

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Humanities - Music

**Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*:  
an approach through Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival**

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2004

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

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VERDI'S *UN BALLO IN MASCHERA*:

AN APPROACH THROUGH MIKHAIL BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF CARNIVAL

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The carnival theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, developed in his studies of Rabelais and Dostoevsky, seeks to connect literature with the surrounding world of social practice. It opens out certain kinds of art work to the cultural and political context in which they were created, and recognises that their structure and language may incorporate popular traditions and symbolic gestures. It has been applied to a number of art forms, but rarely to music.

Opera in Verdi's Italy was closely connected with the celebration of Carnival, the season for which new operas were commissioned and during which the opera house was the centre of much social activity for the literate classes, including participation in masked balls. This is the first study to explore the relationship between carnival practice in mid-nineteenth century Italy and an opera which was commissioned for the Carnival season. *Un ballo in maschera* is particularly apt for such an exploration since, as well as the masked ball from which it takes its title, it shows in its artistic structure other features and gestures connected with carnival.

The political context of 1857-59 is examined and the similarities between Vittorio Emanuele of Piedmont and the ruler in the opera are discussed within a wider examination of the custom of creating and then uncrowning a Carnival King. The concept of the grotesque body opens up an exploration of the links between sex, death and laughter in the opera. Masking, disguise and the *travesti* part of Oscar are investigated through the theory of carnivalization. Each of these chapters uses the recently-published *disposizione scenica* for the opera to illuminate and expand evidence from the libretto, score and correspondence.

In a brief conclusion, Bakhtin's theory of carnival is proposed as a useful tool for the exploration of further operas from Mozart to Britten.

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“Declaration of Authorship”

## *Acknowledgements*

My first debt of thanks goes to Martin Read, who rashly promised long ago to support me through postgraduate study, not realising this would mean a decade of evenings at the opera and lengthy explanations over the dinner table.

I first encountered the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin through typing course outlines in English Studies for Roger Lowman and Simon Barker at King Alfred's College, Winchester. Both have been stimulating companions at the opera and have encouraged me in my ambition to write something more demanding than prospectus copy, though likely to have a considerably smaller readership.

Jeanice Brooks took the risk of accepting me as an unconventional applicant for research at Southampton University Music Department in 1995; her lively interest and tactful guidance helped me take my first steps in musicology, and whenever we have met she has added some new insight to the work in hand. While my Adviser at Southampton, Julie Brown read and commented on early draft material. Simon Dentith of the University of Gloucestershire gave valuable advice on Bakhtinian theory in the opening stages of the project. Sheila Corr of *History Today* helped me to trace the Matarelli illustrations I have discussed in Part II Chapter 1.

Over the last eight years Matthew Head has responded with enthusiasm even to my most outlandish ideas, filled in some of the more obvious gaps in my musical knowledge, and kept my brain alive when family commitments interrupted my studies. Mark Everist ensured that I could return to registration at Southampton after this break, and has given encouragement and practical advice from wherever his own research has taken him. Our supervision meetings were always too stimulating to be contained within the allotted hour and his knowledge of French opera has opened up more interesting perspectives on *Un ballo in maschera* than I have been able to follow in this study.

My final and immense debt of gratitude is owed to Roger Parker of Cambridge University, who provided generous bibliographical guidance from the outset, and regularly updated me on the latest developments in Verdi studies. In 2002 his encouragement led me back to study, and since then he has provided the expert feedback and persistent exhortations without which I should never have staggered at last over the finishing line of this marathon.

## ***Note on translations***

The focus of this dissertation falls as much on words and their connotations as it does on music. For this reason I have, wherever possible, quoted text in its original language, supplying a translation in the footnote. The major exception is the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, which I have only been able to quote in translation.

I have made all the translations specifically for the purpose of the dissertation with the intention of clarifying exact meaning and of matching as far as possible the sentence structure of the original. For this reason they rarely conform to the conventions of English literary style and linguistic register, and no effort has been made to recreate the rhythmic pattern of the Italian or French verse quoted. Antonio Somma, the librettist of *Un ballo in maschera*, used fully the freedom allowed in Italian poetic style of the period to change the word order usual in prose so as to emphasise certain words or to juxtapose them; within the bounds of intelligibility in English, I have tried to reflect his choices in my translations.

## ***Note on score***

At the time of writing (early 2004) the new edition of *Un ballo in maschera* in the University of Chicago-Ricordi series of *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi* is still being prepared by Ilaria Narici. For this study I have used the revised and corrected orchestral score published by Ricordi in 1994 (Plate Number P.R. 159).

The libretto published in Rome for the 1859 première of the opera by the Tipografia Tiberina is reproduced in facsimile, along with the original *disposizione scenica* published by Ricordi, in David Rosen and Marinella Pigazzi's *Un ballo in maschera di Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Ricordi, 2002) in the series *Musica e Spettacolo: Collana di Disposizioni sceniche*. The status of both as evidence is discussed in my Introduction.

**‘La nostra opera resta tuttora la figlia effimera del carnevale.’\***

*Giuseppe Verdi*

‘Our opera is still the short-lived child of the Carnival.’

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\* Remark made by Verdi in a discussion of the differences between opera in Germany and in Italy. See *Interviste e incontri con Verdi* ed. Marcello Conati (Milan: Il Formichiere, 1980), 142.

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**PART I**  
**APPROACHES TO THE OPERA**

## CHAPTER 1.1

### INTRODUCTION

History weighs heavily on *Un ballo in maschera*. Few accounts of it in programme book or opera guide omit the narrative of its troubled passage through the censorship authorities of Naples and Rome, and its source in a historical event is often traced. In March 1792 King Gustav III of Sweden was shot in the back by Jakob Johan Anckarström during a masked ball at the Stockholm Opera House; he died in bed from gangrene twelve days later.<sup>1</sup> Forty years afterwards, Eugène Scribe wrote a libretto around this event for the Paris Opéra, inventing a love plot as the motive for the assassination, adding a supernatural element with a fortuneteller's prophecy of the King's death, and changing Anckarström from an embittered nobody to Gustave's most trusted adviser. *Gustave, ou le bal masqué* seems to have been offered first to Rossini, but it was the second-choice composer, Auber, who took it on, and the opera was premiered in Paris in 1833.<sup>2</sup> There is no record of Verdi's ever having seen the opera, and it had fallen out of the repertory at Paris by 1847 when he began to spend time there.<sup>3</sup> However, the Scribe libretto was taken up by other composers: Bellini considered it for Naples, but died before he could begin work; Gabussi presented an Italian adaptation by the librettist Rossi at Venice in 1841 under the title *Clemenza di Valois*; Cammarano made from it a libretto entitled *Il*

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<sup>1</sup> R. Nisbet Bain, *Gustavus III and his Contemporaries 1746-1792* (London: Kegan Paul, 1894), Vol. 2, 188-213.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Véron, *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris* (Paris: Gabriel de Gonet, 1854). If Véron's account of his time as Director of the Opéra is to be believed, the only part of the libretto that appealed to Rossini was the Act IV conspiracy scene: 'Il s'émut surtout de la situation du 4ème acte. Cette situation était celle-ci: Ankastrom, ayant surpris le roi aux pieds de sa femme, se rend auprès des conspirateurs qui lui étaient connus... Pour les développements du 4ème acte, dit Rossini à M. Scribe, vous m'apporterez et vous vous soumettrez à toutes mes exigences; pour le reste de l'ouvrage, c'est moi qui vous suivrai et qui me soumettrai.' (*Mémoires*, 247. 'He was particularly excited by the situation in Act IV: Ankastrom, having surprised the King wooing his wife, goes to meet the conspirators who are known to him. "For the developments of Act IV", Rossini said to Scribe, "you will supply what I want and will submit to all my requirements; for the rest of the work, it is I who will follow you and submit to you."') As Anselm Gerhard has pointed out, oath-taking was a very popular subject for paintings and opera tableaux during the period, and the patriotic vows exchanged by Scribe's three conspirators in Act IV bear more than a passing resemblance to the Rütti oath-swearing in Act II of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*. See Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 86-7.

<sup>3</sup> Maribeth Clark, 'The Role of *Gustave ou le bal masqué* in Restraining the Bourgeois Body of the July Monarchy' (*Musical Quarterly*, forthcoming.) By 1840 *Gustave* was no longer performed in Paris, although the *galop* from the masquerade scene continued to be a popular piece.

*Reggente* with a Scottish setting for Mercadante, premièred at Turin in 1843.<sup>4</sup> The tale of Gustav III was also turned into other types of performance; in 1846 a ballet *Gustavo III* was presented at La Scala, and an Italian play on the subject was put on at Rome in 1858.<sup>5</sup>

The details of the genesis of *Un ballo in maschera* have been covered very fully in the standard account of the operas by Julian Budden, so I shall not repeat them at length here.<sup>6</sup> Verdi signed a contract in 1857 to write a new opera for the San Carlo opera house in Naples, to be premièred in the Carnival season of 1858. The choice of text and librettist was to be his, provided that the subject was approved in advance by the Naples Censor; he also agreed to pay half the costs of the libretto.<sup>7</sup> He had been working for some time on an adaptation of *King Lear* with the Venetian dramatic poet Antonio Somma, and at first hoped to put this on at Naples, but was not satisfied that the singers engaged by the San Carlo for the 1858 season would be able to cope with the dramatic demands of characters based on a Shakespeare play. After considering various dramas, he asked Somma to adapt Scribe's *Gustave* libretto. As this dealt with the assassination of a European monarch at the time of the French Revolution, it was no surprise to composer and librettist that the notoriously strict Naples Censor stipulated that the action should be moved to a more distant time and place, with a fictional ruler as the main character, and no firearms used on stage. By January 1858 the opera was complete in skeleton score under the title *Una vendetta in dominò*, with a setting in seventeenth-century Pomerania and as the tenor role a Duke who is assassinated by a dagger thrust.

