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Becoming a citizen: The chorus in *Risorgimento* opera

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Just as politics can be analysed as a cultural and symbolic enterprise (that is, as theatre in the broadest sense), so too can theatre or opera (in a narrower sense) be analysed as political.[1] Jonathan Dollimore identifies various conflicting processes at work in Renaissance English theatre: the 'consolidation' of power by a dominant order; the 'subversion of that order'; and the 'containment of ostensibly subversive pressures'.[2] We need not accept Dollimore's essentially Marxist analysis of these processes in order to recognise the validity of his assertion that 'the theatre [is] a prime location for the representation and legitimation of power'.[3] But the way such power is consolidated, subverted or contained depends on the political and social systems in which the theatre operates. The issues are complex enough when one focuses on plays produced in Elizabethan or Jacobean London. They become even more difficult to sort out when single works or groups of related works are performed over a period of time in various locations, each with its own societal configuration, as in the different political entities that comprised the Italian peninsula during the first half of the nineteenth century (to which might be added the other European and even American audiences to which they were played). Under such circumstances, how can we measure the political implications of these works? Where does their meaning reside? How does that meaning change as a function of time or geography?

It is a commonplace of music history that in the choruses of nineteenth-century Italian opera, particularly those of Giuseppe Verdi, a people found its voice.[4] There is ample evidence that this perception was widespread among contemporaries. In his *Filosofia della musica* of 1836, Giuseppe Mazzini, patriot, founder

[1] A version of this paper was delivered at the Gauss seminar, *The Theatre of Politics in Europe: 1789 and After*, at Princeton University in the spring of 1989. Other versions were earlier presented at Reed College and Mount Holyoke College. I am grateful to Gabriel Dotto and Roger Parker for helpful readings and suggestions.

[2] See his introduction to Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca and London, 1985), 10.

[3] Dollimore, 3.

[4] Characteristic and important studies that emphasise this viewpoint are Raffaello Monterosso, *La musica nel Risorgimento* (Milan, 1948) and George Martin, 'Verdi and the Risorgimento', in *Aspects of Verdi* (New York, 1988), 3–28. For an extended discussion of Verdi's use of the chorus in his early operas, see Markus Engelhardt, *Die Chöre in den frühen Opern Giuseppe Verdis* (Tutzing, 1988).

of the secret society 'La Giovine Italia' (Young Italy), and leader of the short-lived Roman republic of 1848–49, laid out a programme for the future of Italian opera. In it, he imagined that the chorus: 'a collective individuality [. . .] would, like the people of whom it is a born interpreter, gain a life of its own, independent, spontaneous'.[5]

Of what would such a chorus sing? After the première of Verdi's *Macbeth* in 1847, the poet Giuseppe Giusti urged the composer to avoid the 'fantastic' genre, and instead to express with his notes 'that sweet sadness in which you have shown you can achieve so much' ['quella dolce mestizia nella quale hai dimostrato di poter tanto']. Giusti's message was precise:

> The kind of pain that now fills the souls of us Italians is the pain of a people who feel the need of a better fate; of one who has fallen and wishes to rise again; of one who repents, and awaits and wills his regeneration. Accompany, my Verdi, this lofty and solemn pain with your noble harmonies; nourish it, fortify it, direct it to its goal.[6]

Far from being offended by this advice, Verdi promised to take Giusti's words to heart. The next year, during the 1848 revolution and at the request of Mazzini,[7] he set to music (for male chorus) a patriotic poem by Goffredo Mameli. In his accompanying letter to Mazzini, Verdi wrote: 'May this hymn soon be sung, along with the music of the cannon, in the Lombard plains'.[8]

All this is well known, and would scarcely bear repeating were it not that recent historical and literary studies have suggested that the interactions between works of art and their culture are more complex than such naïve formulations imagine. Musical scholars have too often been content with, on the one hand, formalistic or analytical studies that isolate the individual art work (or group of works) within a cultural and historical vacuum, or, on the other hand, historical narratives in which works of art are little more than exemplary details.[9] Both kinds of studies remain valid within their self-imposed limits, but the so-called 'New Historicism', particularly in the field of Renaissance English literary studies, has suggested more vital and problematic ways in which works of art determine and are determined by their historical, political and sociological context. As Jean Howard has put it:

[5] Giuseppe Mazzini, *Filosofia della musica*, with an introduction by Adriano Lualdi (Rome and Milan, 1954), 169. Mazzini actually couches his opinion in a rhetorical question, but one that admits a single response: 'Or, perché il coro, individualità collettiva, non otterrebbe come il popolo di ch'esso è interprete nato, vita propria, indipendente, spontanea?'

[6] Letter of 19 March 1847, printed in Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio, eds., *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan, 1913), 449–50: 'La specie di dolore che occupa ora gli animi di noi Italiani, è il dolore d'una gente che si sente bisognosa di destini migliori; è il dolore di chi è caduto e desidera rialzarsi; è il dolore di chi si pente e aspetta e vuole la sua rigenerazione. Accompagna, Verdi mio, colle tue nobili armonie questo dolore alto e solenne; fa di nutrirlo, di fortificarlo, d'indirizzarlo al suo scopo.'

[7] Verdi had met Mazzini in London in July 1847, during preparations for the première of *I masnadieri*.

[8] Letter of 18 October 1848, printed in *I copialettere*, 469: 'Possa quest'inno, fra la musica del cannone, essere presto cantato nelle pianure lombarde'.

[9] Foremost among the critics of traditional methodologies was, of course, Carl Dahlhaus. See in particular his *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge, 1983).

A major feature of a new historical criticism [. . .] must be a suspicion about an unproblematic binarism between literature and history and a willingness to explore the ways in which literature does more than reflect a context outside itself and instead constitutes one of the creative forces of history.[10]

In opera this interaction takes place in both literary and musical terms. One must resist the temptation to judge operatic meanings solely by a work's libretto, a recurring problem with writings on opera by literary scholars or philosophers.[11] Nor must the words be undervalued, as they are in many technical studies by musicologists.[12] Scorn for Italian operatic librettos is unjustified on several levels. First, the apparently artificial language of these librettos is hardly unique to opera: indeed, the linguistic characteristics of Italian librettos and of contemporary drama in Italy are highly similar.[13] Second, the supposed incomprehensibility of the text reflects more the singing styles of some of today's divas – and the barn-like opera houses in which they ply their trade – than it does the art form itself.[14] Finally, even should individual words be difficult to discern, they determine dramatic tone: singers who neglect words are often singers who pay no attention to drama. Nonetheless, opera communicates primarily through the way its text is set to music. It is the multiplicity of ways such communication can be effected, subverted or rendered problematic that concerns me here.

1

From 1815 through 1860 Italy, as always a geographical reality (bounded on the north by the Alps and on all other sides by water), remained a political fiction. Each region had different rulers: Austrians in the north and northeast; the House of Savoy in the northwest; the Bourbon dynasty in the south; the Pope in Rome and the Papal States; various Duchies or short-lived Republics in Tuscany, Parma and so on. Though actual boundaries within the peninsula

[10] Jean E. Howard, 'The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies', in Arthur F. Kinney and Dan S. Collins, eds., *Renaissance Historicism* (Amherst, 1987), 16.

[11] Among recent books the problem is particularly manifest in Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis, 1988). A beautiful and moving book in its own way, it nonetheless assumes the extraordinary viewpoint that words, librettos, plots are 'the forgotten part of opera' (12). But the situation is quite the opposite: popular literature about opera focuses almost exclusively on these matters (though not from the feminist viewpoint that informs Clément's analysis).

[12] Have we really left behind the static periods of Lorenz's *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner*, 4 vols. (Berlin, 1924–33), only to throw ourselves head-long into the Schenkerian voice-leading graphs of Matthew Brown, 'Isolde's Narrative: From *Hauptmotiv* to Tonal Model', in Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, eds., *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley, 1989), 180–201? Recent Wagnerian studies by Abbate and Anthony Newcomb offer encouraging alternatives.

[13] This point was made brilliantly by Piero Weiss in his article '"Sacred Bronzes": Paralipomena to an Essay by Dallapiccola', *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 9 (1985), 42–9.

[14] The complaint, however, does resonate throughout the history of opera: see the words of Ludovico Antonio Muratori, from his 1706 treatise, *Della perfetta poesia italiano*, quoted in Enrico Fubini, *Musica e cultura nel Settecento Europeo* (Turin, 1986), 45–6.

underwent various changes during the Napoleonic period and its aftermath, internal divisions and the foreign presence (particularly in the north) remained a constant.

