remarks in Milan's *La perseveranza*, reproduced in "*Falstaff*," *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi*. *Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 5-19, here 14 and 15. The italics are in the original.

The critics, who have come from all over Europe to testify that Verdi is still the greatest living musician, will not forget that Milan is also one of the greatest centers of art.²³

Falstaff then was a cause for national celebration, but one that also allowed reviewers to trace continuities between those who created the work and those who created Milan. Verdi and the Milanese were drawn to this “center of industriousness” because it was part of their ethical core. Discussion of the work could thus move seamlessly to discussion of the virtues of the city, which like Verdi forever pushed in new directions; and thus Milan came to seem an inevitable location for this most innovative of premieres.

The interconnections among author, work and urban center are what motivates this chapter. These knotted threads invite us to consider how work and city affected one another—how *Falstaff* enhanced the status of Milan, but also how traces of the discourse around the urban center became attached to *Falstaff* and how these traces persist in the narratives that have ossified around Verdi’s last opera. The notion of innovation continues to shape our conception of the work today, and, as this chapter demonstrates, the old “innovation narrative” has accumulated more force than it deserves.

Where *Falstaff* was once revered as an “isolated monument” to innovation, in recent decades scholars have elucidated much about the work’s connections to its

²³ (“Il più grande artista vivente è un italiano, Giuseppe Verdi; la più grande città dell’Italia è Milano, che ne onora il genio. Non è la *città lasciva* fulminata da Ugo Foscolo, e non è nemmeno la capitale politica dell’Italia. È un centro di operosità economica e di elevata coltura quello che attira a sé il Genio. La musica è considerata come cosa seria: la produzione dell’ingegno come il fatto il più importante dei tempi, è ciò appunto una città nella quale lavorano tutti, tutti sono occupati nell’azione feconda, nell’opera remuneratrice. [...] Ma il corpo e la mente riposano nell’arte dopo che si sono affaticati nel diuturno ed incessante traffico per il quale Milano è ricca, industriosa, commerciale, signora si è ed esempio di tutta l’Italia. [...] Non le stravaganze di un mecenate indebitato che attrae a sé il Maestro dell’avvenire, —non le ripulse della patria ingrata verso i suoi grandi, ma la cosciente contemplazione della Gloria rende ora superba e fiera la città lombarda. I critici, venuti da varie parti d’Europa per testimoniare che Verdi è ancora il più grande musicista vivente, non dimenticheranno che Milano è anche uno dei più grandi centri dell’arte.”) See Errera Alberto, writing for Naples’ *Il pungolo*, reproduced in “*Falstaff*,” *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 102-103.

historical moment.²⁴ But there nonetheless remains a residual sense in scholarship that the opera was more disconnected from its moment than most works. For music critic Harold Schonberg *Falstaff* is “almost a freak, what the biologists call a sport,” and for Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol the work is “musically and dramatically eccentric.”²⁵ For others still, *Falstaff* is a work situated in its historical moment, but also intractable at times, so weird that sometimes we cannot make sense of it, or reconcile it with its musical context.²⁶ The disconnect once celebrated as innovative has been reframed as odd; but the essential narrative is the same.

I do not want to suggest that our entire take on *Falstaff* should be linked to the location in which it premiered. There would have been reason to discuss *Falstaff* as innovative wherever it premiered. “Innovation” was a convenient word: it articulated little about the work, and doubtless masked the incomprehension of certain critics, who were unsure what to make of it; the word was also used by critics who were not at all invested in this local center or its narratives.²⁷ To describe *Falstaff* as “odd” now also has a certain appeal, not least because it allows us to be enchanted rather than repulsed by the opera’s seeming moments of strangeness or resistance to explication. The neatness of those associations among

²⁴ For important statements about *Falstaff*, see in particular Parker “*Falstaff* and Verdi’s Final Narratives”; Senici, “Verdi’s ‘Falstaff’ at Italy’s fin de siècle”; Basini, “After Revivalism”; Basini, “The Plays of Art Are for a Playful Art: History, Puzzles, and Play in Verdi’s Falstaff,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 74/2 (2005): 740-749; Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, “Verdi’s Last Laugh: Parody as Late Style in Falstaff,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 74/2 (2005): 750-758; Michal Grover-Friedlander, “Chapter Four: Falstaff’s Free Voice,” in *Vocal Apparitions: the Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 81-109, and Parker, “In Search of Verdi,” in *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 67-89. Karen Henson has also discussed the role of Victor Maurel as creator of Falstaff. See Henson, “Verdi, Victor Maurel and fin-de-siècle Operatic Performance,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19/1 (2007): 59-84. For an introduction to *Falstaff*, see James Hepokoski, *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), and Julian Budden, “Falstaff,” in *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 3, *From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 416-531.

²⁵ See Harold C. Schonberg, “Colossus of Italy: Giuseppe Verdi,” in *The Lives of the Great Composers* (London: Abacus, 1992), 212-229: 225-226, and Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo: Regressive Points of View and the Artifice of Alienation,” trans. Roger Parker, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5/1 (1993): 39-53, here 41.

²⁶ Traces of this stance can be found in most work on *Falstaff*. Grover-Friedlander sets the tone for a chapter on *Falstaff* in the first sentence, for instance, with the statement: “Falstaff is a singular work.” See Grover-Friedlander, “Falstaff’s Free Voice,” 81. Parker has also embraced the strangeness of certain moments in *Falstaff*. See Parker, “*Falstaff* and Verdi’s Final Narratives.”

²⁷ Senici has discussed the puzzled reactions of critics in an article that richly contextualizes *Falstaff* within a *fine secolo* modernity. See Senici, “Verdi’s ‘Falstaff’ at Italy’s fin de siècle.”

author, work and place is at least one of the reasons this particular narrative has assumed so much force. But it is only when we cast aside preconceptions about the work's distinctiveness that we begin to understand its place within a nexus of works that altered how audiences listened to opera at the *fine secolo*.