On the day Verdi arrived in Naples to begin rehearsals and complete the orchestration, an Italian patriot made an assassination attempt on the French Emperor Napoleon III, killing several bystanders outside the Paris Opéra, and scaring the

<sup>4</sup> Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1992), Vol. 2, 365.

<sup>5</sup> *Gustavo III Re di Svezia* was a ballet at La Scala in 1846; see *Bollettino Quadrimestrale dell'Istituto di Studi Verdiani* 1:3 (1960) cxxviii. A five-act drama by Tommaso Gherardi, *Gustavo III Re di Svezia o genio e passioni*, was presented by the stage company of Cesare Dondini at Rome in February 1858; see David Rosen and Marinella Pigozzi, *Un ballo in maschera di Giuseppe Verdi* in the series *Musica e spettacolo: Collana di Disposizioni sceniche* (Milan: Ricordi, 2002), 28.

<sup>6</sup> Budden, Vol. 2, 360-423.

<sup>7</sup> The contract between Verdi and the Impresario dei Reali Teatri di Napoli, signed 5 February 1857, is reproduced in *Bollettino ISV* 1:1 (1960), 297-9 and translated in Frank Walker's 'Unpublished Letters: A Contribution to the History of *Un ballo in maschera*' in the same issue, 39-40.

*ancien régime* rulers of Naples into a renewed crackdown on anything that might stimulate insurrection. The libretto for the new opera fell under suspicion, and a local poet was commissioned to write an alternative to fit the music Verdi had already composed. Verdi was furious and engaged a lawyer to argue that he had fulfilled all the requirements of his contract and of the Censor; if the San Carlo no longer wished to put on his opera *Una vendetta in dominò*, the contract must be dissolved and he should be free to take it to another theatre. By April 1858 the dispute was settled out of court, Verdi signing a new contract to return later in the year to prepare the Naples première of *Simon Boccanegra*, but already in negotiation to take his new opera to Rome.

The impresario Vincenzo Jacovacci was ready to put on the work at the Teatro Apollo in Rome in the Carnival season of 1859, but the Rome Censor had to be placated. Even though a play with Gustav III as the main character had just been presented in the city, it proved impossible to secure approval for an opera on the same subject, even under the guise of *Il Conte di Gothemburg*.<sup>8</sup> A European setting was forbidden and the final compromise agreed in July 1858 was that the action should take place in Boston during the British colonial period, the tenor role to be a Governor with the rank of Count. Somma provided various changes to the libretto verse demanded by the Censor, but refused to have his name attached to the final version, even pseudonymously. The libretto booklet published to accompany the première at the Teatro Apollo, Rome, on 17 February 1859 gives no author's name and describes the setting and period as 'Boston and its surroundings at the end of the seventeenth century'.<sup>9</sup>

Although few opera companies today strive for accurately-reproduced period costumes and *trompe l'oeil* sets, the question of whether this opera should be presented in its seventeenth-century Boston setting or in 'the Swedish version' continues to be treated as an important issue. The recent creation of a '*Gustavo III*' by Philip Gossett and Ilaria Narici from Verdi's 1857 sketch and skeleton-score has

<sup>8</sup> See Rosen's Introduction to his edition of the *disposizione scenica* for a detailed account of the various libretti prepared in 1857-9. (Rosen & Pigozzi, 10-16)

<sup>9</sup>The libretto was published by Tipografia Tiberina in Rome, 1859, and is reproduced in Rosen & Pigozzi, 123-4. Ricordi also published a libretto booklet for the opera in February 1859; see Martin Chusid, *A Catalog of Verdi's Operas* (Hackensack, New Jersey: Joseph Boonin, 1974), 28.

been taken up by opera houses and a recording company, convinced by their assertions that:

*Ballo* has never ceased to be a problem.... Dissatisfaction with Boston has been widespread.... Boston has been an embarrassment [sic] to *Ballo*.<sup>10</sup>

All the more puzzling, then, that when a Swedish opera company premièred this reconstruction there was no attempt to give it in eighteenth-century costume or to commission sets in keeping with the period.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in recent years it has become commonplace for opera-goers to learn a great deal from their programmes about the history of Sweden, the sexuality of its King Gustav III and the influence upon him of the French Enlightenment, before the curtain goes up on a resolutely contemporary set in which thugs stride about in leather trenchcoats or sit on lavatories reading the evening paper.<sup>12</sup> If 'Boston has been an embarrassment to *Ballo*', the question must be asked: Why did Verdi not return the setting to Sweden as soon as censorship was relaxed after 1860? He had the power to do so, since his publishers Ricordi not only hired out the music but issued a printed *disposizione scenica* and costume designs for theatres putting on the opera in subsequent seasons. As early as 1861 the setting was changed to Naples at the time of Spanish rule when the opera was premièred at the Théâtre-Italien in Paris, because the impresario felt that a masked ball in Boston was

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Gossett and Ilaria Narici, 'Restoring Verdi's *Gustavo III*' in booklet for the CD recording of *Verdi: Gustavo III* (Dynamic CDS 426/1-2, 2003), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Gothenburg Opera gave the first performances of 'Gustavo III: The Uncensored Version of *Un ballo in maschera*' in October 2002 with a contemporary set and costumes. A subsequent production at the Théâtre de Metz in October 2003 placed the opera recognizably at the Court of Gustav III, performing it alongside Auber's *Gustave ou le bal masqué*, similarly presented in eighteenth-century dress. When *Gustavo III* was performed at the opera house for which it was originally commissioned, the San Carlo in Naples, in January 2004, an elaborate set evoked Naples under Bourbon rule in the nineteenth century (note that this was different from the 'Naples setting' chosen for the Paris première in 1861 - see Note 14 below).

<sup>12</sup> In 1989 English National Opera staged a production by David Alden, designed by David Fielding, in modern dress with a stark set which Alden intended to evoke 'the Swedish personality and the Swedish winter ... Strindberg, Munch and Bergman, the combination of repression and coldness with Freudian attachments and deep-seated passions in a Northern climate'; the programme included several pages on the history of Gustav III, with photos of his death mask and the clothes in which he was shot. In 1999 a production at the Bregenz Festival, directed and designed by Richard Jones and Antony McDonald, used the Swedish character names but with modern costumes, the conspirators arriving by car, a guillotine instead of a gallows and a stunning set dominated by a thirty-foot high skeleton turning the page of Gustavus III's book of life. In 2002 English National Opera staged a production by Calixto Bieito which hit the front pages of national newspapers for its opening scene of a row of lavatories on which the male chorus were sitting with their trousers round their ankles, reading newspapers. The Catalan director wished to evoke Spain in the late 1970s and the right-wing plot to overthrow the new democratic constitution under King Juan Carlos; despite this explicit intention, the characters' names were changed to their Swedish versions and ten pages of the programme were devoted to historical material about Gustav III.

incongruous, and the star tenor refused to wear Puritan costume.<sup>13</sup> Verdi must have been aware of this change, and during his lifetime the Naples setting was so common that Arthur Pougin in his 1886 study of the composer comments:

On sait que la version “américaine” d’*un Ballo in maschera* n’a pas été conservée, mais on n’a pas non plus rétabli le sujet dans son état primitif. La scène aujourd’hui se passe à Naples, et s’il faut en croire Scudo, c’est lors de la représentation de l’ouvrage sur notre Théâtre-Italien (13 janvier 1861) que cette nouvelle et dernière transformation fut opérée.<sup>14</sup>

As Verdi was a regular visitor to Paris, rehearsing and revising earlier works for performance there in the 1860s, as well as writing *Don Carlos* for the Opéra and supervising its première, he would have had ample opportunity and influence to present *Un ballo in maschera* there in a setting of his choosing, be it Boston or Sweden, but he never did so, nor raised any objection to the Naples setting which became customary. In Chapter 2.1 of this dissertation I shall discuss how the settings Verdi considered carried certain connotations in 1859, and suggest an explanation for his indifference to the question after 1860.

The circumstances of the opera’s genesis created a bulging archive of correspondence, drafts, marginal comments and legal documents through which the development of the libretto and music can be followed in considerable detail.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Eugenio Gara, ‘Il cammino dell’opera in un secolo d’interpretazioni’ in *Bollettino ISV*, 1:2 (1960), 710.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Pougin, *Verdi: Histoire anecdotique de sa vie et de ses œuvres* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1886), 195. Pougin also quotes the critic Scudo’s concern at the loss of ‘la vérité de l’histoire’. Pougin’s study was translated by James E. Matthew as *Verdi: An Anecdotic History of his Life and Works* (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1887), with this footnote on pp. 184-5: ‘The “American” version of *Un Ballo in Maschera* has not been preserved; but the subject has never been restored to its primitive state. The scene now passes in Naples and, if we are to believe Scudo, it was on the occasion of the production of the work at our Théâtre Italien (on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1861) that this new and final transformation was made:- “At the Théâtre-Italien at Paris, the scene of *Un Ballo in Maschera* passes in the kingdom of Naples. M. Mario, though desiring to abdicate the throne of youth which he has so long occupied, absolutely refused to appear in the Puritan costume as worn in Boston at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This is what becomes of historical truth in the hands of censors, of librettists, and Italian *virtuosi!*” (*L’Année Musicale*, Vol. 3, 111-2).’ Editions in the 1920s of Gustav Kobbé’s *Complete Opera Book* state that the opera ‘is usually played with the scene laid in Naples’.