No less significant than the political and military battles fought in the quest for Italian unity and statehood were fundamental cultural struggles, struggles which have not ceased even today: the leaders of the *Risorgimento* sought to encourage and nurture feelings that would give substance to a people, a citizenry to live in that state. An important task was accomplished in literature: joined indissolubly to the narrative qualities of Alessandro Manzoni's historical novel, *I promessi sposi*, were the author's continuing efforts to recast his work in a universal Italian shaped from the Florentine dialect, the principal literary and cultivated language of the peninsula.[15]

In another sense, Italy already had what was perceived to be a universal idiom, the language of music, particularly Italian opera. There were differences and rivalries from one section to another, of course, and elements of so-called 'Neapolitan', 'Venetian' or 'Roman' schools can be identified in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera. Although a few differentiating characteristics continued to exist even in the first half of the nineteenth century, many Italian composers plied their trade from north to south, writing in one season for Milan, in the next for Palermo. A successful opera such as Verdi's *Ernani* had been given at over thirty Italian theatres within a year of its spectacularly successful Venetian première on 9 March 1844.[16]

Among the many developments in Italian opera between the 1810s, when Rossini was hailed the 'Napoleon of music',[17] and the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861 to the slogan 'Viva Verdi', an acronym for 'Viva Vittorio Emanuele, Re d'Italia', none is so culturally important as the change in the conception of the chorus. In most eighteenth-century Italian opera, the chorus was insignificant. Even early in the nineteenth century, choruses were decorative, subsidiary, musically neutral, with a function analogous to the stage set.[18] 'I know the value of a kindly chorus', sings Ralph Rackstraw in Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*, and the choruses of Rossini and his contemporaries were at first little but 'kindly': they hailed the approaching hero, wiped the tears from the heroine's eyes, rejoiced at her good fortune.

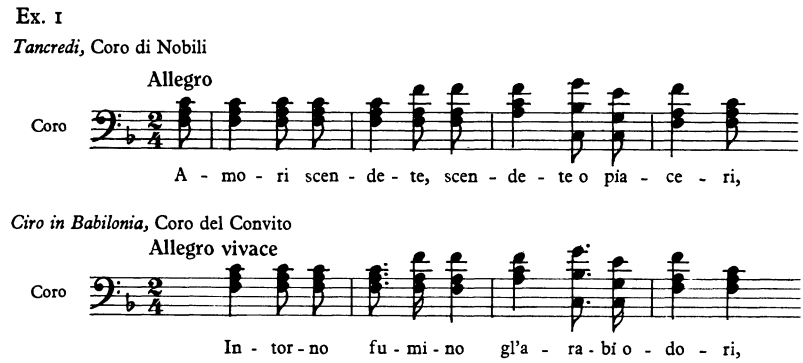
[15] For a fascinating discussion of the various versions of Manzoni's novel and the circle in which he worked, see the book by the distinguished Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg, *La famiglia Manzoni* (Turin, 1983).

[16] A list is provided by Marcello Conati in his '"Ernani" di Verdi: le critiche del tempo. Alcune considerazioni', in *Ernani ieri e oggi: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Modena, Teatro San Carlo, 9–10 dicembre 1984*, published as *Verdi: Bollettino dell'Istituto di studi verdiani*, 10 (1987), 207–72; see in particular 261–3.

[17] The comparison is best known from the opening words of the Preface (dated 1823) to Stendhal's *Vie de Rossini*, ed. V. del Litto (Lausanne, 1960), 27: 'Depuis la mort de Napoléon, il s'est trouvé un autre homme duquel on parle tous les jours à Moscou comme à Naples, à Londres comme à Vienne, à Paris comme à Calcutta' ['Since the death of Napoleon, another man has arisen who is spoken of every day from Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta'].

[18] I owe that last, rather neat formulation to Roger Parker.

In his early operas, Rossini rarely assigned his most expressive music to the chorus. Indeed, choral movements are easily moved, without loss or gain, from one opera to another. Sicilians celebrating the nuptials of Amenaide and Orbazzano in Rossini's neo-classical *Tancredi* (Venice, Teatro La Fenice, 6 February 1813), derived from Voltaire, employ the same music (see Ex. 1) as feasting Babylonians before the fiery handwriting appears on the wall, in his sacred drama *Ciro in Babilonia* (Ferrara, Teatro Comunale, 14 [?] March 1812).



Ex. 1

It is not only that the music is generic in its expression: there is often self-borrowing in Rossini's soloistic music without a sacrifice of expressivity. Rather, the union of generic music and limited dramatic function results in a nameless choral presence, a 'collective individuality' more aptly described as 'collective anonymity', the situation Mazzini deplored.

Still, it was possible for a composer to subvert or at least render problematic the ostensible content of this choral presence. The all-male chorus in Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri* (Venice, Teatro San Benedetto, 22 May 1813) assumes diverse roles: eunuchs in the Bey's seraglio, Algerian corsairs, Italian slaves. The composer makes little effort to 'characterise' these groups through particular melodic or even orchestral devices.[19] Nor does the situation appear to change when the heroine, Isabella, rallies the slaves to flee. The libretto provides a text Rossini himself referred to in a letter of 1864, affirming his life-long support for the principles of the *Risorgimento*:[20]

Pronti abbiamo e ferri e mani
Per fuggir con voi di qua.
Quanto vaglian gl'Italiani
Nel cimento si vedrà.

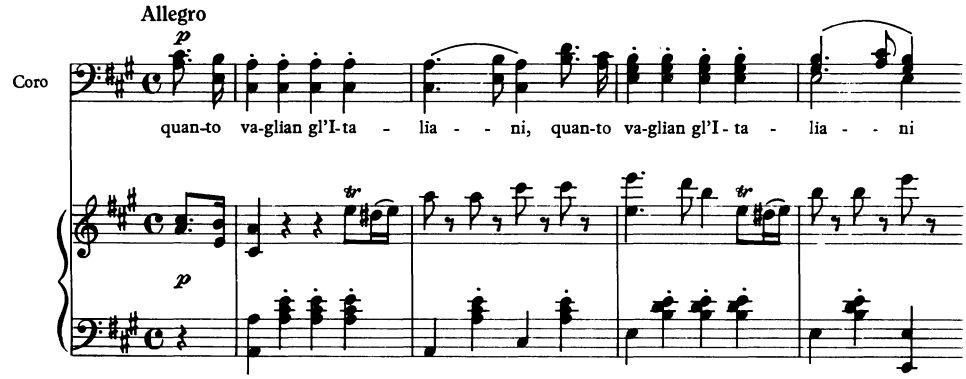
[19] Only in the case of a comic chorus of Turks towards the beginning of the second act, 'Viva il grande Kaimakan', can some hint of 'Turkish' colour be heard, with music that recalls passages in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. (The subject of Rossini's indebtedness to Mozart remains to be addressed in a comprehensive fashion.)

[20] The letter, dated from 'Passy de Paris' on 12 June 1864, is addressed to Filippo Santocanale. It is reprinted in *Lettere di G. Rossini*, raccolte e annotate per cura di G. Mazzatini – F. e G. Manis (Florence, 1902), 270–2.

[We have ready our weapons and hands / To fly with you from here. / You'll see what Italians are worth / In the moment of danger.]

The music at first is little more than blustery. Even when Rossini reaches the crucial verses, 'You'll see what Italians are worth in the moment of danger', the choral melody remains simple, neutral. Its meaning is subverted, however, by an orchestral tune assigned to the first violins and flute (see Ex. 2). It is

Ex. 2
L'Italiana in Algeri, Coro di Schiavi



Ex.2

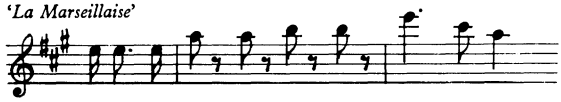
hard not to discern the parody of a melody Rossini could presume his audiences would know well (see Ex. 3). Though no contemporary critic acknowledges this parodistic quotation of 'La Marseillaise', there is evidence concerning its reception. In two manuscripts of *L'Italiana* the chorus alone (and not Isabella's following Rondò, 'Pensa alla patria') is replaced by new music (not by Rossini) to the same words.[21] However seditious textual reference to the worth of Italians might have been, the musical reference, for some contemporaries, was more troubling. Pre-performance censorship of opera (or at least pre-dress rehearsal censorship), after all, even in the most restrictive circumstances, was limited to words.[22]

What significance should we assign to this musical quotation? What did it mean to Venetian audiences in 1813? On one level it is a mere witticism, an ironic glance backwards at the unpopular French, who had sacrificed the

[21] For further information, see the critical edition of the opera, ed. Azio Corghi, in *Edizione critica delle opere di Gioachino Rossini*, sezione prima, vol. 11 (Pesaro, 1981). The manuscripts are Venezia, Biblioteca del Conservatorio, Busta 89 and Vicenza, Biblioteca Civica, FF 2–6-5, 6. When Rossini presented the opera in Naples in October 1815, he was compelled to replace Isabella's Rondò with a new, politically neutral aria, 'Sullo stil de' viaggiatori' (see the critical edition, 751–81); the censors, however, appear to have been untroubled by the opening chorus.

[22] I have discussed this example before, with a rather different emphasis, in my 'The Tragic Finale of *Tancredi*', *Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi* (1976), 5–79; see particularly 72–7.