The Resonant Soundscape

Even if *Falstaff* was not as innovative as sometimes claimed, it did obviously mark a clear departure from *Otello*, and articulating how it did this is perhaps the best way to grasp the compositional rules that structure the work. Commentators at the premieres were themselves keen to determine what made the soundscape of *Falstaff* so removed from that of *Otello*. They noted the opera featured almost no arias, and those few sounded like mere bursts of *cantabile*, no more than “handfuls of sonorous dust” according to one critic.²⁸ Characters instead expressed themselves in *canto declamato*. In this final work, Verdi abandoned the classic alternation between aria time and stage action, between frozen and kinetic moments that defined the tradition he had worked in up to and including *Otello*. Commentators were also struck by the unconventional role of the orchestra, which seemed to have become less a stratum in the sonorous texture that commented on the action than a force bound into that action itself. The orchestra seemed to respond to events in the narrative world, to the words uttered, to the motions that unfolded, with a mimetic force.²⁹ Reformulated in contemporary terms, the orchestra had lost its autonomy, its distance from the narrative, and hence its abilities to nuance that narrative, even to confer on it a deep, metaphysical knowledge.³⁰ More recently, commentators have added to this list of anomalies by drawing attention to *Falstaff*'s preponderance of phenomenal music.³¹

²⁸ See Camille Bellaigue's review of the first performance of *Falstaff* at the Opéra Comique (on 18 April 1894) in the *Revue des deux mondes*, published 1 May 1894 and reproduced in Busch, *Verdi's Falstaff in Letters and Contemporary Reviews*, 527-536, here 533.

²⁹ The reviewer for Milan's *L'Italia del popolo*, for instance, remarked “La musica segue il libretto parola per parola; e siccome i versi del libretto dipingono, così spesso danno essi stessi l'idea per il colorito orchestrale.” (The music follows the libretto word for word; and since the verses of the libretto paint a picture, these verses themselves often provide the inspiration for the orchestral color.) Reproduced in “*Falstaff*,” *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 48-57, here 53.

³⁰ Grover-Friedlander remarks on this loss of function in *Falstaff*. See Friedlander, “Falstaff's Free Voice.”

³¹ On this, see in particular Basini, “After Revivalism.”

These angles of interpretation elucidate much about the sound world of *Falstaff*, but listening to the opera from the perspective of sound studies and acoustic planes opens up a broader question. Act 1 can be understood as a treatise on how to collapse together the acoustic world of the audience and that of the characters on stage. It sets the scene at the Garter Inn, where an incensed Dr. Caius accuses Falstaff's lackeys, Pistol and Bardolph, of having made him drunk in order to rob him. Famously, the text of the confrontation is laid over a musical scheme that resembles a sonata form, and is coordinated so that characters' utterances announce each new section in that form. To Dr. Caius's accusations in one thematic and harmonic area, Falstaff initiates a response that moves to a secondary area with the words "ecco la mia risposta" ("here's my response"), while the development section of the sonata form is announced when Dr. Caius shouts at Bardolph "Non è finita" ("this is not over") (Example 4.1).³² Such close formal coordination is the first hint that characters are not insulated from the orchestral accompaniment, that the characters as well as the audience perceive the orchestral accompaniment.

Canto declamato is the vocal idiom in use across this opening sequence, and it too contributes to the narrowing of acoustic dimensions. One conventional way to perceive operatic singing is to hear the words as resonating in—heard, comprehended, and responded to within—the narrative world on stage, while the melodic and sonorous clothing given to those words is understood as audible only to the audience, and not to the characters on stage. But *canto declamato* interferes with this implicit division of registers, by binding the words and their resonance together. It condenses utterances into statements that sound closer to speech: closer to sound that resonates within one acoustic dimension alone.

There is, of course, also a more conventional sense in which vocal sound is available for all to hear in opera, when it resonates as phenomenal song within the narrative world. And in the "sonata form" sequence, *canto declamato* is abandoned only in order to introduce this other variety of resonant song. It is Pistol and Bardolph who introduce this new register, creating closure for the sonata form with an antiphonal outburst on the word "Amen," at the same time "battendo il tempo, mentre [Pistol] accompagna sull'uscio il Dr. Cajus ("beating time, while Pistol escorts Dr. Caius to the door") (Example 4.2). Falstaff,

³² For an introduction to the music of *Falstaff*, see Hepokoski, "Musical Technique and Structure," in *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff*, 85-109, and Budden, "Falstaff," in *From Don Carlos to Falstaff*.

meanwhile, provides confirmation that these last sounds have invaded the world of the Garter Inn, with his admonition: “cessi l’antifona, Laurlate in contrattempo” (“cease your antiphonals. Ye drone them out of time.”)

Until this point the orchestra has underscored the dramatic tension with a quintessential musical embodiment of conflict (sonata form). But here it begins to redouble what we hear, to function as an amplifier for the noise within the inn.³³ Once Dr. Caius has been escorted out of the inn, Bardolph rummages for pennies in his purse and the orchestra provides a comically literal soundtrack for this stage business. We hear the chink of the pennies that remain as a sustained chord in the flutes, and an acoustic approximation of the rummaging motion in the cellos which starts and stops, each time recommencing when Falstaff orders Bardolph to search again. The orchestra has such a prominent role in mimicking stage sound in the first scene of *Falstaff* that even the conventional technique of doubling the voice in a lyric utterance begins to seem like a sound effect meant to be heard as resonating within the fictional world of the stage, a deliberate amplification of voice audible to the characters (Example 4.3).

³³ Critics often remarked on this in their reviews. See, for instance, the *Corriere della sera*'s review of the premiere, as reproduced in “*Falstaff*,” *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 19-41, here 32-33.

Example 4.1 Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 1, Scene 1, Sonata form confrontation, Falstaff, Dr. Caius.

4

Dr. C. *Allegretto*
 .spo.sa. - Am - - - pio Mes.

FAL *Allegretto*
 se - re, Se fo - ste ven - ti vol - te John Fal - staff Ca - va -

Dr. C. *Allegretto*
 .lle.re Vi forze - rò a ri - spondermi. (con flemma)
 Ec - - - co la mia ri -

UN POCO MENO ANIMATO
 Dr. C. *ben legato*
 E

FAL *Allegretto*
 .sposta: «Ho fat - to ciò ch'hai det - to.»