<sup>15</sup> Verdi’s surviving letters to Somma are to be found in *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma* ed. Alessandro Pascolato (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1913). Letters from Somma to Verdi, and Verdi’s comments on the substitute libretto *Adelia degli Adimari*, appear in Volume I of *Carteggi verdiani* ed. Alessandro Luzio (Rome: Reale Accademia d’Italia, 1935). The contract with the San Carlo and correspondence relating to it, and letters to Vincenzo Jacovacci, the Rome impresario, are gathered in Frank Walker’s ‘Unpublished Letters: A Contribution to the History of *Un ballo in maschera*’ in *Bollettino ISV*, 1:1 (1960), 279-304. The legal document setting out Verdi’s objections to the substitute libretto, and other correspondence relating to *Ballo*, can be found

Somma was an inexperienced librettist, collaborating with Verdi from a distance on their first opera together; in his letters to the poet Verdi gives careful guidance on his requirements, which have proved a treasure for researchers wanting to observe the creative process in slow motion. The negotiations with two different censors, and especially the marginal comments Verdi scribbled on the libretto *Adelia degli Adimari* foisted on him by the Naples authorities, illuminate in an unusually clear way those elements of the opera which the composer saw as essential, as well as those on which he was willing to compromise. It was also the first opera premièred in Italy for which a *disposizione scenica* was published, setting out the way in which it was to be produced on stage by theatres hiring the parts from Ricordi.<sup>16</sup> In addition to these materials, there is also Scribe's libretto, and the operas by Gabussi and Mercadante which were written to libretti based on it before Verdi and Somma began work. Much attention has been given to the similarities and differences between these operas, and to the mysteries of the adaptation process which made Verdi's version an enduring success while the others soon disappeared from the stage.<sup>17</sup> Most recently the preparation of a new edition of the opera has led to the Carrara-Verdi family making available the musical sketches of the opera prepared by Verdi in 1857; Gossett and Narici report that a quarter of the music the composer took to Naples was changed for the Rome première.<sup>18</sup>

The creation of *Ballo* therefore documents in a striking way how far nineteenth-century Italian opera was a collaborative art, in which the contributions and demands of writers, managements, censors, audiences and performers were mediated by the composer as he edged his way towards the first night. Some of the

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in *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi* ed. Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio (Milan, 1913, [n.pub.] reprinted [n.p.] Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1979), 561-76.

<sup>16</sup> The publication of the *disposizione scenica* in late 2002, with an introduction and notes by David Rosen (see Note 5 above), has brought a resource of enormous value to my study of the opera. In Part II of this dissertation I have made some use of it to shed light on obscure corners of the work, but there is much more to be drawn from it than I could include within my word limits.

<sup>17</sup> See in particular Francesco Flora, 'Il libretto' in *Bollettino ISV*, I, 1 (1960), 44-72; Harold Powers, 'The "Laughing Chorus" in Contexts' in *A Masked Ball/Un ballo in maschera* ENO Opera Guide 40 (London: John Calder, 1989), 23-40; Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 2, 365-423. Guido Salvetti, Introduction to his edition of the libretto of *Un ballo in maschera* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1973), 82-90; Jacques Gheusi, 'Avant Verdi: un assassinat qui inspire' in *L'Avant-Scène Opéra* 32 (1992), 8-11.

<sup>18</sup> Gossett & Narici, *Gustavo III* libretto booklet, 14-15. At the time of writing (March 2004) the sketch of *Ballo* has not been published, and we await the new University of Chicago-Ricordi edition of the opera which is being prepared by Ilaria Narici.

excitement and controversy in this area is probably due to the tension we still feel between older habits of valuing ‘originality’ and seeking out ‘the author’s intentions’, and postmodernist approaches which allow a number of versions equal validity and interest.<sup>19</sup> Rosen has drawn attention to what he calls the ‘bitextuality’ of *Ballo*, by which he means the points of divergence between the printed libretto published in Rome for the 1859 premiere, and the autograph score which formed the basis of that performance.<sup>20</sup> The Censor’s changes were incorporated into the publication which went on sale, but the words were not changed on Verdi’s manuscript and it is therefore very likely that it was the uncensored words which were sung. Generations of singers have given their performances from the text set by Verdi and preserved by Ricordi, which forms the basis of the current published scores. Leading baritones would be disconcerted to find themselves asked, in the name of ‘authenticity’, to abandon lines such as ‘Te perduto, ov’è la patria’ and ‘Sangue vuolsi’ in favour of the unfamiliar alternatives of the 1859 libretto which was, nevertheless, authorized for publication by the composer himself.<sup>21</sup>

Verdi also authorized the preparation of the production book, the first such publication to be issued for an opera premièred in Italy.<sup>22</sup> This *disposizione scenica* was prepared by Giuseppe Cencetti, described in Ricordi’s announcement of the publication as the ‘direttore di scena’ of the Rome production. Rosen has examined in detail Cencetti’s and Verdi’s involvement in the staging details, pointing out that opera, like film, is an art form which follows a model of ‘multiple paternity’.<sup>23</sup> A

<sup>19</sup> ‘Why should we deny ourselves the occasional chance to experience alternative texts, might-have-beens and one-offs? The old, familiar *Ballo* will remain, and may even become richer and more complex for our glimpses down a rejected avenue,’ suggested Roger Parker in his review of the Gothenburg Opera recording of Gossett and Narici’s *Gustavo III* in *Opera*, September 2003, 1148. However, Parker took issue with the description of the score as a ‘reconstruction’, arguing that this implied a pre-existing work by Verdi, a point to which Gossett will be responding in a forthcoming issue. A production of *Gustavo III* at the San Carlo, Naples, in January 2004 met with a hostile reception from Italian critics: Paolo Isotta attacked the use of public money to put on stage work that Verdi had not completed because he was dissatisfied with it (*Corriere della sera*, 20 January 2004), while Sandro Cappelletto compared the enterprise to painting in a missing limb on a Giotto fresco (*La stampa*, 22 January 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Rosen, Introduction to *Disposizione scenica* 2002 edition, 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> By December 1858 Somma had withdrawn his name from the libretto and it is clear from Verdi’s correspondence with the impresario that he himself authorised its publication in time for the première (Letter to Jacovacci, 29 December 1858, in Walker, *Bollettino ISV* I:1, 295).

<sup>22</sup> *Livrets* had been in circulation for operas premièred at Paris since the late eighteenth century, but the first production book published in Italy was a translation of the *livret* prepared at Paris in 1855 for Verdi’s own *Les Vêpres siciliennes*.

<sup>23</sup> Rosen, Introduction to *Disposizione scenica* 2002 edition, 21.

month after the Rome première Tito Ricordi's secretary wrote to Verdi to say that he had received 'the music and the scenic description' and taken careful note of the composer's corrections, which seems to indicate to Rosen that Verdi was involved in the preparation of both the vocal score and the production book, at least to the extent of correcting drafts by others.<sup>24</sup> If so, this material carries as much – or as little – weight of authorship as the new *Gustavo III* reconstructed from Verdi's 1857 sketch. It will be interesting to see how long it takes for an opera management to announce an 'authentic' production of *Un ballo in maschera* blocked in accordance with the *disposizione* and following the costume sketches, lighting indications and set descriptions issued by Verdi's publisher. Probably quite a long time since, as Yonel Buldrini has pointed out, modernist taste in stage production exercises its own form of censorship in our century.<sup>25</sup> However, the details of the *disposizione* have allowed me to grasp more fully the totality of the opera which the Rome audience saw in February 1859, and in particular to examine in Part II the possibility that meanings might have been conveyed through gesture and stage action within a cultural context beyond the published words of the libretto which were scrutinised by the Censor.

Those who revere authors for their originality and refusal to compromise with authority have dealt particularly harshly with Somma. A poet who merely adapts the work of Scribe, a prolific theatre craftsman with no pretensions to genius, then meekly accepts continual amendments by his collaborator and a succession of censors until he is so ashamed of the result that he will not allow his name to be published as author: this is not a writer likely to inspire much respect from literary critics. For a hundred years after the creation of *Ballo* its libretto was ridiculed for its incoherence and poetic incompetence, and it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the composer Luigi Dallapiccola came to its defence, pointing out that Verdi had sought from his librettists words that could be 'a springboard for a dramatic

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> 'À Gothembourg [for the première of Gossett & Narici's *Gustavo III*] l'on choisit des costumes ... contemporains!! n'osant pas (probablement pour cause de *modernisme*, une autre censure, par le fait!) opter pour les originaux ... c'était pourtant l'occasion!' (Yonel Buldrini, programme book for *Gustave Terzo* at the Théâtre de Metz, October 2003, p. 5)

situation'.<sup>26</sup> Using examples from other operas by Verdi and verse by other authors, he suggested that an emotional crescendo was always to be found in the third line of a quatrain, and explained the effectiveness of the Act II trio of *Ballo*, 'Odi tu come fremono cupi', through an exploration of the way he believed Verdi had manipulated and developed the quatrain structure provided by Somma. It is not necessary to accept Dallapiccola's theorising of nineteenth-century libretti in its entirety to acknowledge his point that Somma's contribution to the opera has been undervalued, and that one indication of his effectiveness as a dramatic poet lies in the fact that the opera has continued to engage audiences in its various settings, continuing in the repertory across Europe and America when other Verdi operas fell out of favour.<sup>27</sup>

While the censorship history of this opera has focused much attention on the libretto, questions of musical form have also exercised scholars. A quarter of a century ago Siegmund Levarie opened a debate about the tonality of the opera, asserting that:

Key relations in an opera serve at least two functions. They help build and clarify the overall structure, and they contribute toward characterization and identification of people and issues.<sup>28</sup>

His outline of the key structure of *Ballo*, moving from a B major beginning to a B $\flat$  minor close and attributing dramatic significance to the tonality of various situations and numbers in the opera, was immediately challenged by Joseph Kerman, who disputed his descriptions and pointed out that Verdi used key changes for immediate dramatic effects rather than as part of an over-arching structure.<sup>29</sup> In 1983 Roger Parker and Matthew Brown used a Schenkerian approach to plot graphically the

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<sup>26</sup> Luigi Dallapiccola, 'Words and Music in Italian Nineteenth-Century Opera', from his collected essays *Appunti, incontri, meditazioni* (Milan: 1970), is translated by Alvary E. Grazebrook in *The Verdi Companion* ed. William Weaver & Martin Chusid (New York: Norton, 1979), 193-215.