Ex. 3
'La Marseillaise'



Ex.3

Venetian Republic to their own political interests, ceding it to Austria in the Peace of Campo Formio of 1797. At the same time, we should not undervalue the impact of French Revolutionary ideals on Italian patriots, even those with bitter memories of Napoleon's invasion. 'La Marseillaise' existed both as a specific reference to Revolutionary France and as a reminder of its ideals. The meaning communicated by Rossini's quotation was not absolute, but rather a function of the changing audience to which its message would be addressed and the changing moments when that message would be received.

'Pronti abbiamo e ferri e mani' does not alter substantively the choral presence in *L'Italiana in Algeri*, which remains essentially secondary. In Rossini's mature Italian operas, however, particularly those first performed in Naples, where he was musical director of the opera houses from 1815 through 1822, the composer and his librettists conjure up an operatic world in which the chorus begins to emerge as a force in its own right. Often these works feature politically oppressed peoples whose identity is defined historically, dramaturgically and musically; but the plots usually avoid any apparent threat to the restored Bourbon rulers of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.[23]

Operas with a biblical setting, such as Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto* (Naples, Teatro San Carlo, 5 March 1818), were primarily centred on the emotions of individuals – in this case, the love between an Israelite woman and the son of the Egyptian Pharaoh. Their tragedy is played out against the story of their respective nations, each portrayed in striking music. We suffer with the Egyptians under the plagues of darkness and fire; we pray with the Hebrews at the Red Sea, Mosè's voice (see Ex. 4) immediately joined by the entire chorus. In this case, the hymn-like quality of Rossini's setting (with its harp accompaniment) establishes a generically religious tone; the words are a prayer for peace and mercy. Despite the forceful presence of the chorus, nothing obviously points the meaning in a politically suspect direction.

Choral parts are not only more extensive in these operas, they are more

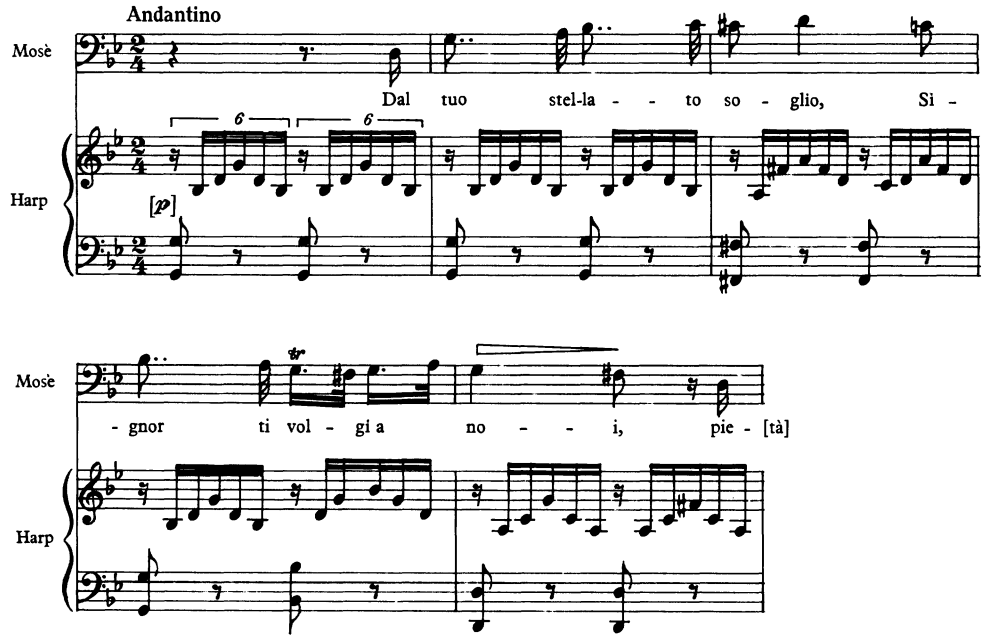
[23] Bruno Cagli has pointed out one significant exception, in *Maometto II* (Naples, Teatro San Carlo, 3 December 1820). See his 'Le fonti letterarie dei libretti di Rossini: *Maometto II*', in *Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi* (1972), no. 2, 10–32. The political disturbances in Naples of 1820–21 surely influenced Rossini's decision to eliminate Anna's final speech, whose text nonetheless remains in the original printed libretto:

E tu che Italia . . . conquistar . . . presumi
Impara or tu . . . da un'itala donzella
Che ancora degli eroi la patria è quella.

[And you who presume . . . to conquer . . . Italy / Learn now . . . from an Italian maiden / That this is still the homeland of heroes.]

Ex. 4

Mosè in Egitto, Preghiera

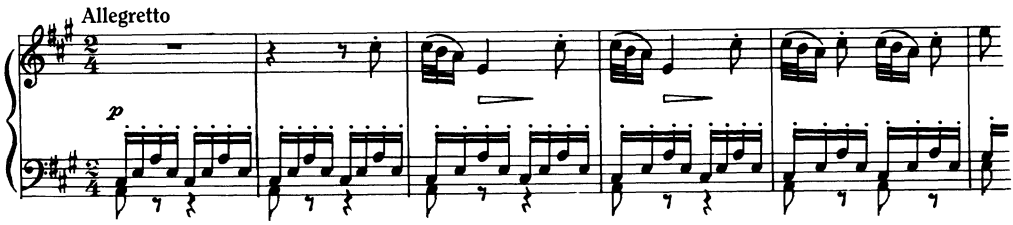


Ex.4

'characteristic', portraying different dramatic groups in different musical terms. So, in Rossini's *La donna del lago* (Naples, Teatro San Carlo, 24 October 1819), based on the narrative poem by Sir Walter Scott, a chorus of Scottish women features an accompaniment dominated by rhythmic figures traditionally known as 'Scotch snaps' (see Ex. 5). The chorus, a clan in revolt against the Scottish King, James V, is prominently featured in the first-act finale, when Scottish bards lead the assembled populace in a vow to defend their rights or die. What gives the piece its character is both the accompaniment for harp and lower strings, Rossini's imagining of the sound of the lyre, and a simple, repetitive melody, which suggests a tune used for intoning bardic poetry (see Ex. 6). In Rossini, as in Scott, the clan is defeated by the army of James V, but the King proves an enlightened ruler. What begins as a revolt against tyranny develops into an apology for benevolent monarchy. Although Rossini's rebels become acquiescent subjects before *La donna del lago* concludes, the chorus has nonetheless developed a musical personality, has acquired a dramatic force, has become, in short, a people. Significantly, in 1846 Rossini revised this hymn as an encomium for the new Pope, Pius IX, whose apparently liberal convictions were greeted with hope by Italian patriots (a hope soon dashed when he formed an alliance with France to destroy the Roman republic proclaimed in 1848).

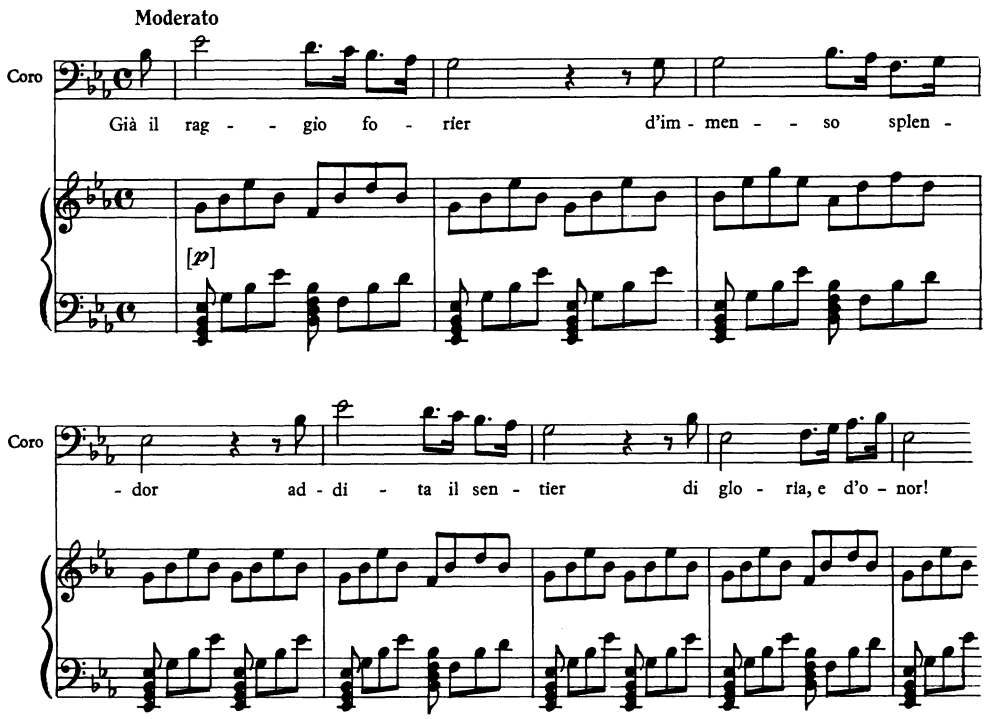
The most fully developed choral presence in Rossini's works is found in his final opera, *Guillaume Tell*, written in French for the Académie Royale de Musique and first performed in 1829, near the end of the reign of Charles X,