UN POCO MENO ANIMATO

G 96000 G

5

D.C. poi? M'appel.le.rò al Con.si.glio Re .

FAL. L'ho fat.to ap . . . po.sta.

p

D.C. al.

FAL. Vat.ti con Di . o. Sta zit.to o a.vrai le

(gridando verso Bardolfo)

D.C. Non è fi .

FAL. bef.fe; quest'è il con.si . glio mi . o.

G 96000 G

Example 4.1 continued

6

COME PRIMA (sempre in furia)

D. C. - ni - ta!! Bar.

FAL. Al dia - vo - lo!

COME PRIMA

(2) *ff*

The image shows a page of a musical score, page 6. It features three staves. The top staff is for the vocal part of D. C. (Dante), with lyrics "- ni - ta!!" and "Bar.". The middle staff is for the vocal part of FAL. (Faust), with lyrics "Al dia - vo - lo!". The bottom two staves are for the piano accompaniment, marked with "(2) ff" and "COME PRIMA". The tempo is indicated as "(sempre in furia)". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 4.1 continued

Example 4.2 Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 1, Scene 1, “Amen,” Pistol, Bardolph, Falstaff.

(esce dalla porta a sinistra)

D^cC

BAR. -a. (come Pistola)

FIS. (battendo il tempo, mentre accompagna sull'uscio il D^c Cajus)

B

FAL. *men.*

Ces.sj l'an . ti . fo . na. Laur . la . te in con . trat .

P

men.

p

PRESTO *PIU' LENTO*
(con intenzione)

FAL. tempo. L'ar. te sta in que. sta

PRESTO *PIU' LENTO*

ff

FAL. *legato* mas. si. ma: *PPP* Ru. bar con gar. bo e a tem. po.

pp *legato* *ff*

ALL' COME PRIMA (con disprezzo) (imporre silenzio)

FAL. *ff* Siete dei roz. zi ar. ti. sti. Sss.

BAR. A.....

PIS. A.....

ALL' COME PRIMA

Example 4.2 continued

Example 4.3 Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 1, Scene 1, “Sei polli, sei scellini,” Falstaff, Bardolph.

(si mette ad esaminare il conto dell'Oste)

FAL

mf

f

FAL

(7)

6 pol-li: 6 scelli-ni. 30 giarre di Xe-res:

(a Bardolfo gettandogli la borsa)

più forte

2 li-re. 3 tacchi-ni... Fru-ga nel-la mia bor-sa.-

ALLEGRO ♩ = 100
(si rimette a leggere)

ancora parlante

un fil di voce

2 fa-gia-ni. Un' ac-

ALLEGRO ♩ = 100
pp

96000

FAL. *- cù - - - ga. Fruga. Fruga.*
 HAR. (estrae dalla borsa le monete e le conta sul tavolo)
 8. Un *mark*, un *mark*, un *penny*. Ho frugato.
a tempo
pp
 FAL. (alzandosi) Sei la mia di - stru.
 HAR. (gettando la borsa sul tavolo) Qui non c'è più uno spicciolo.
 FAL. - zio - ne! Spendo ogni set - te gior - ni die - ci ghi - ne. e! Be.
f *p* *ff*
 06000

Example 4.3 continued

At other moments, however, the sheer sonorous excess in the vocal lines and orchestra actually reinforces a sense of a division between the phenomenal sounds of this fictional Windsor and those heard by the audience. But these sonorous moments are fleeting, at most temporarily undermining the dominant resonant idiom. This impressing is striking in the letter narration that begins the second scene, as well as in the sonnet for Fenton and Nannetta, which is also a narration of sorts—at least in its final couplet, which draws on lines from Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*.³⁴

The comic mechanism of the letter scene is, famously, the fact that Falstaff delivered the same love letter to two different women, Meg and Alice, who then trade letters and read them aloud. Verdi’s orchestral accompaniment fastidiously marks the distinction between narration (the narration of Falstaff’s cloying words) and the ironic commentary offered by the women. The narration has its own soundtrack, an aching, descending cor anglais line that does not echo the voice, but seems to reach out from another acoustic dimension to surround the narration with intimations of desire (Example 4.4). This narration is interrupted four times, as the wives tear themselves from the fiction and note that their letters are identical; on cue the sentimental soundtrack is abandoned. Each time the melodic line reaches the supertonic, E, it suddenly, unceremoniously, cedes to orchestral silence and bare, immediate utterances.

In what follows, the narrative function of the music toggles between extremes with dizzying rapidity, juxtaposing almost Puccinian splashes of emotive outpouring with intrusions of dry wit that puncture the illusion. Alice assumes the dominant role in the narration, as she reads the letter(s) to their end. The cor anglais’ descent has been transformed into a double-bass *passus duriusculus*, which then moves to a D sharp, leading to a radiant E major (Example 4.5). Where once Alice’s line had soared over the *passus duriusculus*, here its sonorous beauty reaches new heights, enhanced each time it is suspended a ninth above the bass (as she entertains the old knave’s vision of splendid love). Voice and orchestra now encode that illusion, rendering in sound her interior world. But with the close of the narration, those acoustic dimensions definitively collapse—and not even into *canto declamato*, but the noise of the women’s laughter. Much as in Fenton and Nannetta’s sonnet later in the act, these sonorous moments are unstable, liable to be cut short with conversational exchange in a more resonant register.

³⁴ On the Boccaccio source see Hepokoski, “The Forging of the Libretto,” in *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff*, 19-24: 29-30.

Example 4.4 Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 1, Scene 2, “Fulgida Alice, amor t’offro,” Alice, Meg.

The image displays a musical score for a scene from Verdi's *Falstaff*. It features three systems of music, each with vocal lines for Alice (A) and Meg (M) and a piano accompaniment.

System 1: Alice's line begins with the instruction "(dà la lettera a Meg)" and the word "Leggi." Meg's line follows with "(scambia la lettera con quella d'Alice)" and "Leggi." The piano accompaniment starts with a *pp* dynamic.