<sup>27</sup> Verdi operas with a more distinguished literary pedigree, such as *Ernani*, *I due Foscari*, *Giovanna d'Arco*, *I masnadieri*, *Luisa Miller*, *Macbeth* and *Don Carlos*, based on dramas by Hugo, Byron, Schiller and Shakespeare, all suffered phases of eclipse between the period of their première and the latter part of the twentieth century.

<sup>28</sup> Siegmund Levarie, 'Key Relations in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*' in *19th-Century Music*, 2:2 (1978), 143-7 (p.143).

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Kerman, 'Viewpoint' in *19th-Century Music*, 2:2 (1978), 186-191. 'It would take all of Ulrica's Boston voodoo to divine the opera's B $\flat$  tonic in Act I, the main numbers of which come in B, F $\sharp$ , B $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , C, A, E, A $\flat$  minor, B $\flat$  and A' (p.187). The battle rumbled on in the next issue of the journal, with a contribution by Guy A. Marco, and a riposte to Kerman by Levarie; see *19th-Century Music*, 3:1 (1979), 83-9.

‘tonal flow’ of the Prelude and Act I scene 1 of the opera.<sup>30</sup> They noted other signs of dramatic and musical symmetry in the scene, making Renato’s ‘Alla vita che t’arride’ its central point, but failed to find a corresponding structure in the tonality of the scene. While it was clear that at certain points Verdi used the same key shift or vocal sonority to suggest a link between dramatic situations across the opera, especially in relation to the prophecy of death and its fulfilment, Parker and Brown expressed caution about pulling every detail from a brief chord to a major closed number into an overall scheme, concluding that ‘those irremediably wedded to organicism are doomed to distort this repertory’.<sup>31</sup> This approach is supported by Harold Powers’ more recent work on changes made by Verdi to some of his Middle Period operas, showing that halfstep transpositions were made by the composer between sketch and final version for important numbers in *Trovatore*, *Rigoletto* and *Simon Boccanegra*. Powers followed Pierluigi Petrobelli in believing the motivation for such changes was Verdi’s awareness of the dramatic potential of a particular sonority, which was at least as important to him as the way a number fitted into the overall tonal structure of the opera.<sup>32</sup>

In the last decades of the twentieth century musicologists have moved away from methods of analysis developed in relation to orchestral music and the work of Wagner to examine in more detail the conventions of Italian opera within which Verdi worked and to explore what use he made of them. In one of the first such studies, ‘Verdi and the Musical Figure of Death’, Frits Noske traced the history of the anapaestic motif which carried connotations of death in operas composed in France from the late seventeenth century and in Italian opera from the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> In his examination of the use of this *topos* in Verdi’s work, Noske lists no fewer than ten variants of the anapaestic rhythm in the Ulrica scene of *Ballo*, showing how the death motifs are woven into the structure of the opera to make connections between the prophecy of death through the encounter of the lovers

<sup>30</sup> Roger Parker and Matthew Brown, ‘Motivic and Tonal Interaction in Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera*’ in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 36:2 (1983), 243-65.

<sup>31</sup> Parker & Brown, ‘Motivic and Tonal Interaction’, 265.

<sup>32</sup> Harold Powers, ‘One halfstep at a time: Tonal transposition and ‘split association’ in Italian opera’ in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7:2 (1995) 150-64.

<sup>33</sup> Frits R. Noske, ‘Verdi and the Musical Figure of Death’ in *Atti del III Congresso Internazionale di Studi Verdiani 1972* [1974], reprinted in his collection *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 171-214.

at the gallows to the murder in the final Act.<sup>34</sup> He recognised that in Verdi's hands a convention could be used to work on the audience with great subtlety across widely-differing dramatic situations and musical contexts.

The conventions of duet and aria structure have also been the focus of much attention, and *Ballo* has been invoked in debate about them. In his influential essay on 'la solita forma' Powers used Abramo Basevi's 1859 study of Verdi's operas to lay out the pattern for an *ottocento* opera duet, and argued that the form of solo arias was a contraction of it. Although Basevi completed his book before the première of *Ballo*, Powers cited Amelia's Act III 'Morrò, ma prima in grazia' as an example of a solo aria preceded by the *tempo d'attacco* conventional for a duet because, he explained, Renato is a silent but equal participant in the confrontation.<sup>35</sup> In his 1997 study of Act II of *Ballo* Powers examined at length and in close detail the structuring of the Amelia-Riccardo love duet, drawing attention to several points where Verdi broke the conventions of the 'solita forma'.<sup>36</sup> The pattern drawn by Powers from Basevi's writing has not gone unchallenged, however. Parker has pointed out that the term *tempo d'attacco* is used only once by Basevi and that it is unclear that he would have understood the term to denote a complex, multi-tempo opening section of a duet.<sup>37</sup> Little evidence has been found in the writings of Italian critics in the 1850s to indicate that they, never mind the ordinary operagoers of the period, thought of opera numbers in terms of whether they followed or altered a recognised compositional design; I shall show in Part II that contemporary reviews of *Ballo* paid attention to quite different aspects of its music.

While musicologists are alert to the existence of musical conventions and often explore how Verdi used them in different ways, repeating and developing compositional solutions he had found effective, their discussion of characters and

<sup>34</sup> Noske, 1990 edition, 197-201.

<sup>35</sup> Harold Powers, "La solita forma" and "The Uses of Convention" in *Acta Musicologica* 59 (1987), 65-90 (p.72).

<sup>36</sup> Harold Powers, "La dama velata": Act II of 'Un ballo in maschera' in *Verdi's Middle Period 1849-1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice* ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 273-336 (p.306). Powers' observations on Act II have informed my discussion of Amelia in Chapter 2.2 of this dissertation.

<sup>37</sup> Roger Parker, "Insolite forme", or Basevi's Garden Path' in *Verdi's Middle Period* ed. Chusid (1997), 129-46 (p.140). Powers' detailed response is to be found in 'Basevi, Conati and *La traviata*:

plot in *Un ballo in maschera* often lacks an awareness of literary conventions and genre expectations. Distinguished critics such as Budden, Rosen and Gerhard speculate on what Riccardo ‘really’ feels and whether Ulrica is a ‘clever fraud’.<sup>38</sup> *Un ballo in maschera* is described on the front cover of its libretto as a *melodramma in tre atti* and gradually the generic roots of the work in the tradition of melodrama are being uncovered.<sup>39</sup> Gilles de Van has examined Verdi’s operas from the point of view of the melodramatic aesthetic, and has drawn attention to the restricted set of character types who appear in his work. Using a method of analysis similar to that developed by Anne Ubersfeld for the dramas of Victor Hugo, de Van has succeeded in reducing the plot of *Ballo* to a formula connecting H (the hero) to h (the heroine), omitting Oscar and Ulrica, and concluding at the point where Renato (J4) stabs H4.<sup>40</sup> This has the merit of moving discussion away from a novelistic treatment of the characters, but does not satisfy as an adequate description of the dramatic action. Nevertheless, de Van has many interesting observations about the way the opera is

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the Uses of Convention’ in *Una piacente estate di San Martino: Studi e ricerche per Marcello Conati* ed. Marco Capra (Lucca: LIM, 2000) 216-29.

<sup>38</sup> Budden in his otherwise admirable discussion of the opera devotes two pages to the question ‘Is Ulrica genuinely possessed or is she merely a clever psychologist?’ in which he invents thoughts and motivations for the character: ‘Ulrica likes [Silvano]’, ‘She has no idea who Riccardo and his friends are ... she decides to give them a thoroughly unpleasant shock’, ‘She realizes that she has hit the mark ... she shrewdly presses home her advantage’, ‘She proceeds to give Riccardo *genuine* advice based on what she has observed’ etc. (*Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 2, 395. Budden’s emphasis). Rosen speculates on what Amelia and Renato will do after the curtain falls at the close of the opera: ‘Ma Amelia? Perdonerà Renato? Che dobbiamo pensare della sorte del suo matrimonio una volta sceso il sipario? Le prime parole di lei saranno “Allontanati dalla mia vista, assassino!”, oppure “Non rammaricarti, mio caro, capita a tutti di sbagliare”? (Introduction to *Disposizione scenica* 2002 edition, 95). ‘But what about Amelia? Will she forgive Renato? What must we expect will happen to their marriage once the curtain has gone down? Will her first words be “Out of my sight, you murderer!” or “Don’t worry about it, darling, everyone makes mistakes”?’ Gerhard reads the opera as the drama of Riccardo’s ‘longing for interior space’, placing great emphasis on the psychological significance of masking as an indication of the character’s isolation and alienation. He invents a complex psychology for Riccardo as he dies: ‘Verdi’s protagonist does not fully comprehend, even now, that the game is over and that all his closest friends can do for him is help him die. He still relies on the irresistible charm that he obviously attributes to himself, and, having failed to obtain the privacy he longs for, reveals his most intimate feelings to an entire ballroomful of people. He appears to believe in all seriousness that by declaring Amelia’s honor intact he will save the marriage that he has played so active a part in wrecking.’ (*The Urbanization of Opera*, 447.)