Ex. 5
La donna del lago, Coro di Donne



Ex.5

Ex. 6
La donna del lago, Coro dei Bardi



Ex.6

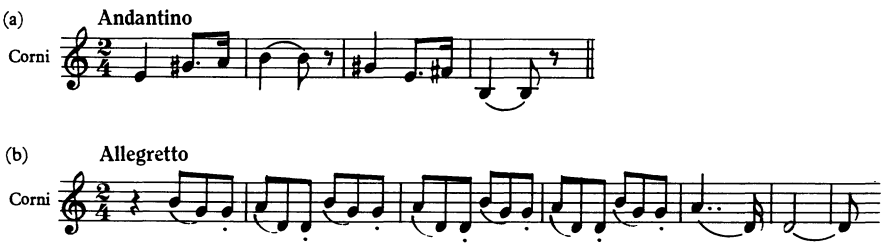
the last Restoration monarch in France. Although an opera in which a people rebels against an oppressive monarchy might seem a peculiar subject for a state theatre of the Restoration, Jane Fulcher has argued compellingly that the staging of works such as *Tell* or Auber's *La Muette de Portici* in 1828 (which deals with a Neapolitan revolt against Spanish rulers) served a precise political function. These works provided 'a sympathetic representation of revolutionary emotion but in the specific context of political domination by a distinctly foreign

power'.[24] The reception of Auber's opera, according to Fulcher, had overtones quite different from those anticipated by the government; indeed, its political meaning was interpreted in kaleidoscopically changing ways over the course of its Parisian revivals during the next half century.

The history of Italian performances of *Guillaume Tell* is equally fascinating. The struggle of the Swiss for liberty against Austrian tyrants, after all, was a topic from which French patriots might be able to distance themselves, but its implications could not be ignored by northern Italians, themselves subject to the Austrians. For almost two decades the opera was performed in northern Italy in censored versions, with titles such as *Vallace* or *Rodolfo di Sterlinga*, the action generally set in Scotland. What resulted was a startling dissociation between the text and Rossini's music, which uses extensively and imaginatively typical Swiss melodies (the so-called 'ranz des vaches') (see Ex. 7). Rossini not only states these themes directly: he weaves them into melodic strains that dominate the entire opera.

Ex. 7

Guillaume Tell, 'ranz des vaches'



Ex.7

Even when the work was performed as *Guglielmo Tell*, in sections of Italy not dominated by Austria, contemporary translations softened the semantic meaning of Rossini's opera, avoiding altogether the politically charged language of the original.[25] To take a non-choral example from the opening scene of the opera, when a Fisherman sings of the beauty of the day and of his happiness, Tell comments aside, in the original French (see Ex. 8): 'il chante, et l'Helvétie pleure sa liberté' ['He sings, while Switzerland weeps over its lost liberty']. In the standard Italian translation (disseminated by the music publisher Ricordi) the text became: 'Ei canta, e Elvezia intanto, ahi! quanto piangerà' ['He sings, while Switzerland, ah! weeps'].[26] Not only do the words 'ahi! quanto' fail

[24] Jane Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge, 1987), 24.

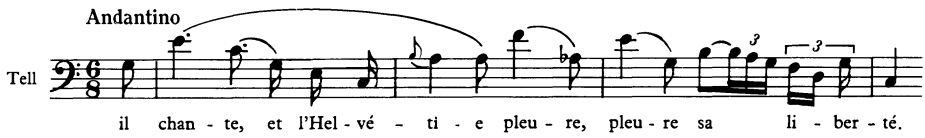
[25] The history of these performances is traced by Alberto Cametti, 'Il "Guglielmo Tell" e le sue prime rappresentazioni in Italia', *Rivista musicale italiana*, 6 (1899), 580.

[26] The translation was finally brought closer to the original meaning in December 1988, when the critical edition of the opera, edited by Elizabeth Bartlet for the Fondazione Rossini of Pesaro, was unveiled at the Teatro alla Scala, in the Italian translation revised by Paolo Cattelan. The new text of this passage reads: 'Ei canta, e Elvezia intanto piange la libertà'.

utterly to capture the expression of the original 'pleure, pleure', but missing, of course, is the crucial word, 'liberté'.[27]

Ex. 8

Guillaume Tell, Introduction



Ex. 8

More striking still is the final scene, that remarkable tone portrait of a people united and free, to the text:

Liberté, redescends des cieux!
Et que ton règne recommence,
Liberté redescends des cieux!

[Liberty, descend again from the heavens! / And may your reign begin anew, / Liberty descend again from the heavens!]

That Rossini was aware of the importance of the text is apparent in this phrase from his letter to Santocanale of 12 June 1864, previously cited: ' [. . .] I set the words of liberty in my *Guglielmo Tell* in such a way as to demonstrate how enthusiastic I am for my homeland and for the noble feelings that fill it'.[28]

Rossini's compatriots, however, would have had little sense of the composer's meaning, since in this concluding scene the contemporary Italian translation reduces the words to supreme banality:

Quel contento che in me sento
Non può l'anima spiegar.
[I cannot express the happiness I feel.]

Here, though, the problem of reception and perceived meaning exists on multiple levels. As fragments from the 'ranz des vaches' motif (see Ex. 9) wind their way from key to key, and finally return to a radiant C major for the conclusion,

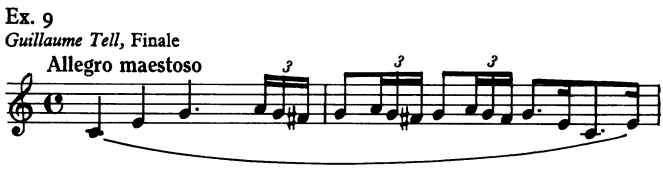
[27] This problem affected other composers. Well known is the situation of Bellini's *I Puritani*, originally written for the Théâtre Italien of Paris. When Bellini prepared a version for Naples, he felt compelled to omit the duet that concludes the second act, with its text:

Suoni la tromba, e intrepido
Io pugnerò da forte.
Bello è affrontar la morte
Gridando libertà.

[Let the trumpet sound, and, intrepidly, / I will fight with courage. / It is a fine thing to face death / Crying 'liberty'.]

See my introduction to the facsimile edition of both versions of *I Puritani*, published in *Early Romantic Opera* (New York and London, 1983).

[28] *Lettere* (see n. 20), 271: '[. . .] ho vestito le parole di libertà nel mio *Guglielmo Tell* a modo di far conoscere quanto io sia caldo per la mia patria e pei nobili sentimenti che la investono'.



Ex.9

the voices declaim the French text in a hymn-like setting of grandiose power. The Italian words, while not patently inappropriate, give no substance to the sense of exaltation that pervades Rossini's music.[29] On the other hand, the Swiss character of the music cannot be disguised: Scottish huntsmen do not express themselves in the language of the 'ranz des vaches'. Thus, the efforts of the Austrians to blanch away the meaning of *Tell* by changing its locale were doomed from the outset, doomed because the music unmistakeably provides a level of meaning that subverts the sense of the new words.

2

It is not difficult to see in Verdi's treatment of the chorus a development of these tendencies in Rossini's later operas. Though the gypsies in *Il trovatore* of 1853 and the Egyptian priestesses in *Aida* of 1871 are not central to the action, Verdi defines them with care. Neither the Anvil Chorus nor its succeeding solo for Azucena, 'Stride la vampa', could easily find a place in another operatic setting: their violent changes of mood, strident orchestration and rhythmic élan are directly tied to the exotic world of the gypsy camp. Nor could the orientalism of the consecration scene and its priests and priestesses of Fthà in *Aida*, with its modal scales, repetitive motivic schemes and non-traditional harmonic patterns, be confused with other religious choruses in Verdi's music, such as the monks who intone the 'Miserere' in the last act of *Il trovatore*. In these instances Verdi has fulfilled Mazzini's dictum of creating a 'collective individuality', without, however, rising to Giusti's challenge of providing a musical setting for 'the kind of pain that now fills the souls of us Italians'.

But crucial for Verdi as an artist and for that creation of a national culture integral to the ideological programme of the *Risorgimento* are instances in which his chorus achieves not merely individuality but dramatic stature. This occurs most frequently when the choral representation has a political basis, one that could be reinterpreted by contemporary audiences: the lament of the Hebrew slaves in *Nabucco*, the fiery chorus of rebellion in *Ernani*, the poignant chorus of Scottish exiles in *Macbeth*. It was presumably in these passages that Giusti identified the Verdi whom he urged to sing of 'the pain of a people who feel the need of a better future'.

[29] The new translation (see n. 26), 'Di tuo regno fia l'avvento / Sulla terra, o libertà', is more faithful to Rossini's meaning.

As with Rossini, the dramatic setting of these compositions ostensibly removes them from political actuality. Indeed, *Nabucco* and *Ernani* are similar, respectively, to *Mosè in Egitto* and *La donna del lago*. *Nabucco* is a biblical drama (the Babylonian captivity) in which a chorus of Hebrew slaves laments its fate, but its plot is largely centred on the emotions of individuals. In *Ernani*, the chorus in the third act plots against the King of Spain, Don Carlos (the future Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V). As in *La donna del lago*, the conspiracy is defeated and Charles V, heir to the throne of Charlemagne, promises a benevolent reign on the model of his illustrious predecessor. The tragedy is reserved for the protagonists; significantly, the chorus is all but absent from the concluding act of the opera.