System 2: Meg's line is marked *AND^{te} SOSTENUTO* with a tempo of 126. The lyrics are "(leggendo la lettera d'Alice)" and "Fulgida A-li-cel a-mor t'offro... Ma". The piano accompaniment is also marked *AND^{te} SOSTENUTO* with a tempo of 126 and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand.

System 3: Meg's line is marked *ALLEGRO* with a tempo of 126 and "Lo stesso movimento". The lyrics are "come?! Che cosa dice? Salvo che il nome la frase è u-guale." The piano accompaniment is also marked *ALLEGRO* with a tempo of 126 and "Lo stesso movimento" and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand.

Come Prima
 ALI. (cogli occhi sulla lettera che tiene in mano) *ALL.^o come prima*

Ful-gi-da Meg! a-mor t'offro... Qua

(continuando sul proprio foglio la lettura d'Alice)

a-mor bra-mo.

Come Prima *ALL.^o come prima*

AND.^{te} come prima

Meg, là A - li - ce.

È tal e quale.

AND.^{te} come prima

(come prima)

t' a - mo.

(come prima)

non domandar perchè, ma dim - mi:

Example 4.4 continued

Example 4.5 Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 1, Scene 2, “Facciamo il paio in un amor ridente,” Alice, Nannetta, Meg and Quickly

Sempre lo stesso movimento

A
Faccia - mo il pa - - io..... in un amor ri -

Q
tre.

Sempre lo stesso movimento

pp

A
(tutte col naso sulle lettere)
- den - - te di, don - - na

A
(con caricatura) *doleiss.*
NAN. bel - - la e d'uom ap - pa - ri - scen - te e il vi - so

MEG. *f* ap - pa - ri - scen - te.

QUIC. *f* ap - pa - ri - scen - te.

QUIC. *f* ap - pa - ri - scen - te.

f *pp*

tu - o su me ri - splen - de - rà co - me u - na
 stel - la co - me u - na stel - la sul - l'im - men - si -
 NAN. - tà. Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!
 MEG. Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!
 QUIC. Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!
 Ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! ah!

Example 4.5 continued

This dissection of the shifting acoustic registers in the letter scene is just one instance of the opera's radically updated attitude to the relationship between music and stage action. A much simpler indication of Verdi's newly cynical—and newly sensitive—attitude to musical dramaturgy is the fact that *Falstaff* contains not a single aside. That is, characters never reveal their private thoughts within earshot of another character, and the audience is never asked to believe that it has heard something that other characters in that same acoustic space somehow failed to hear. The abandonment of this quintessential operatic convention is so unexpected and so complete that it has completely escaped notice by commentators on the opera. To put it another way, the Verdian vocal aside sounded for the last time in *Otello* with moments like the Act 2 handkerchief quartet, when Verdi gave simultaneous voice to the inner consciousness of four characters, each locked into the echo chamber of their own minds, with an acoustic seal between them. One opera later, the vocal aside had been banished and sound made available for all to hear.³⁵

Verdi and Mascagni

Falstaff seems to be experimenting with a treatment of sound that was common to a small but extremely popular set of works on the *fine secolo* stage: Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) and one-act verismo operas modeled on it, such as Ruggero Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* (1892) and Umberto Giordano's *Mala vita* (1892).³⁶ *Falstaff* is almost never discussed in relation to these works save to articulate its distance from them (indeed, conventional wisdom tells us that “Verdi parted company with contemporary Italian tradition once it had taken the form of verismo”) but clearly Verdi was more drawn to the operatic soundscape

³⁵ Characters also seem concerned with how their voices carry. For instance, when Fenton and Nannetta initiate their sonnet in Act 1 the stage is cleared dramatically. The characters remain alone on stage, but their love is secret, and as if concerned that their voices will carry beyond the stage, Nannetta cautions Fenton to be silent “mettendo l'indice al labbro per cenno di silenzio” (putting her finger to her lips, to signal the need for silence).

³⁶ On the widespread circulation of *Cavalleria rusticana* at the outset of the 1890s, see Alan Mallach, “‘Abbiamo un maestro’: *Cavalleria rusticana* and its Progeny,” in *The Autumn of Italian Opera: from Verismo to Modernism, 1890-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 21-46: 34.

around him than we have tended to allow.³⁷ An anecdote about a conversation he had with Heinrich Ehrlich catches him in the act:

Ehrlich: Have you seen the piano score [of Mascagni's *L'Amico Fritz*], Maestro?

Verdi: Certainly!

Ehrlich: Well, you remember how on one page you change from 3/4, to 4/4, 3/4, 3/8 ad infinitum—almost as in Wagner's deeply tragic *Tristan und Isolde*.

Verdi: Even more so. And in *Tristan*, the alternation mirrors the most terrible and touching passions. But in *L'amico Fritz*, in this picture of rural life, I do not understand such things; there was one moment, where I held my head in my hands (Verdi accompanied these words with the corresponding gesture) and asked: Why all this? Nonetheless, [Mascagni] has a very great talent, and has invented a most effective genre: short operas without pointless *longueurs*. Our mistake, you see, was to write interminable, large operas, which had to fill an entire evening. We were always compelled to consider how we could fill the four and half hours with music: this meant great choruses, which had precious little to do with the drama, elaborate scenery, solo arias with all kinds of incidental episodes—all of which slowed down the action. And now along comes someone

³⁷ See Budden "A Problem of Identity," in *From Don Carlos to Falstaff*, 263-292, here 281. Basini has noted that Ford's Act 2 monologue in *Falstaff* appears to poke fun at Leoncavallo's portrayal of Canio in *I Pagliacci*. In his work on *Falstaff*, meanwhile, Parker has documented Verdi's concerns about the musical style of Mascagni and his peers. See Basini, "The Plays of Art Are for a Playful Art: History, Puzzles, and Play in Verdi's Falstaff," and Parker, "*Falstaff* and Verdi's Final Narratives."

with a one- or two-act opera without all that pompous nonsense, and the action develops speedily.³⁸

The conversation does not delve into technical details of acoustic resonance or vocal asides. But it shows that Verdi was fascinated with the ways *L'Amico Fritz* broke down the conventional, formal blocks of opera and delivered music that was more concise and direct. *Falstaff* was not a one- or even a two-act opera but in all other respects it fits this description perfectly.