<sup>39</sup> The influence of Peter Brooks’ *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) on thinking about French nineteenth-century theatre and opera has been immense, and has found its way into discussion of Verdi’s Paris opera *Les Vêpres siciliennes* in Roger Parker’s ‘Reading the *livrets*, or the Chimera of “Authentic” Staging’ in *Leonora’s Last Act* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 126-48. There is still much work to be done on the vast array of Italian operas which have their literary origins in Paris.

<sup>40</sup> Gilles de Van, *Verdi’s Theater: Creating Drama Through Music* trans. Gilda Roberts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 113-4. See Anne Ubersfeld’s *Le Roi et le bouffon: Etude sur le théâtre de Hugo de 1830-1839* (Paris: J. Corti, 1974), 399-459, for a schematic approach of this kind to the dramas of Hugo, including *Hernani* and *Le Roi s’amuse*, which might be applied to the operas based on them.

put together, and especially on the way comedy and irony are used by Verdi in the Hugolian manner to undermine certainty and seriousness.<sup>41</sup> More recently, Melina Esse in her study of Amelia's Act II aria in *Ballo* has sought to rehabilitate the practices of melodrama as a means of communicating the interiority of a character.<sup>42</sup> Taking as her starting point the convention identified by James Hepokoski that Verdian sopranos in desperate situations are generally accompanied by a double-reed timbre, Esse hears the sobbing *cor anglais* as the means Verdi uses to display the character's inner conflict, and the detailed instructions of the *disposizione scenica* for her movements as 'a semiotically significant visual tableau' which also enact it.<sup>43</sup> She has proposed a re-examination of the stagecraft of the melodramatic tradition, speculating that the importance of gesture and tableau in the nineteenth-century theatre may have some bearing on the musical gestures within Verdi's scores.

Gesture and tableau play an important part in my discussion of the opera in Part II of this dissertation. While the history of *Ballo* has focused on paperwork - the libretto revisions, the threatened litigation, the correspondence, the sketch and skeleton score - very little attention has been given to the social context in which it was first performed. In the late 1850s the Carnival season was still celebrated in every major Italian town, and the streets of Rome at the time of the première in 1859 were crowded with revellers shouting and pelting one another with confetti.<sup>44</sup> The social year in Italy still followed the rhythm of Christian feasts and fasts, and Carnival was set apart as a special time when certain kinds of enjoyment were permitted and certain regulations were relaxed. All classes of society could participate in the gestures and rituals of carnival in the *piazza*, and even those who scorned to do so were familiar with them. For the literate classes of the cities the opera house was the venue for two of the most important entertainments of the season: newly-commissioned operas, and masked balls. The very title of the opera

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<sup>41</sup> De Van, 256-63.

<sup>42</sup> Melina Esse, "'Chi piange, qual forza m'arretra?': Verdi's interior voices' in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 14:1&2 (2002), 59-78.

<sup>43</sup> Esse, 75. James Hepokoski, 'Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: "Addio, del passato" (*La traviata*, Act III)' in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1:3 (1989), 249-76, includes Amelia's 'Ma dall'arido stelo divulsa' in the 'tradition of solo pieces for lonely or 'isolated' soprano with a double-reed accompaniment – the English horn or oboe – that functions as a complement to the soloist's psychological estrangement' (259-62).

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 2.1 of this dissertation for an eyewitness account of the 1859 Roman Carnival.

*Un ballo in maschera* refers to one of these entertainments, and it was written in response to a commission for the Naples Carnival season. When the contract was annulled, Verdi was willing to wait several months so that it could receive its première during the following Carnival season at Rome. The opera was therefore presented in the same space in which masquerades took place on other nights during the season, and to audiences who themselves were participants in the dancing, chasing and flirting which were permitted to maskers at the Carnival balls.

This is the first study which has looked at the connection between the practices of carnival in nineteenth-century Italy and an opera commissioned for the Carnival season. *Un ballo in maschera* was by no means the first opera to include a masquerade scene, but it is a work which seems to reflect and incorporate the practices of carnival in a remarkably diverse and complex way. In making my analysis I have drawn extensively on the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian thinker who claimed that the physical gestures, tricks and rituals of popular culture had entered into works of art by writers such as Rabelais, Cervantes and Shakespeare through a process he termed carnivalization. In the next chapter I shall introduce the carnival theory of Bakhtin at more length and highlight those concepts which have proved useful in my exploration of the opera.

*Un ballo in maschera* occupies a pivotal place in Verdi's *oeuvre*. Before it, the composer had been accepting regular commissions, mostly from Italian opera houses, and this was his twenty-first opera in twenty years, not counting reworkings and revisions. After 1859 he wrote only five operas in the remaining forty years of his life, and none of these was in response to a commission from an Italian opera house.<sup>45</sup> The operas after *Ballo* are different in character from those before it – moving ever further from Italian musical conventions and from the traditions of *melodramma*. When earlier operas such as *Macbeth* and *Simon Boccanegra* were to be revived, Verdi made substantial reworkings of them, and he made major changes to *La forza del destino* and *Don Carlos* after their premières. Many reasons could be put forward for the change in his attitude to composition, but it would be hard to

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<sup>45</sup> Although he revised *La forza del destino* and *Don Carlos* for their Italian premières at La Scala, the operas were written to commissions from St Petersburg and Paris respectively. Neither *Otello* nor *Falstaff* was written to fulfil a commission from La Scala, though both were premiered there.

argue that the tinkering perfectionist of his later years was not a very different composer from the busy *maestro* complaining in 1858 about being worked like a galley slave.<sup>46</sup>

Within weeks of the première of *Ballo* the world changed irrevocably for Verdi. War broke out in Northern Italy, and during the summer of 1859 Piedmontese and French troops fought with the Austrians in the countryside near Busseto. By September the composer was chosen as one of the representatives sent by the former Duchy of Parma to seek annexation to the Kingdom of Piedmont, and Cavour persuaded him to stand for election to the first Italian Parliament, knowing that Verdi's participation would reflect well on the new national institution.<sup>47</sup> Verdi had reached middle age without being permitted to participate in democratic politics, and suddenly he found himself representing others in a parliament.<sup>48</sup> He spent little time in the Chamber of Deputies, but had the opportunity to see at close quarters the reality of politics. He had become a Public Man, his opinion deferred to and his subscription begged for every kind of project.<sup>49</sup>

New institutions, new laws, new ways of doing things, generally following Northern European models, began to transform Italian cities in the years after 1860. The old cycle of saints' days, feasts and Carnival gave way to a secular calendar tailored to the requirements of banks, lawcourts and public offices. The tradition of

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<sup>46</sup> Letter to Clarina Maffei, 12 May 1858: 'Tornerò forse a Napoli in autunno, ed a Roma in carnevale, se quella Censura vorrà permettere l'opera che era scritta per Napoli; se no, tanto meglio, chè così non scriverò nulla nemmeno nel venturo Carnevale. Dal *Nabucco* in poi non ho avuto, si può dire, un'ora di quiete. Sedici anni di galera!' (*Copialettere*, 572). 'I shall perhaps go back to Naples in the autumn, and to Rome for Carnival, if the Censor there will permit the opera written for Naples; if not, so much the better, because that way I shan't write anything even for next Carnival. From *Nabucco* onwards I haven't had a moment's peace. Sixteen years in the galleys!'

<sup>47</sup> In August 1859 Verdi and Giuseppina Strepponi finally married. The ceremony took place in Savoy, i.e. within the territory ruled by Vittorio Emanuele (though soon to be ceded by treaty to France). Was this formalization of their relationship prompted by a realization that their private life might attract adverse comment if Verdi accepted public office in the unified Kingdom? They invited no friends and made no announcement of the event.

<sup>48</sup> Despite the myths which still persist in popular writing about Verdi as the Bard of the Risorgimento, he spent most of 1848 in Paris working to earn the money for the property he was buying in Sant'Agata. Unlike Somma, he held no public office in the short-lived democratic institutions set up in 1848-9 and as a Parma subject had no opportunity to exercise a vote. See Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 224-45, and John Rosselli, *The Life of Verdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 77-80.