Despite the dramaturgical neutralisation of the choral masses within these operas, which by locating the stories in remote eras and circumstances rendered the presence and actions of the chorus acceptable to Austrian censors, their words and music were not neutral to an Italian public in the 1840s. This was a public open to subversive messages, a public fully aware of the fate of the Bandiera brothers in July 1844, a few months after the première of *Ernani*. Sentenced to death for inciting rebellion in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the brothers faced their executioners singing a chorus from an 1826 opera by Saverio Mercadante, *Donna Caritea*: 'Chi per la patria muor, vissuto è assai' ['He who dies for his country, has lived long enough'].[30] Thus, no Italian in the audience of Milan's Teatro alla Scala in 1842 could have doubted that when the Hebrew Slaves in *Nabucco* sang Temistocle Solera's verses 'Oh mia patria sì bella e perduta! Oh membranza sì cara e fatal!' ['Oh my homeland so beautiful and lost! Oh remembrance so sweet and fatal!'], they referred not only to Palestine but to Italy.[31]

Although in the emblematic 'Va pensiero' Verdi and his librettist avoided censorial intervention, one of the most problematic moments in *Nabucco* occurs in another chorus, near the end of the opera, when the Hebrew people, together with the converted Nabucco, praise 'Immenso Jeovha' ['Great Jehova'].[32] The

[30] The story is told at length by Raffaello Barbiera in his essay 'Crepuscoli di libertà nella Venezia e la tragedia dei fratelli Bandiera', published in *Voci e volti del passato (1800–1900) da archivi segreti di stato e da altre fonti* (Milan, 1920), 117–63; see particularly 151–2. Although there is some conflicting evidence as to whether the conspirators actually sang the Mercadante chorus, Barbiera rightly insists that the event's significance lies in the widespread popular acceptance of the anecdote.

[31] Such reactions could be accentuated by the performers. Frank Walker, *The Man Verdi* (London, 1962; rpt. Chicago, 1982), 151, reports an incident from the spring of 1847:

> [. . .] the young Angelo Mariani, after conducting *Nabucco* at the Teatro Carcano, Milan, was to be rebuked and threatened with arrest by Count Bolza, commissioner of police, 'for having given to Verdi's music an expression too evidently rebellious and hostile to the Imperial Government'.

[32] I have discussed the textual problems surrounding this chorus in my article 'Censorship and Self-censorship: Problems in Editing the Operas of Giuseppe Verdi', to be published in the forthcoming (1990) Festschrift for Alvin Johnson. For fuller details, consult the critical edition of the opera, *Nabucodonosor*, ed. Roger Parker, in *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi*, Series I, vol. 3 (Chicago, 1987).

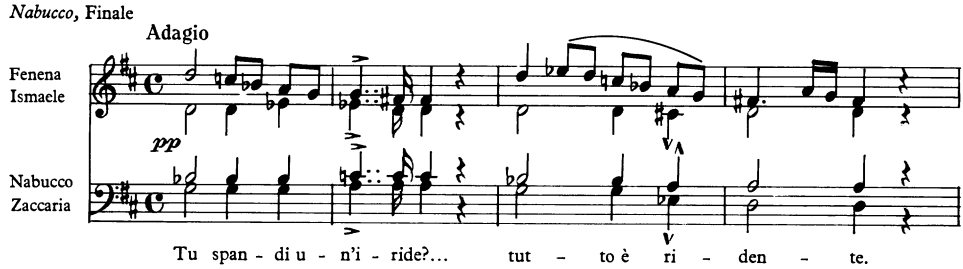
text is abstract (as in the *Mosè in Egitto* prayer) and the unaccompanied musical texture disembodied. An anomaly in the setting of the second quatrain, however, cannot be ascribed to artistic nonchalance. The text reads:

Tu spandi un'iride? . . .
Tutto è ridente.
Tu vibri il fulmine?
L'uom più non è.

[You spread a rainbow? . . . / Everything is joyous. / You launch a lightning bolt? / Man is no more.]

There is a patently inappropriate match between the first two verses of this quatrain and their musical setting (see Ex. 10).[33] Why might Verdi, normally so attentive to such matters, allow his music to subvert the meaning of the text?

Ex. 10
Nabucco, Finale



Ex. 10

As Roger Parker has shown in the new critical edition of *Nabucco*, Verdi's autograph of this ensemble went through two stages. The second quatrain was originally:

Spesso al tuo popolo
Donasti il pianto;
Ma i ceppi hai franto,
Se in te fido.

[Often you brought / Your people to tears; / But you broke their chains, / If they trusted in you.]

This is a very different text, its God a very different God: he intervenes directly in human affairs and will break the bonds of captive people who trust in him. Verdi's setting of the second quatrain beautifully expresses its meaning precisely

[33] Without entering into the complex aesthetic and philosophical issues raised by such an assertion, suffice it to say that in Italian opera of the Ottocento, just as in Baroque opera, it is possible to identify musical elements (orchestral, melodic, harmonic) whose dramatic associations or affects are coloured by similar patterns and associations found throughout the repertory to which they belong. These meanings may be in constant and subtle flux; indeed, they may be received differently by different individuals or audiences. But they cannot be ignored.

where the revised text is most inappropriate. Why did Verdi alter the original version?

Verses referring to God breaking the chains of captive peoples may well have been more than Verdi, his librettist or the impresario believed Austrian censors would swallow; hence the text may have been self-censored. But there is important evidence that the government was prepared to intervene directly in the text of *Nabucco*. Renato Meucci has recently discovered a large number of manuscripts that once belonged to the archives of the Teatro alla Scala. Several document the practice of theatrical censorship of the period, and one is particularly important for *Nabucco*: a letter ('N. 5548') dated 28 February 1842 (a week and a half before the opera's première on 9 March) from the 'Imperiale Regia / Direzione Generale / della Polizia' to the 'Inclita Direzione degli II. RR. Teatri' of Milan.[34] Here is the letter in its entirety:

Restituendo i libretti d'opera 'La Bella Celeste degli Spadari' 'Clemenza di Valoi[s]' 'Il Colonello' ed il programma di Ballo 'Gabriella di Vergy', argomenti già noti da prodursi seconda l'intenzione dell'Impresa sulle scene della Scala nella prossima primavera,[35] colla riserva della prova generale,[36] non faccio difficoltà alla produzione parimenti del Dramma 'Nabucco' composizione di Temistocle Solera, sul quale deve scrivere la musica il Maestro Verdi.[37]

Per questo ultimo importerà che particolarmente cada la vigilanza di cot.ª Inclita Direzione sul modo di farlo in iscena, onde nessuna sconveniente osservazione emerga nella pub[b]lica esecuzione, massime per la comparsa del Sacerdote Zaccaria e del Protagonista.

Faccio con ciò evasione al pregiato di Lei foglio 26 corr.ᶜ N.º 62.

[Returning the opera librettos 'La Bella Celeste degli Spadari', 'Clemenza di Valois', 'Il Colonello' and the synopsis for the ballet 'Gabriella di Vergy', subjects whose intended production by the Management on the stages of La Scala this coming Spring was already known, reserving the right of the dress rehearsal,[38] I likewise do not object to the production of the drama 'Nabucco' by Temistocle Solera, which Maestro Verdi will set to music.

For the latter, it will be particularly important that the distinguished Management is vigilant about how the opera is staged, so that no inappropriate reaction will take place during the public performance, especially in appearances of the Priest Zaccaria and of the protagonist.

With this I respond to your esteemed letter, N.º 62 of the 26th.]

[34] This document is found in the Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan: spettacoli pubblici (1842). Let me thank Roger Parker for bringing it to my attention.

[35] All these works were actually performed during the Spring season at the Teatro alla Scala, with the exception of *Il colonello*, presumably the 1835 opera by the brothers Federico and Luigi Ricci. See Carlo Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala nella storia e nell'arte*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1964), II, *Cronologia completa degli spettacoli e dei concerti*, ed. Giampiero Tintori, 43 and 189.

[36] Even after approving an opera for performance, the censors in Milan reserved the right to witness the dress rehearsal, so as to guard against any difficulties that had gone unobserved in the written materials submitted to them.

[37] Although, as Roger Parker has pointed out, we have very little information about the composition of *Nabucco*, there is no reason to believe that Verdi had not yet written the score on 28 February 1842! The phrase means only that the libretto was to be performed with new music by Verdi.

[38] See n. 36.