Not surprisingly, the illustrious older composer was not in the business of revealing his debt to others, so the most substantial trace of the influence of *Cavalleria rusticana* or *L'Amico Fritz* on *Falstaff* can be found in the scores of these operas. As Arman Schwartz has demonstrated, *Cavalleria rusticana* established an acoustic world in which resonance was all-important, and where conventional, non-phenomenal music therefore became problematic.³⁹ Much of the opera's sound is issued from the narrative world: at prominent moments in the opera, church bells peal and churchgoers sing. *Cavalleria* also removed sound barriers between characters: as would *Falstaff* three years later, the opera quietly eliminated the vocal aside. Mascagni's discomfort with the conventional language of operatic emotion is also suggested by the staging of the first appearance of the tenor, Turridu: he sings from behind the curtains, as if the composer wanted to distance the display of interiority from the audience. In other words, in the same moment that Verdi started to compose *Falstaff* in earnest, Mascagni shook at the foundations of operatic discourse. That *Falstaff* revealed the same acoustic tactics at its premiere three years later was not a coincidence.

³⁸ (Ehrlich: "Avete visto lo spartito per canto e pianoforte [di *L'Amico Fritz*], maestro?" Verdi: "Certo!" Ehrlich: "Allora si ricorderà certamente come su una pagina a volte si passi dai tre quarti ai quattro quarti, ai due quarti, ai tre ottavi, *ad infinitum*; quasi come nel tragicissimo *Tristano e Isotta* di Wagner." Verdi: "Direi ancora di più che in questo. E in *Tristano* viene sottolineato l'avvicinarsi delle passioni più accese e terribilmente violente (*poignantes*). Invece in *Amico Fritz*, in questa vicenda di provincia (*vie de paysage*), non riesco a concepire nulla di simile; ci fu un momento in cui mi presi la testa fra le mani—(Verdi accompagnò le parole con un eloquente movimento della mano)—e mi chiesi: "Perché tutto questo?" Nondimeno Mascagni è un grandissimo talento e ha portato anche un'innovazione di bell'effetto: opere brevi, senza inutili lungaggini. Vedete, il nostro errore erano le grandi sterminate opere che dovevano occupare un'intera serata. Eravamo sempre costretti a pensare come approntare musica per quattro ore e mezza: quindi grandi cori che propriamente avevano ben poco a che fare con l'argomento, apparato scenico dilatato, arie solistiche con ogni sorta di episodi incidentali, e tutto questo tratteneva l'azione. Ora si fa avanti uno con un'opera in uno o due atti senza tutto quel pomposo armamentario, e l'azione progredisce rapida.") See Marcello Conati, "Verdi su Mascagni, 1892," in *Verdi: Interviste e incontri*, 255-259, here 258-259.

³⁹ See Arman Schwartz, "Rough Music: *Tosca* and Verismo Reconsidered," *19th-Century Music* 31/3 (2008): 228-244.

There is, however, one glaring difference between *Falstaff* and these *verismo* works. Even as *Cavalleria rusticana* made sound resonate more than ever, it also smothered its characters with a dense orchestral soundtrack that nuanced the narrative for the audience but was, presumably, inaudible to those characters themselves.⁴⁰ In *Falstaff*, on the contrary, the orchestra has little autonomy; the sonata form of the traditional overture is even folded into the action of the first scene, as if to diminish its function as autonomous orchestral music. This confinement of the orchestra's role in *Falstaff* is probably a byproduct of Verdi's cultural conservatism, his resistance to teutonic musical values and especially the Wagnerian orchestral style that was creeping into Italian auditoriums at the time.⁴¹ If the limited independence of orchestra from vocal line in *Falstaff* distanced it from the world of *Cavalleria rusticana*, it also turned Verdi's final opera into an even more perfect demonstration of the new *fine secolo* acoustic rules that opera had established.

Comic Truth

Our discussion so far has isolated these acoustic dimensions as if composers in the 1890s had an abstract fascination with resonance. But these adjustments to the musical fabric were tied to much broader concerns about truth on the *fine secolo* stage. The literary sources for works like *Cavalleria rusticana*—novels and plays of Italian *veristi* such as Giovanni Verga—tried to banish dramatic illusion and idealist representation in favor of a drama that seemed earthier and less nuanced, more lifelike and less contrived. The new treatment of sound worked in tandem with these realist aims: phenomenal sounds that emanated from visible or concrete sources were less likely to invest the narrative with a transcendent depth. And

⁴⁰ These orchestral textures have doubtless contributed to a strain of criticism that concludes there is little that is realist in these operas except, perhaps, their plots. For an example of this stance, see Egon Voss, "Il verismo nell'opera," in *Cavalleria rusticana, 1890-1990: cento anni di un capolavoro*, ed. Piero and Nandi Ostali (Milan: Sonzogno, 1990), 47-55. Traces of a similar point of view can also be found in Carl Dahlhaus, "Realism in Italian Opera," in *Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 63-71. For work that rather seeks to identify connections between the realist dimensions of plot and music in these operas, see Corazzol, "Opera and Verismo: Regressive Points of View and the Artifice of Alienation," in addition to Schwartz.