<sup>49</sup> It is interesting to note that the majority of press interviews and memoirs gathered by Marcello Conati relate to the period after 1859. See his *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi* trans. Richard Stokes (London: Victor Gollancz, 1984).

commissioning new operas for each year's Carnival season began to die out, and theatres relied increasingly on a repertory of established works.<sup>50</sup> Masked balls were no longer the social highlight of the year, as the new political establishment preferred formal celebrations: inaugurations, civic welcomes, dinners.<sup>51</sup>

The year 1859 is such a watershed in Verdi's creative and public life that in my study of *Un ballo in maschera* I have tried to make myself deliberately 'blind' to events, developments and writings after 1860. There is such a wealth of correspondence from Verdi's later years that it is tempting to use his statements as evidence for attitudes, dramatic concepts or techniques of composition which can be read back on to earlier works, but I have resisted this temptation. Not only was Verdi living in a social and political world very different from that in which *Ballo* was composed, but in the later part of his life he was collaborating and corresponding with Arrigo Boito, a writer and composer of a younger generation who looked to Baudelaire rather than Hugo as a literary model. Verdi's responses and opinions were naturally shaped by the interlocutor to whom they were addressed, and the practical problems of the projects on which they were engaged. I have therefore kept evidence from their collaboration out of my study of *Ballo*, fascinating though it is on the relationship of text, music and dramatic action.

Looking over the books, programmes and CD covers I have accumulated over the last few years, the image of Verdi used over and over again is that of the Grand Old Man, the reticent, respectable greybeard in the black hat. The image I have tried to keep in mind as I have been writing this study is very different: a wildly capering figure with a thatch of straight black hair, waving his arms about or slumped with boredom, singing along with his performers while his beribboned lapdog yelps and jumps up to join in. This is the Giuseppe Verdi of the winter of 1858-59, sketched by the caricaturist Melchiorre Delfico as he rehearsed *Simon Boccanegra* in Naples. (See Illustration 1.<sup>52</sup>) He is 45 years old, energetic, easily

<sup>50</sup> When Verdi was a young man in Milan, La Scala commissioned 38 new operas between 1831 and 1840. By the 1860s only one or two new operas a year were commissioned there. See John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 170.

<sup>51</sup> See Fiora Gandolfi 'De la première Biennale à 1939' in *Venise en fêtes* ed. Georges Herscher (Paris: Chêne, 1992) for an account of the decline of carnival in Venice after its incorporation into the new Kingdom of Italy in 1866.

<sup>52</sup> Illustrations may be found on pages 214-220.

exasperated, busy preparing one set of singers before rushing off to Rome to begin rehearsals with another cast for the première of his new opera *Un ballo in maschera*. He laughs at Delfico's caricatures – even the ones which joke about his row with the Naples Censor are taken home to be kept in an album at Sant'Agata. He does not know that the world is about to be turned upside down. He does not know that he is going to become a Grand Old Man.

## CHAPTER 1.2

### THE THEORY OF MIKHAIL BAKHTIN

Michel Foucault has drawn attention to the way in which the notion of ‘discipline’ defines the set of objects which may be studied, the methods which may be employed to study them, and the metaphors which may be employed to describe them.<sup>1</sup> Those who work in ways or explore phenomena which fall outside the field of study defined and policed by academic institutions, appointments and publications may make significant breakthroughs but risk being ignored or underestimated by their contemporaries who are working within the prevailing discourse.<sup>2</sup>

The careers and lasting achievements of the brothers Nikolai and Mikhail Bakhtin seem to demonstrate Foucault’s point. Nikolai Mikhailovich Bakhtin studied Classical literature at Petrograd University under F. F. Zelinskii, before moving to the West in 1918 and teaching for several years as a Lecturer in Classics at Hartley University College (later to become Southampton University). In 1939 he moved to Birmingham University where he founded the Linguistics Department. Forty years after the close of Professor N. M. Bakhtin’s academic career neither the Hartley Library of Southampton University nor the British Library holds any publications by him.

His younger brother Mikhail never graduated from university and never held a tenured academic post. He was frequently ill with osteomyelitis, and after many years of pain had one leg amputated as a drastic cure. After Nikolai fled the Revolution, Mikhail joined the circle around the philosopher M. I. Kagan, who encouraged artists and intellectuals to debate new ideas in philosophy, religion, linguistics and culture. Mikhail Bakhtin began to write and give public lectures, publishing a study of Dostoevsky in 1929. In that year a censorship crackdown

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘The Order of Discourse’ (1971) 59-61, extract in *Modern Literary Theory* ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London: Edward Arnold, 2nd edition 1992), 228-30.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault cites the work of Gregor Mendel, the founder of genetics, as an example of a groundbreaking scientist whose work was dismissed as unimportant because it did not conform to the rules of biological discourse in the nineteenth century.

resulted in a sentence of internal exile to Kazakhstan and prevented him from publishing anything else for three decades except an article on book-keeping in collective farms. He continued to write, but left much work unfinished or, so he claimed, used his drafts for rolling cigarettes during a wartime paper shortage. At the age of 50 he secured a teaching post at a provincial training college and began to find a following amongst younger scholars. After his retirement in 1961 he revised his earlier work for publication, and within a few years it was translated into English and French. By the time of his death in 1975, Mikhail Bakhtin's writings were celebrated in Russia and becoming influential in Western academic circles. The centenary of his birth in 1995 was marked with publications and the establishment of a Bakhtin Centre at the University of Sheffield; regular international conferences on his work are held and a quarterly journal on his work appears in Russia; a seven-volume edition of his writings is being prepared by the Russian Academy of Sciences and translations of previously unpublished work are eagerly awaited by Western scholars.<sup>3</sup>

The unorthodox path of Mikhail Bakhtin to publication is significant because it meant that he operated for most of his career outside the confines of an academic discipline. As a young man Bakhtin was attached to no academic faculty, but took part in the lively intellectual life of a group that included graduates and teachers from a variety of fields, as well as the artist Marc Chagall, the composer Dmitri Shostakovich and the pianist Maria Yudina.<sup>4</sup> His first pieces of writing were on philosophy, and it is clear from his later work that he participated in the discussions on linguistics which led to publications on language by other members of the circle during the 1920s. Russian scholars have uncovered early writings and lecture notes

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<sup>3</sup> The biographical information given in Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist's study *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) has to be treated with considerable caution as a result of more recent research on his life by Nikolai Pan'kov and others. For example, Mikhail Bakhtin claimed to have graduated from Petrograd University but there is no record of his even having registered as a student, although he may have attended lectures with his brother. He also claimed to have studied in Germany, apparently borrowing from the curriculum vitae of his mentor, M. I. Kagan. See *Bakhtin/“Bakhtin”*: *Studies in the Archive and Beyond* (South Atlantic Quarterly 97:3/4, Summer/Fall 1998), 580-3, 733-48; *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (revised and expanded 2nd Edition) ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) 3, 132-3. For a recent overview of Bakhtin studies in Russia and the West, see Carol Adlam 'Critical work on the Bakhtin Circle: a new bibliographical essay' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (2001 Revised edition).

<sup>4</sup> Clark & Holquist, 104-5. Craig Brandist, 'The Bakhtin Circle' in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 19 October 2003 <[www.utm.edu/research/iep/b/bakhtin](http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/b/bakhtin)>.

that disclose his interest in Christian theology, and it appears that his exile was punishment for membership of a religious discussion group.<sup>5</sup> His attention then turned to the novel, and his writings after 1929 focus on literature, but seek always to situate it within its cultural, historical and linguistic context.

Caryl Emerson has drawn attention to Bakhtin's description of himself as a *myslitel* or 'thinker', which in Russian 'designates an intellectual with eclectic interdisciplinary interests and a philosophizing bent'.<sup>6</sup> He was uncomfortable with the confines of 'literary criticism', commenting that 'there must be a way out to other worlds'.<sup>7</sup> Anthony Wall has written of him: 'Bakhtin is a broken thinker and the pieces of his thought are strewn in virtually every direction' and he cautions against misguided attempts to pull all the disparate fragments of Bakhtin's writing into a single coherent theory.<sup>8</sup> It is the very range of his interests, and his refusal to be neatly categorised within a particular discipline or school of thought, that has made Bakhtin a significant figure for those who also want to find 'a way out' of traditionally-defined academic fields. This is not always easily achieved within the rigidly-policed subject boundaries of British university research, as David Shepherd has pointed out.<sup>9</sup> However, aspects of his thinking have been taken up and developed in studies of decolonization in Africa and of immigrant women's health in Canada; as a theme for a touring exhibition of historical and contemporary visual art; and for a graph illustrating attitudes to sewage in nineteenth-century cities.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hirschkop, 586. Brandist, 'Introduction'. Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 172-6.

<sup>6</sup> Emerson, 73. Bakhtin so described himself in an interview in 1973 (Emerson, 6).

<sup>7</sup> Emerson, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Wall, 'A Broken Thinker' in *Bakhtin/“Bakhtin”*, 669-98 (p.669).

<sup>9</sup> David Shepherd, founder of the Bakhtin Centre at Sheffield University, in a 1997 interview: 'An awful lot of the way research is done and received is determined these days by government funding, and this reinforces traditional boundaries. It claims to reward interdisciplinary activity, but everything has to be drawn back to a "unit of assessment" ... which is more often than not coterminous with a traditional academic department. I think this is probably impeding genuine interdisciplinarity and collaboration. For example, you might be able to co-supervise a Bakhtin student doing research, but that student has always got to belong to one or the other department involved.... So you get a Bakhtin Centre that is run from a Russian department - which gets measured against other Russian departments in the country that have a rather more traditional profile and also cover a whole range of areas with which Bakhtin has very little to do.' See Peter Hitchcock, 'The Bakhtin Centre and the State of the Archive: An Interview with David Shepherd' in *Bakhtin/“Bakhtin”*, 753-772 (p. 766).