It is likely that changes in the text of 'Immenso Jeovha' were insisted upon by the censor after the dress rehearsal. The particularly violent way in which these changes were effected in Verdi's autograph suggests that this was more than a simple substitution motivated by artistic considerations.[39]

But how could Verdi and Solera have allowed such a startling dissociation between text and music in this final version? Might the subversion of the music by the text signal an explicitly subversive political act? Rather than substituting bland words that suited the original music, composer and librettist provided a sign of their disaffection. The hypothesis that at least part of the public was aware of the events that had taken place would help explain why, on the opera's opening night, the audience demanded a reprise of 'Immenso Jeovha', not the subsequently more popular 'Va pensiero'.[40] Such reprises were often politically motivated. Articles in the Milanese periodical *Italia musicale*, just before the 1848 revolution, mention that certain pieces (choruses from Verdi's *I Lombardi* or from Bellini's *Norma*) were repeated 'for reasons that had nothing to do with the music'.[41]

The difficulty with such a hypothesis is that, unlike the case of Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*, the sign is a private sign, the protest (if protest it was) available only to the initiated. And so, when Verdi faced a similar problem in *Ernani*, he gave way, allowing words to be altered to avoid censorial objections. The four-strophe text that begins with the verse 'Si ridesti il Leon di Castiglia' ['Let the Lion of Castille reawaken'] proclaims a brotherhood among the conspirators, ready to fight rather than be slaves. But it was the third strophe that caused the poet, Francesco Maria Piave, to write: 'I am sending you a chorus of Spanish conspirators, although I do not know whether the censorship will approve it'.[42] The text reads:

> Morte colga o n'arrida vittoria,
> Pugneremo; e col sangue de' spenti
> Scriveranno i figliuoli viventi:
> Qui regnare sol dee libertà!

[Let death strike or let victory smile, / We will fight; and with the blood of the dead / The living sons will write: / Here Liberty alone must reign!]

[39] A sample page is reproduced as Plate 5 in the critical edition of the opera, cited in n. 32.

[40] See Roger Parker, 'The Critical Edition of *Nabucco*', in *The Opera Quarterly*, 5 (1987), 2/3, 91–8.

[41] See Monterosso, (n. 4), 59–60. The articles he cites are dated 29 December 1847 (reporting on a performance of *I Lombardi* in Cremona) and 9 February 1848 (*Norma* in the same city).

[42] Piave's letter (dated Venice, 13 November 1843) is to his Roman friend, the librettist Jacopo Ferretti: 'Ti mando un coro di congiurati Spagnuoli, che peraltro non so se la Polizia vorrà passarmi'. This fascinating document, and others of equal importance, were first brought to light by Bruno Cagli in his article '"... questo povero poeta esordiente": Piave a Roma, un carteggio con Ferretti, la genesi di "Ernani"', in *Ernani ieri e oggi* (see n. 16), 3–18.

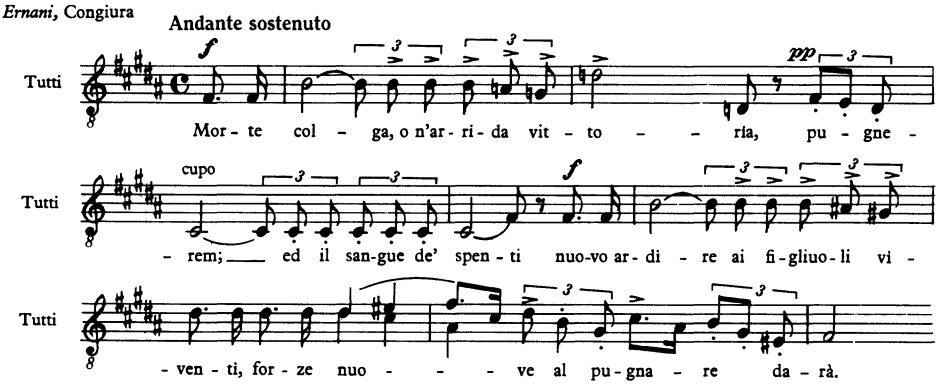
The words Verdi set are distinctly less provocative:

Morte colga, o n'arrida vittoria,
Pugnerem; ed il sangue de' spenti
Nuovo ardire ai figliuoli viventi,
Forze nuove al pugnare darà.

[Let death strike or let victory smile, / We will fight; and the blood of the dead / Will give new ardour to the living sons, / New force in battle.]

Unlike the *Nabucco* ensemble, text and music function well together (see Ex. 11). There would be no reason for an audience to suspect that other words were contemplated, nor is there anything in the story of *Ernani* to suggest to the censorship that this chorus had meaning beyond its apparent one.

Ex. 11
Ernani, Congiura



Ex.11

Yet it is certain that, despite the less provocatory text, the composition was received by Italian audiences as a patriotic hymn. Its grandiose accompaniment, unison melody, strong martial rhythms and the thrust of its dramatic function were sufficient to guarantee such a reception. Even the subsequent finale, in which Charles V pardons the conspirators, was reinterpreted in contemporary political terms. According to Verdi's student Emanuele Muzio, after the coronation of Pius IX as Pope on 16 June 1846 (the same Pius IX for whom Rossini provided a hymn based on the chorus of the Bards from *La donna del lago*), the *Ernani* finale was performed in Bologna, with 'the name of Carlo changed to Pius, and there was such enthusiasm that it was repeated three times; then, when the words "Pardon for all" were reached, the shouts and applause broke out all over the theatre.'[43] By 1844, Verdi had no need to render problematic his choruses: the public readily understood their political subtext. Indeed, these meanings were so palpable that in Naples, where censorship could be ferocious,

[43] Letter of 13 August 1846, published in Luigi Agostino Garibaldi, ed., *Giuseppe Verdi nelle lettere di Emanuele Muzio ad Antonio Barezzi* (Milan, 1931), 259: '[. . .] vi si cambiò il nome di Carlo in quello di Pio – e fu tanto l'entusiasmo che si ripetè tre volte; quando poi erano alle parole "*Perdono a tutti*", scoppiarono gli evviva da tutte le parti'.

operas such as *Nabucco* or *I Lombardi* were ignored until 1848. Only in the wake of political concessions by the King were they finally performed.[44]

In the brief period of giddy hope that followed the revolutionary movements of 1848, Verdi moved this subtext to the surface, in a work to a libretto by Salvatore Cammarano that had its première in Rome on 27 January 1849, *La battaglia di Legnano*. The opera relates the successful battle of the Lombard League in 1176 against the German Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa: no longer Swiss fighting against Austrians or Hebrews longing for freedom. The first act begins with an unaccompanied hymn the meaning of whose text is unequivocal:

Viva Italia! Sacro un patto
Tutti stringe i figli suoi:
Esso alfin di tanti ha fatto
Un sol popolo d'eroi!

[Long live Italy! A sacred pact / Binds its sons together: / It has finally made of them / A single people of heroes!]

In the third act the 'Knights of Death' vow before the tombs of their fathers, in a subterranean vault of the church of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan (the patron saint of the city), to defeat the invaders or die. The knights continue:

Se alcun fra noi, codardo in guerra,
Mostrarsi al voto potrà rubello,
Al mancatore nieghi la terra
Vivo un asilo, spento un avel.

[If anyone among us, cowardly in war, / Fails to live up to this oath, / May the earth refuse him / A refuge in life, a tomb in death.]

What makes the passage fascinating is its relationship to the second-act finale of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, whose text (in the nineteenth-century Italian translation) has the same poetic meter (*doppi quinari*), verbal images and general meaning as the Verdian scene:

Se qualche vil v'ha mai tra noi,
Lo privi il sol de' raggi suoi,
Non oda il ciel la sua preghiera,
E giunto al fin di sua carriera
Gli neghi tomba la terra ancor.

[If there is a traitor among us, / May the sun hide its rays from him, / May heaven be deaf to his prayer, / And, at the end of his days, / May the earth refuse him a tomb.]

The dramaturgical similarity between the two scenes, of course, has been noted before.[45]