⁴¹ Roger Parker has argued most convincingly for the sonata form's role in resistance to teutonic influence in *Falstaff*. See Parker, "*Falstaff* and Verdi's Final Narratives." Hepokoski has also framed *Falstaff* as a manifesto on how to resist teutonic influence. See Hepokoski, *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff*, 34. On the contemporary Italian musical scene at the time that Verdi penned *Falstaff*, see Budden "A Problem of Identity," 263-292.

while *Falstaff* obviously was not based on a *verismo* source, it was nonetheless the one work in Verdi's entire oeuvre that reached for an equivalent realism.⁴² As Richard Taruskin has noted, *Falstaff* "cut things down to size" as it strove for a comic truth of its own.⁴³

This could seem an odd claim to make about a work in which characters dissemble most of the time and conceal their identities from one another. What might be called the structural insincerity necessitated by the plot peaks in Acts 2 and 3, in the complex scheme characters devise to teach Falstaff a lesson. But when this musical characterization is understood in terms of comic truth, the constant dissimulation ceases to be so problematic. At the start of Act 2, for instance, Quickly visits Falstaff, convinces him that Alice and Meg are indeed consumed with love for him, and establishes that he can visit Alice when her husband is not home, "dalle due alle tre" ("between two and three o'clock"). The tone of the conversation is set with not one, not two, but three curtsies:

Quickly (inchinandosi profondamente verso Falstaff, il quale è ancora seduto)

Reverenza!

Falstaff

Buon giorno, buona donna.

Quickly

Se Vostra Grazia vuole,

(avvicinandosi con gran rispetto e cautela)

Vorrei, segretamente,

⁴² The idea of Verdi as a realist has been explored in the most depth in relation to *La traviata* (1853), which was based on Alexandre Dumas fils' play *La dame aux camélias*. See Dahlhaus, "Realism in Italian Opera," and Roger Parker, "Verdi and Verismo: The Case of *La traviata*," in James P. Cassaro, ed., *Music, Libraries, and the Academy: Essays in Honor of Lenore Coral* (Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 2007), 215-222.

⁴³ Richard Taruskin has noted that Verdi could have had another model in mind as he penned *Falstaff*, and one whose "realist" dimensions were easier to read: Alexander Dargomyzhsky's *The Stone Guest* (1872). *The Stone Guest* was furnished with a libretto that like *Falstaff* demanded no realist musical soundtrack—based on Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, the title character is an animated mass of stone that, in contravention of realism however defined, carries himself from start to finish in song. But as Taruskin notes, *The Stone Guest* also "cut things down to size," avoiding rounded musical numbers and aria-like scenes, and pushing vocal lines in the direction of pure speech. Verdi would have met Dargomyzhsky in salons on his visits to Russia around the time of the premiere of *La forza del destino* (1862) and would likely have been familiar with the opera's score. See Taruskin, "Artist, Politician, Farmer (Class of 1813, II)," in *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 3, *The Nineteenth Century*, 563-616, here 615, and, in the same volume, "Cutting Things Down to Size," 617-674.

dirle Quattro parole.

Falstaff

T'accordo udienza.

(a Bardolfo e Pistola, rimasti nel fondo a spiare)

Escite.

(escono da sinistra facendo sberleffi)

Quickly (facendo un altro inchino ed avvicinandosi più di prima)

Reverenza! Madonna

(a bassa voce) Alice Ford....

Falstaff (alzandosi ed accostandosi a Quickly premuroso)

Ebben?

Quickly

Ahimé! Povera donna!

Siete un gran seduttore!

Falstaff (subito)

Lo so. Continua.

[Quickly: (With a deep bow to Falstaff) Your Grace! Falstaff: Good day, my good woman. Quickly: If it should please your grace (drawing near, cautious, respectful), I should like a word with you alone. Falstaff: I grant you audience. (To Bardolph and Pistol, who are eavesdropping from a distance): Away with you (they go out, sneering). Quickly: (as she curtsies once more and draws herself even closer to Falstaff than before) Your grace! Mistress (whispering) Alice Ford.... Falstaff: (standing up and drawing closer to Quickly, attentively). Well? Quickly: Alas! Poor woman. You are a great seducer. Falstaff: (straight away) I know. Continue.]⁴⁴

The ruse is wrapped in the most exaggerated of musical gestures. Verdi draws out these curtsies: Quickly's vocal line is set as the consequent to an antecedent orchestral phrase, so that she is forced to stand still for the orchestral antecedent, and then curtsy over the next three-measure phrase, until any naturalness is drained from the movement (Example 4.6). In what follows, Quickly's vocal line is overloaded with emotion, encoded in chromatic slides, as she describes Meg's unrequited love. Then in the next scene she rehearses the entire encounter to the wives almost verbatim, using the same musical gestures, thus creating a seemingly redundant episode that Roger Parker has described as "strange, inconclusive, even."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The third curtsy occurs later in the conversation.

⁴⁵ See Parker, "*Falstaff* and Verdi's Final Narratives," 123.

Now consider Ford, who, in Act 2, Scene 1, calls on Falstaff masquerading as Signor Fontana in order to persuade the old knave to make advances towards his wife, Alice. As this conversation unfolds, Fontana sounds like a caricature of himself, not least because his text-setting is so erratic: some words are drawn out, others are squeezed into the final beat of the measure. As he continues to reveal his scheme to Falstaff, he cycles through a range of styles as if searching for an idiom in which his impersonation can settle, but unable to find one he can achieve with consistency (Example 4.7a and 4.7b). As Laura Basini has noted, he sounds “ultimately voiceless, able only to express himself by gasping out a steady stream of clichés.”⁴⁶

Moments such as these could also seem to abandon the acoustic rules established in Act 1: Fontana’s music in particular is marked with sonorous vocalism and orchestral abundance. But this should draw our attention to a broader point. The comic idiom made it easier to write in a realist manner. When characters act and scheme—as they are wont to in comedy—the composer does not need to labor over realist utterances for them. Lush orchestration and sonorous vocalism do not risk endowing Fontana with an expressive interior that might tip the opera’s style over into sentimentality or artifice, because the character is a mere facade, with no genuine thoughts or feelings. Rather than introduce a metaphysical depth to his character that would be at odds with realist imperatives, the expressive richness of his music merely allows his facade to glisten with a musical discourse both brilliant and entertaining. The preponderance of masquerade and dissimulation in *Falstaff*’s plot, then, liberates Verdi to play with sounds, including sounds that had earlier signified emotional overkill, without compromising his realist aims.