<sup>10</sup> Graham Pechey, 'On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogization, Decolonization' in *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1987), 59-84. Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 'Bakhtin without Borders: Participatory Action Research in the Social Sciences' in *Bakhtin/“Bakhtin”*, 643-68. *Carnivalesque*, National Touring Exhibition organised for the Arts Council of England, co-curated by Timothy Han and Roger

Bakhtin was always ready to adopt and adapt concepts and terminology from those whose ideas excited him. Indeed, it may be because he escaped the formal training of the university essay that he was so little bothered by the need to distinguish between his own work and that of others, shocking modern scholars by the kind of plagiarism which would attract severe sanctions today.<sup>11</sup> At a lecture on biology in 1925 he learned the scientific term 'chronotope' and developed it as a way of describing time and space relationships in literature.<sup>12</sup> During the same period he attended musical performances and discussions at the home of Maria Yudina, and knew Ivan Sollertinsky, who was trained in philosophy but was developing new ideas in the field of opera and music. Sollertinsky encouraged Shostakovich to write his first opera, *The Nose*, and supported his *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* when it provoked outraged criticism instigated by Stalin in 1936.<sup>13</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Bakhtin took the musical term 'polyphony' and made it a key concept in his characterization of Dostoevsky's novels. He quotes a statement by Glinka that 'everything in life is counterpoint' and expands it as a comment both on Dostoevsky's work and more widely as an indication that dialogic relationships exist throughout art and life.<sup>14</sup> Dialogism was a key concept for Bakhtin in his examination and valuation of novels; he celebrates the way in which Dostoevsky allows independent 'voices' to compete with one another within the novel, entering into dialogue with one another and with the authorial 'voice', refusing the closure of a single point of view. In recent years discussions of music have often taken the term 'voice' back from literary criticism and have examined the way in which dialogic

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Malbert, May-December 2000. Peter Stallybrass and Alton White, 'The City: the Sewer, the Gaze and the Contaminating Touch' in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 145.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Poole estimates that about ten pages of Ernst Cassirer's *Individuum und Kosmos* found their way into the text of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*, without acknowledgement of any kind. See Brian Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism' in *Bakhtin/“Bakhtin”*, 537-78, (p.572.)

<sup>12</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

<sup>13</sup> Clark & Holquist, 104-5; Ken Hirschkop, 'The Classical and the Popular: Musical Form and Social Context' in *Music and the Politics of Culture* ed. Christopher Norris (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), 284.

<sup>14</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 42.

relationships operate in song and opera.<sup>15</sup> As Carolyn Abbate points out, the fact that Bakhtin was using a musical metaphor can make this an unsatisfactorily circular process.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1930s, influenced by his reading of Ernst Cassirer's work on Renaissance thought, Bakhtin became interested in the way literary genres shifted in response to the social and religious changes of the late medieval and early modern periods. He sought to account for the emergence of comic writing in the sixteenth century, and prepared his doctoral thesis on François Rabelais. This work, which was substantially revised before publication in 1965, looked outside literature to the customs and traditions of popular culture in medieval Europe to develop a theory of carnival and carnivalization which has proved a powerful tool for the examination of many kinds of works of art. Writing for Russian readers in the mid-twentieth century, Bakhtin wanted to uncover an aspect of the European past which was unfamiliar to them but which he believed was essential for an understanding of certain writers and literary genres:

Our introduction has merely touched upon the exceptionally rich and original idiom of carnival forms and symbols. The principal aim of the present work [*Rabelais and his World*] is to understand this half-forgotten idiom, in so many ways obscure to us. For it is precisely this idiom which was used by Rabelais, and without it we would fail to understand Rabelais' system of images. This carnival imagery was also used, although differently and to a different degree, by Erasmus, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Guevara, and Quevedo, by the German "literature of fools", and by Hans Sachs, Fischart, Grimmelshausen, and others. Without an understanding of it, therefore, a full appreciation of Renaissance and grotesque literature is impossible.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Edward Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera: the Extravagant Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984) 94-5; Gary Tomlinson, 'Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies' in *Disciplining Music* ed. Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 91; Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 10-29.

<sup>16</sup> Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 253: 'That Bakhtin chooses musical terminology (such as "polyphony") to describe phenomena that he perceives in literature does, of course, suggest that there is something tautological in the ease with which his theory may be manipulated to illuminate music.'

<sup>17</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 11. The Russian title of the work is more correctly translated 'The work of François Rabelais and the popular culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance'. Scholars such as Caryl Emerson and David Shepherd who are familiar with the work in Russian point to the need for a new translation as some passages have been omitted in the English text, and some terms inaccurately translated. I have only been able to work with the Iswolsky translation for this study.

Carnival may have been half-forgotten by Russians after decades of Stalinism, but in the Italy in which Verdi was writing *Un ballo in maschera*, it was still celebrated each year with many of the practices described by Bakhtin. Bakhtin's theory of carnival looks back to a historical period when popular festivities were widespread in Western Europe and there finds a means of connecting works of art with their social and political context (as he seeks to do in much of his theory). His studies of Rabelais and Dostoevsky focus on novelists writing at times of rapid ideological change, and he traces within the structure and imagery of their fiction the tensions and shifts in power taking place in the world within which the works were conceived. He also looks more widely at their contemporaries who used the symbolic language of popular festivity to create new kinds of work in response to the competing world views in play around them. If Bakhtin finds the symbolic language of carnival running through the novels of Rabelais and Cervantes, in the dramas of Shakespeare and Lope de Vega, and even in the work of Dostoevsky, Balzac and Victor Hugo, it is worth turning our attention to operas that were explicitly commissioned for the Carnival season in Italian cities to see if the imagery of carnival has found its way into them too. A closer look at the traditions of popular culture with which Verdi and his contemporaries were familiar may illuminate aspects of his work and, in the case of *Un ballo in maschera*, shed light on why he held out so tenaciously against certain changes demanded by the censors.

The period between the failure of the 1848 Revolutions in Italy and the outbreak of war against the Austrians in 1859 was a time when *ancien régime* political and religious certainties were increasingly challenged by a variety of ideologies. Censors scrutinised libretto verse to suppress any words they found politically suspect or irreverent, which only made Italian artists more adept at deploying symbols and images to convey meaning to their audiences, who were practised in discerning the outlines of a conflict behind and beyond an approved text.<sup>18</sup> Verdi and Somma prepared their opera for Naples just as those who called themselves 'patriotti' were regrouping and rethinking their strategy to overthrow Austrian rule in Northern Italy, and a stream of articles and pamphlets was flowing in from political exiles enjoying the press freedom of other European states. The

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<sup>18</sup> Censorship changes and the strategy of 'making applications' are discussed at more length in Chapter 2.1.

hierarchies of absolute monarchy and the Catholic church were increasingly challenged by modernising programmes and the growth of an educated class who could read and discuss new ideas. In some ways this situation echoed the social and political tensions of the sixteenth century in Europe. Bakhtin pointed out that during that period Rabelais, Cervantes and Shakespeare used the language of carnival to create scenes which enacted the conflicts resulting from the new learning of humanism, from the religious challenge of the Reformation and from the increasing power of the monarchy. He also recognised that carnival practices still persisted in Italy long after they had died out in other parts of Europe, and he exemplifies some of his points by reference to Goethe's account of the Roman carnival of 1788, commenting that in Italy 'the central philosophy of the carnival system was preserved long after Goethe's time'.<sup>19</sup> In the middle of the nineteenth century, then, the symbolic language of carnival was still available to Verdi and my study seeks to show how he used it to create scenes of shifting power and focus which reflect something of the ideological conflicts of the world in which he wrote *Un ballo in maschera*.

Bakhtin's work does not simply describe particular aspects of popular culture and carnival tradition then show how they are reflected within literary works. He draws together a range of practices within an overarching theory of carnival, seeing within them the expression of a world view which is distinctive and which explains their effectiveness when incorporated into works of art. While he builds on the work of other writers and philosophers, it is this concept of the 'carnival sense of the world' that is his own powerful contribution to the analysis of the relationship between art works and the context in which they are created. Once he had developed his theory in relation to Rabelais, he returned to his earlier study of Dostoevsky and, in revising it for a second edition thirty years after its 1929 publication, brought the insights gained in examining the literature of sixteenth-century France to his work on a Russian writer of the nineteenth century, at a considerable distance from much of European folk culture.<sup>20</sup> In it he cites the major Italian cities as exemplars in setting up the two opposing world views of his theory: the 'official' and the 'carnival':

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<sup>19</sup> *Rabelais and his World*, 218: 'The clearest, classical carnival forms were preserved in Italy, especially in Rome.' For his discussion of the Roman Carnival described by Goethe, see 244-55.

<sup>20</sup> Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*, 75.

The large cities of the late Middle Ages (such cities as Rome, Naples, Venice, Paris, Lyon, Nuremberg, Cologne) lived a full carnival life on the average of three months out of the year (and sometimes more). It could be said ... that a person of the Middle Ages lived, as it were, *two lives*: one was the *official* life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchical order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence and piety; the other was the *life of the carnival square*, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything. Both these lives were legitimate, but separated by strict temporal boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

Bakhtin ranged widely over all sorts of popular traditions and customs to point to a common theme of challenge to anything claiming to be fixed and immutable, bringing them all together under the heading of 'carnival ... the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal'.<sup>22</sup> He saw that in societies where such popular culture retains its vitality, the lived experience of carnival liberties dialogues in an annual cycle with the lived experience of a social order divided by rank, wealth and power. Where all classes participate alongside one another in communal celebrations, carnival practices and signs are available as a symbolic language without further explication, existing alongside the serious, explicit language and ritual of a hierarchical society. Such language can enter works of art through the process he terms 'carnivalization', taking care to distinguish between the actual gestures and street activities of the annual festival and the way in which they may be incorporated into literature or other art forms:

Carnival itself (we repeat: in the sense of a sum total of all diverse festivities of the carnival type) is not, of course, a literary phenomenon. It is a *syncretic pageantry* of a ritualistic sort. As a form it is very complex and varied, giving rise, on a general carnivalistic base, to diverse variants and nuances depending on the epoch, the people, the individual festivity. Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms - from large and complex mass actions to individual carnivalistic gestures. This language ... gave expression to a unified (but complex) carnival sense of the world, permeating all its forms. This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts, but it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature. We are calling this transposition of carnival into the language of literature the *carnivalization of literature*.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [translation of 1963 edition] 129-30. Italics are in the translated text.