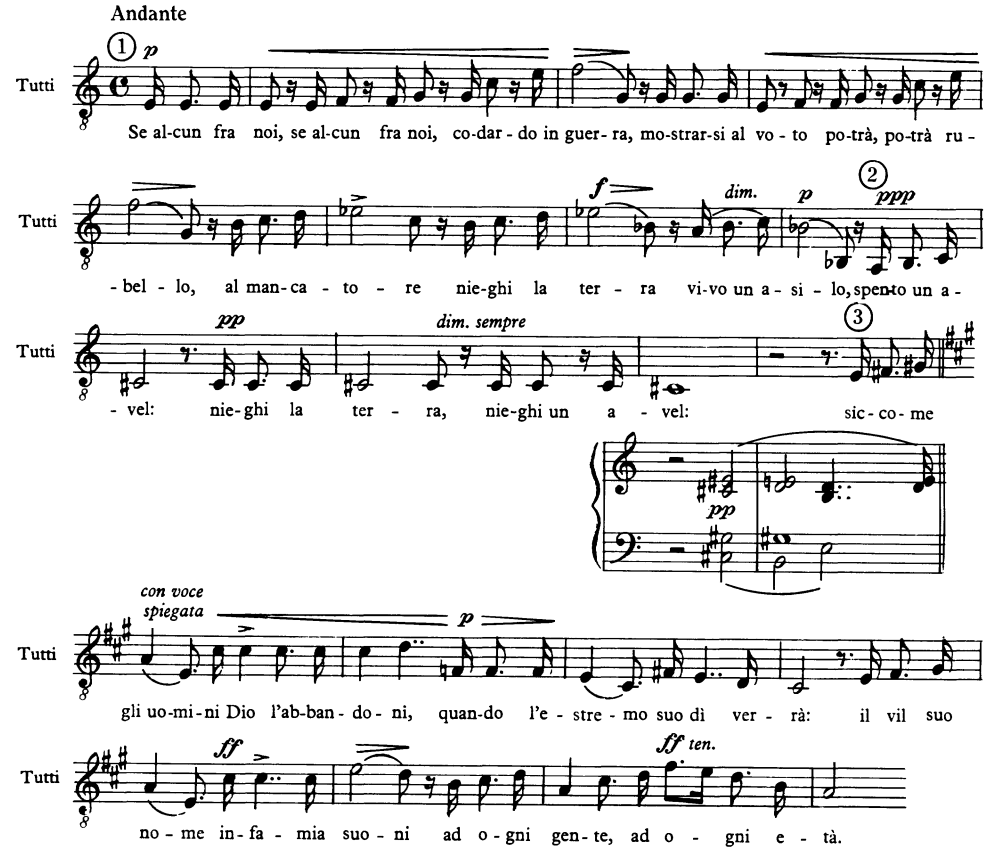
[44] I have discussed the interactions between political and musical events in Naples in this period in my article 'La fine dell'Età borbonica 1838–1860' in *Il Teatro di San Carlo*, 2 vols. (Naples, 1987), I, 165–203.

[45] By Julian Budden, for example, in *The Operas of Verdi: From 'Oberto' to 'Rigoletto'* (London, 1973), 407, or by David R. B. Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism* (Cambridge, 1981), 569 (where the *Battaglia* passage is, however, misidentified as the 'Act III finale').

The musical reference is equally precise. The *Battaglia di Legnano* passage is in three parts: a quiet theme, with a strong upward gesture to the words 'guerra' and 'rubello'; a chromatic passage, pianissimo and partly unaccompanied, at the reference to the earth's denying the traitor a tomb; finally, a soaring lyrical phrase to conclude (see Ex. 12).

Ex. 12

La battaglia di Legnano, Giuramento



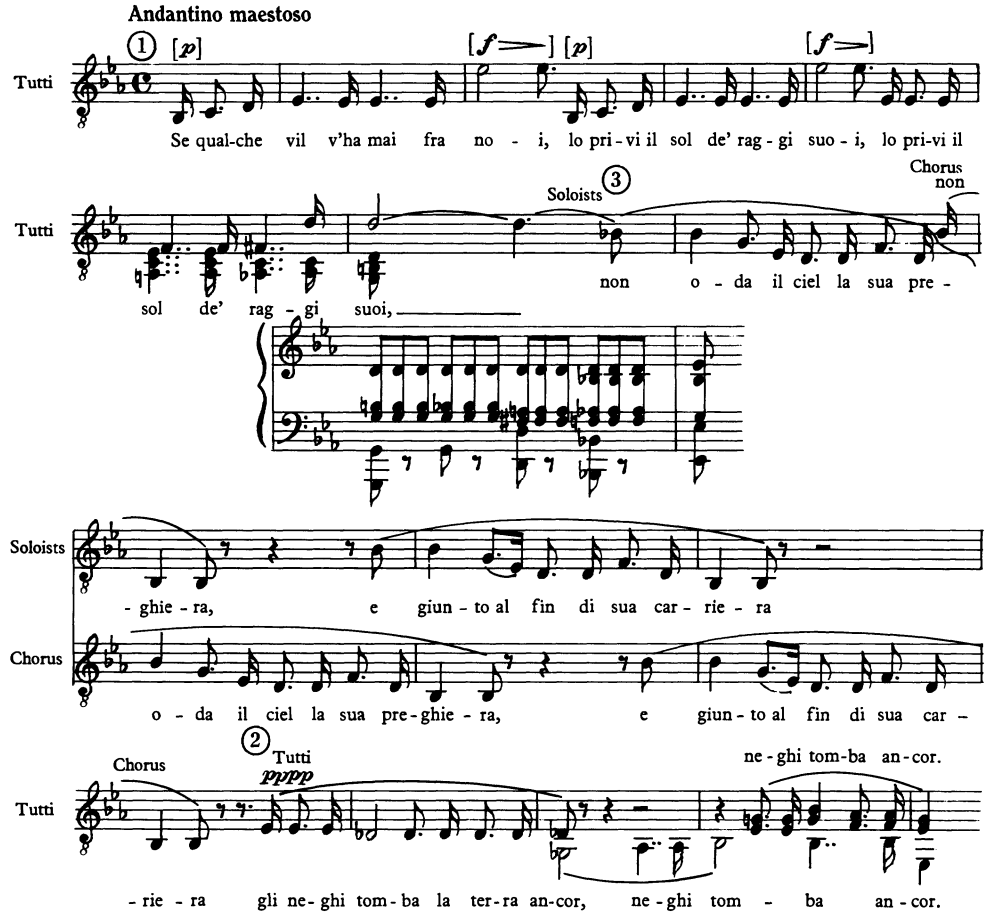
Ex.12

Sections similar to all three are present in Rossini's original, though in a different order. Even the ascending four notes to the tonic (with their dotted rhythm) that initiate the lyrical phrase in *La battaglia di Legnano* are derived from the opening of the *Guillaume Tell* passage (see Ex. 13). Notice too the similar modulatory phrases in the accompaniment that fall between the second and third elements in *La battaglia di Legnano* (moving from C sharp major to a lyrical phrase in A major) and between the first two elements in *Guillaume Tell* (moving from G major to a lyrical phrase in E flat major).

This is intertextuality with a vengeance. But what was the subtext in the

Ex. 13

Guillaume Tell, Finale II



Ex. 13

reception of Rossini's opera in Italy during the Austrian occupation became the text of Verdi's opera. Poet and composer made the reference so pointed it could not be missed. By doing so they offer precious evidence of how Verdi and Cammarano read Rossini, that is, how they understood the function and purpose of choral ensembles in earlier nineteenth-century Italian opera.

3

The cultural and political meaning of the chorus remained significant even after the foundation of the Italian nation in 1859 and its gradual annexation of the remaining independent states in the peninsula. If *Nabucco* looked forward to independence, *Aida* looked back on the experience and is virulent on the subject of intolerance, especially religious intolerance. Here too Verdi's message can be read politically – among the Italian government's most difficult problems

was achieving an accord with the Papal presence in Rome. Verdi's vengeful chorus of priests leaves no doubt as to where his sympathies lay.

Though censorship was not a problem for operatic composers after the unification of Italy, the theatre remained a focal point for political discourse of a different kind. Italy was a constitutional monarchy, and many of its most profound problems were social. Little time was needed to expose the myth that a united citizenry would follow close on a united Italy. Regional divisions, particularly between north and south, have never been fully resolved, and as early as the 1840s and 1850s writers and patriots such as Carlo Pisacane and Giuseppe Ferrari had sought to redefine the *Risorgimento* in terms of class struggle.[46] Verdi was a follower of Cavour, at whose behest he agreed to be a deputy in the first Italian parliament. He feared populism and leftist politics, and could write on 27 May 1881, shortly after the première of the revised version of *Simon Boccanegra*: 'I have a sad presentiment about our future! The Leftists will destroy Italy.'[47]

One could read the treatment of the chorus in *Simon Boccanegra* in precisely these terms. First performed with little popular success at the Teatro La Fenice of Venice on 12 March 1857, to a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, *Simon Boccanegra* was revised by Verdi (with additional text by Arrigo Boito) for the Teatro alla Scala of Milan (24 March 1881). Through both textual and musical means, Verdi makes a political statement in this opera that might appropriately be labelled 'didactic'. Indeed he himself describes his generating idea for the 'council chamber' scene added in 1881 as 'political, not dramatic'.[48] In the definitive version of *Simon Boccanegra* there are no independent choruses, nor can the chorus be considered a protagonist of the drama. It largely represents the plebians of Genoa, whose conflicts with the patricians of the city underlie much of the meaning of the work. After the 'council chamber' scene the chorus all but disappears, yet its transformation from an unruly mass to a mature people united under a just and strong leader mirrors the view Verdi shared with many Italian intellectuals and political leaders of the time.

In the Prologue of the opera, unscrupulous politicians seek to gain support from the chorus for their choice of a new Doge. The tone in which the chorus hears of the imprisonment of a young patrician woman (Maria) by her father, because of her love for the corsair Simon, is redolent of a ghost story told

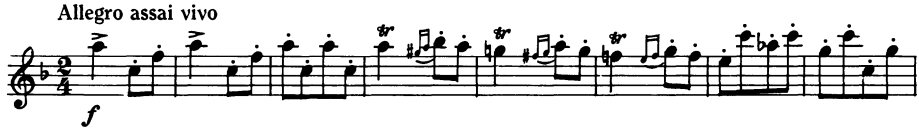
[46] For a discussion of these political currents in Italy during this period, see Stuart Woolf, *A History of Italy 1700–1860: The Social Constraints of Political Change* (London and New York, 1979), 418–24.