The musical characterization of Quickly and Fontana, the inconsistencies of their rhetoric, and the unexpected turns their music takes contribute to this effect, making these characters sound (literally) incredible. But to leave the audience incredulous is the comedic aim: Falstaff believes in these simulations even as the audience does not. And when Quickly recounts the entire narrative in the next scene, to the same melodic line, listeners in the theater are in turn reminded of the comic truth that this opera establishes—of its abilities to cut characters down to size and encourage the audience to not listen for meaning that does not exist.

⁴⁶ See Basini, “After Revivalism,” 195. Basini attributes the discontinuities in Ford’s music to Verdi’s fascination with the eclectic musical styles around him in *fine secolo* Italy.

A number of moments that have seemed most problematic in *Falstaff* work in the service of this same comic truth, not least those that involve simulation. Indeed, Verdi encodes simulation with remarkable consistency throughout *Falstaff*: whenever characters utter something in words other than their own, the vocal and orchestral line somehow mark the insincerity, the adoption of an inauthentic voice. Moments like the letter duet in Act 1 therefore work partly to train or condition the audience, to ensure we understand that unusual sonorous textures are markers of inauthenticity.

Example 4.6 Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 2, Scene 1, “Reverenza,” Quickly, Falstaff

The image shows a page of a musical score for Verdi's *Falstaff*, Act 2, Scene 1, titled "Reverenza." The score is for two vocal parts, Quickly and Falstaff, and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "QUICKLY ASSAI MODERATO" with a metronome marking of 80. The time signature is 3/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into two systems. The first system features Quickly's vocal line with the lyrics "Re.ve - ren - za!" and Falstaff's vocal line with the word "Buon". The piano accompaniment is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system features Quickly's vocal line with the lyrics "Re.ve - ren - za!" and Falstaff's vocal line with the lyrics "gior - no buo - na don - na." The piano accompaniment continues with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings. At the bottom of the page, there is a reference number "96000" and a small "m.s." marking.

Example 4.7a Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 2, Scene 1, "In me vedete un uomo ch'ha un'abbondanza grande," Fontana (Ford), Falstaff, start of the conversation.

150

FOR.

- du - to Di più lunghi pre - ambo - li.

FAL.

Voi siete il ben - ve -

ALL^o MODERATO ♩ = 100
Lo stesso movimento

FAL.

- nu - - - to.

(10)

ALL^o MODERATO ♩ = 100
Lo stesso movimento

FOR.

In me vede - te un uom ch'ha un'ab - bon -

96000 g

FOR

- dan - za gran - de Degli a - gi del - la vi - ta;.....

p

FOR

..... un uom che spen - de e span - de Co - me

FOR

più gli ta - len - ta pur..... pur di pas -

f *ff*

FOR

- sar mat - ta - na. Io mi chia - mo Fon -

q 96000 *q*

Example 4.7a continued

♩ = 100

FOR

-ta-na! (gli stringe la mano con grande cordialità)

FAL.

Ca - - ro si-gnor Fon - ta - na! Voglio fa-re con

♩ = 100

mf

FOR

Ca - - ro *SIR*

FAL.

voi più am-pia co - no - scen - za.

p

FOR

John de - si - de - ro' par - lar - vi in con - fi -

9 96000 9

Example 4.7a continued

Example 4.7b Verdi, *Falstaff*, Act 2, Scene 1, “Per lei sprecai tesori,” Fontana (Ford), Falstaff, from later in the conversation shown in 4.7a.

The image shows a musical score for the vocal line of Fontana (Ford) and the piano accompaniment. The score is in G major and 3/4 time, with a tempo of 120 beats per minute. The vocal line is in bass clef and the piano accompaniment is in treble and bass clefs. The lyrics are: "cer - co e si na_sconde. Per lei spre_cai te - so - ri, git - tai do - ni su". The score includes performance instructions such as "legato con espress.", "poco string.", and "f.". The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers the first two measures, and the second system covers the next two measures. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the bass and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the treble. The vocal line is marked with a slur and a fermata over the final note of each phrase.

FOR

do - - ni, E - sco - gi - tai, tre - -

The first system of music consists of a vocal line in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The vocal line has a long note on 'ni' followed by a series of eighth notes for 'E - sco - gi - tai' and a final note on 'tre'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a simpler bass line in the left hand.

FOR

- man - - do, il vol del - le oc - ca -

The second system continues the vocal line with '- man - - do, il vol del - le oc - ca -'. The piano accompaniment includes a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking and continues with the same rhythmic pattern as the first system.

FOR

- sio - ni. Ahi - mè! tut - - to fu

The third system features the vocal line with '- sio - ni. Ahi - mè! tut - - to fu'. The piano accompaniment has a 'p' (piano) marking and shows some chordal changes in the right hand.

FOR

va - no!... Ri - ma - si sul - le sca - le, Ne -

The fourth system concludes the vocal line with 'va - no!... Ri - ma - si sul - le sca - le, Ne -'. The piano accompaniment continues with the established rhythmic and harmonic structure.

" 96000 "

Example 4.7b continued

Milan, the 1890s

Let us return to 1893 and the hundreds of critics who came from all over Europe to hear a work that shimmered with a sound that until now audiences had never associated with Verdi. For a population conscious that once *Falstaff* had premiered their national hero would retreat into retirement—and then be claimed by death—the event would have been hailed as a triumph no matter what, as that critic for *L'Italia del popolo* acknowledged. *Falstaff* would have had incalculable value for the nation however it sounded. In the event, the premiere stimulated talk of innovation: it was clear to all that it broke with the Verdian past, and critics were quick to remark that it had infused the Italian musical scene with a new brilliance. From there came the notion that it was an isolated monument, somehow divorced from the trends around it. Verdi was not dead, but he had removed himself from the world, so much so that he could have a vision that was absolutely new.