[47] In a letter to Opprandino Arrivabene, published in *Verdi intimo: carteggio di Giuseppe Verdi con il Conte Opprandino Arrivabene [1861–1886]*, ed. Annibale Alberti (Milan, 1931), 288: 'Ho un tristo presentimento sul nostro avvenire! I Sinistri distruggeranno l'Italia.'

[48] The phrase comes from a letter to Giulio Ricordi of 20 November 1880. After describing the two letters of Petrarch to the Doges of Genoa and Venice, in which the poet begs them to avoid a fratricidal war, Verdi writes: 'Tutto ciò è politico non drammatico; ma un'uomo d'ingegno potrebbe ben drammatizzare questo fatto' ['All of this is political, not dramatic; but a man of imagination could successfully dramatise this event']. See Pierluigi Petrobelli, Marisa Di Gregorio Casati and Carlo Matteo Mossa, eds., *Carteggio Verdi – Ricordi 1880–1881* (Parma, 1988), 70.

to children, complete with the appearance of 'fantasmi' (spectres). Verdi's music even invokes rhythmic and melodic fragments from Fernando's tale about witches, gypsies and haunted babies in *Il trovatore*. When, at the end of the scene, Simon learns of Maria's death, he cries out in torment. At that very moment, music of jarring banality accompanies the choral expression of delight at the political success of the candidate of the plebians (Simon) over the patricians (see Ex. 14). Throughout the Prologue, Verdi establishes the chorus as a superstitious mob, easily swayed by unscrupulous leaders and bound up in class hatred that can tear apart the fabric of a society.

Ex. 14
Simon Boccanegra, Finale of the Prologo
Allegro assai vivo



Ex. 14

The 'council chamber' scene (the only complete scene added in 1881), on the other hand, is about reconciliation and unity: between Genoa and Venice, between the plebians and the patricians. Both political and social reconciliation were needed to create a united Italy. As indicated above, it was Verdi's idea to build this scene around Petrarch's impassioned plea to the council for the cessation of war between Genoa and Venice. The Consiglieri cry for 'War', while Simon responds with words that had enormous resonance for Verdi, and which he sets over a sparse accompaniment so as to guarantee their audibility:

E con quest'urlo atroce
Fra due liti d'Italia erge Caino
La sua clava cruenta! Adria e Liguria
Hanno patria comune.

[And with that horrid cry / Cain raises between two Italian shores / His bloody club! Adria and Liguria / Share a common fatherland.]

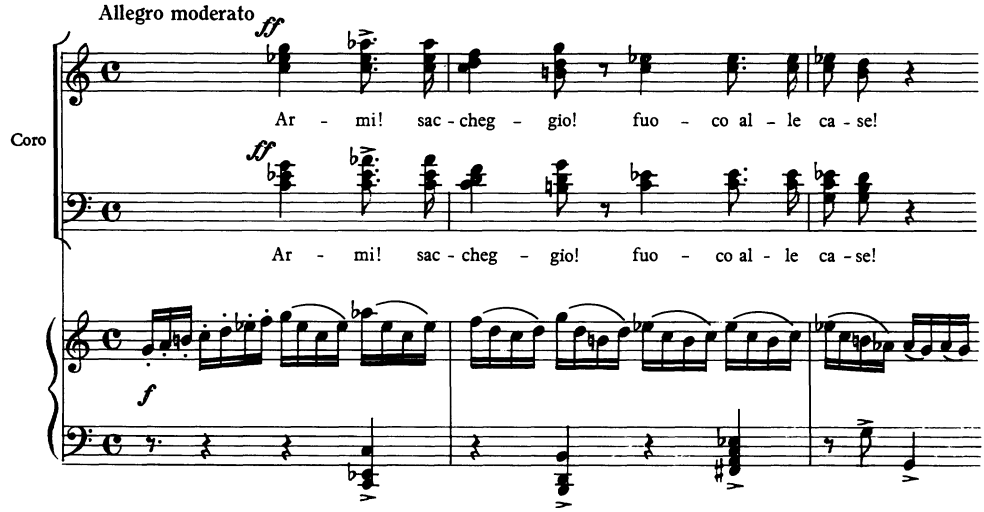
But the reaction of the Consiglieri remains 'È nostra patria Genova' ['Our country is Genoa'].

Noise is heard from without, an uprising in the streets that results from a conflict between plebians and patricians. Verdi builds up the agitation gradually, with cries of 'Morte!' ['Death!'], then 'Morte ai patrizi!' ['Death to the patricians!'] and finally 'Morte al Doge!' ['Death to the Doge!']. At the gates of the palace the mob sings (see Ex. 15): 'Armi! saccheggio! / Fuoco alle case!' ['Arms! plunder! / Set fire to the houses!']. Finally the chorus erupts into the chamber demanding 'Vendetta!' ['Revenge!'].

To characterise this plebian mob, Verdi employs music that constantly invokes the first section of the *Dies iræ* movement from his *Requiem Mass*. In its furious orchestration, its highly accentuated rhythmic patterns, its use of a held pitch

Ex. 15

Simon Boccanegra, Council Chamber scene



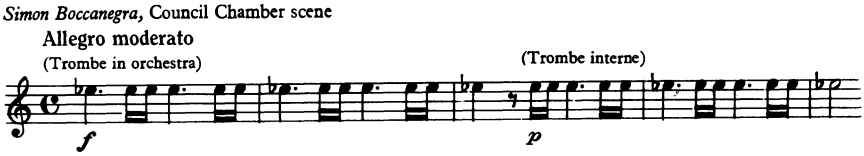
Ex. 15

in some vocal parts while other voices maintain active rhythmic patterns beneath, its rapid and irregular shifting between musical ideas and its forceful syncopation, the choral passage from *Simon Boccanegra* identifies itself with the announcement of the day of judgment. Verdi's technique extends even further. The mob is momentarily silenced by the herald's trumpets, divided between trumpets in the orchestra and others in the wings (see Ex. 16). This is precisely the pattern Verdi employs in the *Dies iræ* to introduce the 'Tuba mirum' section that follows the opening 'Dies iræ'. Even the pitch employed is the same in the two works (E flat). The hostilities end only when Simon intones what Verdi would have called a 'parola scenica' (a word with immediate and telling impact on the audience) that sums up the emotional heart of the drama: 'Fratricidi!!!' ['Fratricides!!!']. The ensemble he leads is one of the most beautiful moments in all Verdi: a plea for unity, a plea to set aside political, geographical and class differences, closing with words derived from Petrarch: 'E vo gridando: pace! e vo gridando: amor!' ['I cry out: peace! I cry out: love!'] (see Ex. 17). The music soars to ecstatic heights, then concludes *dolcissimo*, with the chorus providing the melodic ground over which the solo voices are raised in short phrases. The very last word, 'pace' ['peace'], is left for the heroine, Amelia, in a trill that soars over the entire ensemble.

In this scene, Verdi and Boito project their social ideals on the story of fourteenth-century Genoa: political unity between diverse Italian states, social unity within the state. Before the act is over, the masses have become a people, under the leadership of a strong but compassionate and wise ruler.

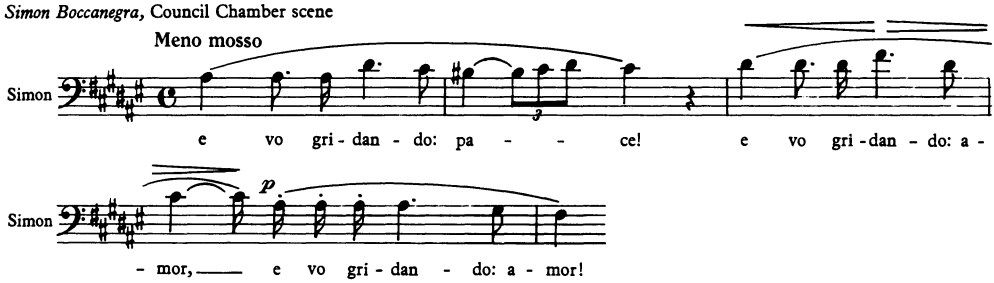
Simon Boccanegra exemplifies and apotheosises a traditional view of the Italian opera chorus in the nineteenth century: from a neutral body in the early works

Ex. 16
Simon Boccanegra, Council Chamber scene



Ex. 16

Ex. 17
Simon Boccanegra, Council Chamber scene



Ex. 17

of Rossini, the chorus gradually emerges as a 'collective individuality' and finally evolves into a citizenry. Yet it should be apparent that such a view is at best partial. 'Becoming a citizen', after all, is hardly an unambiguous concept: what kind of citizen, in what kind of state? Neither the politics of theatre nor the theatre of politics could avoid addressing such issues, nor must we. By framing our questions in ways that recognise the complexity of the historical processes embodied under the banner of the *Risorgimento*, we may find that its principal theatre, Italian opera, offers a broader range of responses to those questions than we had suspected.