If this narrative was partly a distortion, downplaying connections between *Falstaff* and contemporary *verismo* works, it was the Milanese polis and its flagship theater that were most invested in the perpetuation of this strand of discourse. While *Falstaff* could have been used to enhance the status of theater and city however it sounded, the modern patina that eventuated allowed for a much more targeted promotional campaign about La Scala and Milan as motors of progress. And because the work crowned such a long and varied career, it could also be described as the ultimate demonstration of dogged, determined hard work. Little wonder then that the critics who brushed shoulders in Via Alessandro Manzoni and the streets around La Scala ran with the innovation narrative; or that some rushed to fold the opera into broader narratives about the *capitale morale*, that center of hard work and industriousness. In the hands of the critics, *Falstaff* could project onto the world stage all that Milan stood for.

Blanking out the rest of the musical landscape, critics took this final Verdian work and held it up as a national, civic and theatrical innovation par excellence. The inconvenient matter of the work's similarity to other "less groundbreaking" premieres had to be avoided, however. And avoided it was: *Falstaff's* evident antecedents went unobserved in the hundreds of column inches amassed about the work. Those audible connections had to be written out of the critical coverage. But such connections would have been audible, at the least to the more practiced of critics. We could take Ippolito Valetta's view of the premiere in Rome's *L'opinione* as a reminder that we should not underestimate what critics could hear:

From the first moment the public meets the characters of *Falstaff*, we experience a naturalness and straightforwardness of ambience that creates an illusion of real life.

There are no displays of sonorousness, no drawn-out musical designs, the harmony itself is of the most basic kind; the rhythms unfold very clearly [...].

Music less unadulterated and of a sounder constitution than that of the first scene of *Falstaff* has never before been written; and it reveals to us a luxuriance free from the accumulation of excess: there is not a single superfluous note, and in the orchestra there is not a single moment of display, or untimeliness.

Verdi's *brilliant ideas* are continuous; they spring forth at every moment [...]: ingenious, for instance, is the disposition and response of the voices in the first little love duet, the interruption when people arrive and its resumption. Fresh and marvelous is the arrangement of the voices in the first part of Act Three, when Quickly begins to recount the legend of the *black huntsman* and her voice is lost as she enters the inn, while the same melodic theme and the same legend are taken up by Alice who narrates it to the women of Windsor, to Ford, to Caius, and to the others who were spying. It is curious that the final pieces of advice that Quickly dispenses to Nannetta at the close of the scene are audible when the women have already returned home.

There is here and elsewhere such a delicious sense of the real, of a sort seen only rarely on the stage, and it is achieved with an incomparable naturalness, and with devices made all the more effective by the extraordinary swiftness of the music.⁴⁷

Valetta's words are remarkable for their attention to detail: to voices that fade on cue, and others that remain audible when they should not. Even more striking is the author's concern with acoustic as much as musical attributes, with sound as much as music. We need not read his review as the ultimate demonstration that critics heard *Falstaff* as realist, and thus connected it with the new phenomenon of operatic *verismo*. Terms like "real" and "natural" could be used in 1893 without evoking a broader discourse of operatic realism that had still to gather pace.⁴⁸ The review does however remind us that critics heard details that would have enabled them to understand connections between the works around them. A critic such as Valetta would have been disingenuous to peddle the innovation narrative: *Falstaff* was not an isolated monument, but one with rich connections to a *fine secolo* theater that treated sound in a similar manner.

The 1890s was a decade in which audiences were introduced to new sonic experiences, and *Falstaff* played an important role in that. Understood in this sense, the opera is not quite the weird remnant of the *fine secolo* stage we have assumed it to be, but more a work that absorbed the influences of the 1890s, and

⁴⁷ ("Dal primo momento che il pubblico fa conoscenza coi personaggi del *Falstaff* esso sente un'atmosfera di semplicità a di schiettezza che dà illusione della vita reale. Nessun sfoggio di sonorità, nessun disegno tirato in lungo, la tonalità stessa è la più elementare, tutti i ritmi si succedono chiarissimi [...] Music più schietta, più sana di quella che c'è in tutta la prima scena del *Falstaff* non è stata scritta mai; ed essa ci palesa una rigogliosità immune da ogni superfetazione: non una nota sola vi è di superfluo, e nello strumentale non v'ha un momento solo di pompa e di inopportunità [...]. Le *trovate* di Verdi sono continue, rampollano ad ogni momento [...]: ingegnossissima ad esempio è quella della disposizione e della risposta delle voci nel primo duettino d'amore, l'interruzione quando vien gente e la ripresa: nuova e splendida tutta la disposizione vocale della prima parte del terzo atto, quando Quickly comincia a raccontare la leggenda del *cacciatore nero* a Falstaff, e la sua voce si perde entrando all'osteria, mentre lo stesso tema melodico e la stessa leggenda sono ripresi da Alice che la narra alle comari, a Ford, a Cajus, ad altri che stavano spiando: curiosa la chiusa di questa scena colle ultime raccomandazioni di Quickly a Nannetta che si sentono quando le donne sono già rincasate. C'è qui ed altrove un così squisito sentimento del reale, come non si è avuto che di rado sulla scena, e questo si ottiene con una naturalezza insuperabile di espedienti resa più efficace dalla rapidità straordinaria della musica.") See Ippolito Valetta, writing for *L'opinione*, as reproduced in "*Falstaff*," *commedia lirica in tre atti di Arrigo Boito, musica di Giuseppe Verdi. Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera*, 83-90, here 88-89. The italics are in the original.

⁴⁸ Schwartz has argued that it was not until the mid-1890s that discussions about what constituted musical realism gathered force. See Schwartz, "Rough Music: *Tosca* and Verismo Reconsidered," 231.

reworked them into a comic setting. But to see this, we need to resist the lure of these older narratives, and the enchantment of more recent ones, not least that old New Historicist promise that odd moments are windows onto the past. Casting off the idea that *Falstaff* occupies a unique place in our operatic histories, and that we should be absorbed with its oddities, we might take that maxim Falstaff recites to Pistol and Bardolph at the close of the confrontation with Dr. Caius as a stimulus to listen anew: “rubar con garbo e a tempo” (“steal stealthily and at the right moment”), the old man tells them. When we are open to looking for them, we can find traces in *Falstaff* of what Verdi himself ran off with—traces of the soundscape of the 1890s.

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