<sup>22</sup> Rabelais, 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 122. Italics are in the translated text.

From the outset, historians have questioned Bakhtin's sweeping generalizations about medieval and Renaissance history. The Russian scholars before whom Bakhtin defended his thesis on Rabelais in 1946 were impressed by the range and originality of his approach, but some took issue with his idealised view of medieval popular culture.<sup>24</sup> Historians of carnival such as Natalie Zemon Davis and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie have shown that popular celebrations could provide opportunities for repression and harassment under the guise of 'merrymaking', and other scholars have taken issue with Bakhtin's simplistic opposition between 'gloomy seriousness' and 'laughter', especially where the medieval Catholic Church is concerned.<sup>25</sup> However, the strength of his theory lies in the concept of carnivalization, and his recognition that non-verbal gestures, images and practices could be understood and deployed by artists in work for audiences who still retained personal experience of carnival.

The concept of time is central to Bakhtin's theory. Carnival, both as the season in the Christian calendar which precedes Lent, and as a more general term for popular customs which are linked to particular dates or occasions, defines itself by the very fact that it does not take place all year round.<sup>26</sup> It is a break from 'normal' life, in which the change of rules is clearly marked out and understood by participants, both at the beginning of the festivity and at its close.<sup>27</sup> It is in this sense that Bakhtin describes carnival as 'the feast of change', its existence demonstrating that the complex regulation of the 'official world' can be overturned and replaced,

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<sup>24</sup> Nikolai Pan'kov, 'Bakhtin's dissertation defence' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (2001 edition), 38-54. Pan'kov reports an interview with Valerii Kirpotin, who was responsible for setting up the panel to consider Bakhtin's thesis: 'I remember I was sitting in my office at the Institute when Bakhtin came in and asked to be allowed to defend his work. He said "I need a higher degree so as to get ration coupons" (they wouldn't give him food coupons without this)'. The needs of the belly were not for Bakhtin simply a matter for academic theorization in the 1940s.

<sup>25</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London: Duckworth, 1975) 97-123; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival: A People's Uprising at Romans 1579-1580* trans. Mary Feeney (London: Scolar Press, 1980). Stallybrass & White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 9-17. Leonid Batkin, 'Panurge's Laughter and the Philosophy of Culture' [1967] summarised in Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* 97-100. Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 71-6.

<sup>26</sup> In the present dissertation I use the word 'carnival' with a small 'c' to indicate the wider grouping of festive rituals and gestures discussed and theorized by Bakhtin, reserving 'Carnival' with a capital 'C' for the season of celebration in the weeks preceding Lent.

<sup>27</sup> The vestiges of this understanding of the temporal limits of feasts can be detected in the disapproval often voiced by older shoppers when Christmas stock appears in supermarkets in September, Easter eggs go on sale in January, and hot cross buns are on the shelves all year round.

albeit temporarily and with the agreement of the authorities. While historians may argue that carnival itself was merely a safety valve, a brief period of release in which the oppressed could let off steam before resuming their toil, Bakhtin perceived that where people regularly experienced the communal freedom of carnival, it was possible to draw on its practices to create literary work that had something of this free and familiar character.

The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance. Rank was especially evident during official feasts; everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling, rank, and merits and to take the place corresponding to his position.... On the contrary, all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age. The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit.... This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. A special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression was formed which we find abundantly represented in Rabelais' novel.<sup>28</sup>

An imaginative space may thus be created in which people's social relationships may be reconfigured and an alternative world conceived. Bakhtin saw the emergence of the novel in the sixteenth century, citing both Cervantes and Rabelais, as the way in which the special conditions of carnival were transposed into literature. In the present study I shall argue that the familiarity of Italian audiences of the mid-nineteenth century with the lived experience of carnival made it possible for Verdi to create a similar kind of imaginative space on the opera stage, transposing gestures and practices into music, text, visual image and physical action to make *Un ballo in maschera* a work with something of the openness of carnival encounters.

One of the recurring features of carnival and similar popular customs was what Bakhtin termed 'uncrowning', the parodic ritual of choosing a person of lowly origin, or a child, to preside temporarily over the feasting and disorder of the season,

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<sup>28</sup> Rabelais, 10.

before being unthrone and returned to his original place at the bottom of the social pyramid. Carnival Kings, boy bishops, fools giving orders at court, the 'lucky bean' monarchs of the Epiphany *galette des rois*, and many other traditions in which power structures were reversed, expressed what he called 'the joyful relativity of all structure and order' which was central to the 'carnival sense of the world'.<sup>29</sup> If a beggar could be elevated from the gutter to wear a paper crown and hold a turnip as an orb, the gesture undermined the claims of monarchs to enduring authority. The noisy processions, laughter-provoking speeches and mock ceremonies of carnival exposed the emptiness of the deference normally shown to social superiors, and the abrupt toppling of the festive king back to the gutter at the end of the season was an annual reminder that all reigns come to an end one way or another. Such playful coronations and reversals of authority could be brought into works of art through the process of carnivalization to undermine expectations of order and stability, and to create an imagined world which carried within it some of the uncertainties and upheavals of a rapidly-changing society. Bakhtin even saw this process at work in Dostoevsky, who was writing - like Verdi and Somma - in a society torn between *ancien régime* certainties and the new ideologies of nineteenth-century urbanization:

Carnivalization is not an external and immobile schema which is imposed upon ready-made content; it is, rather, an extraordinarily flexible form of artistic visualization, a peculiar sort of heuristic principle making possible the discovery of new and as yet unseen things. By *relativizing* all that was externally stable, set and ready-made, carnivalization with its pathos of change and renewal permitted Dostoevsky to penetrate into the deepest layers of man and human relationships. It proved remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into "rotten cords" and the previously concealed, ambivalent, and unfinalized nature of man and human *thought* was being nakedly exposed.<sup>30</sup>

Another opposition which Bakhtin saw as essential to carnival was that between the 'classic body' and the 'grotesque body'. He pointed out the importance in medieval popular culture of the physical processes of eating, drinking, defecation and sex, and his work on Rabelais examined the way in which these activities were brought into literature of the Renaissance. Bakhtin developed a wide-ranging theory

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<sup>29</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 124. *Rabelais*, 81.

<sup>30</sup> *Rabelais*, 166-7. Italics are in the translated text.

of the grotesque which appreciated the unfinished, interactive and regenerative nature of the images and physical gestures typical of carnival:

The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures of the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development.<sup>31</sup>

He saw how this kind of presentation of the body in a state of constant change was very different from the presentation of the human body in classical art, and in artistic traditions which looked to classical models. In the century after Rabelais, such classical ideals began to predominate, both in visual art and in literary language.

Gargoyles gave way to marble statues with an impenetrable surface, which emphasised the individuality and perfection of the figure. Literary language began to exclude any reference to physical processes which transgress the borders of the closed body: sex, pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>32</sup> This classical canon prevailed in elite art forms across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including *opera seria* in which no physical process is ever shown and few are mentioned.

The grotesque gestures of carnival - mimicking physical activities or sticking out body parts normally kept hidden - were intended to provoke laughter, and Bakhtin believed that laughter was a central feature of carnival. He was at pains to distinguish this type of laughter from satirical or negative laughter, which he connected with personal invective.<sup>33</sup> Bakhtin imagined the laughter of carnival as

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<sup>31</sup> Rabelais, 26.

<sup>32</sup> If one were to draw up a catalogue of physical functions which transgress the body's limits and are therefore unmentionable in classical literary language, they would include, in addition to sexual acts, pregnancy and childbirth, defecation, urination, belching, farting, sweating, blowing the nose, sneezing, vomiting, spitting and menstruation. The only bodily fluids which are mentionable seem to be non-menstrual blood and tears. It is interesting to note the frequency with which weeping and shedding blood are mentioned in the literary language of, say, Racine or Metastasio as markers of the intense emotion of a character in conflict with the surrounding world. They may symbolize the restricted channels which remain for self/other relations.

<sup>33</sup> Rabelais, 115.

communal, and expressive of a shared understanding of the folly of any claims to eternal authority or enduring values by human beings who eat, drink, procreate and die. Laughter was particularly directed at death and sex, the means of annihilation and of regeneration, and was therefore ambivalent, mocking death and celebrating copulation as the only way in which the human race can achieve eternity:

[The people's festive laughter] is also directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world. They, too, are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed. This is one of the essential differences of the people's festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times. The satirist places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction. The people's ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it.<sup>34</sup>

Bakhtin's theorization here may shed some light on the intrusion of laughter into solemn moments which occurs in *Un ballo in maschera*, an unusual feature of the opera which has often drawn the attention of critics. In it a prophecy of death and the discovery of a sexual transgression are opportunities for an outburst of mirth, and one that takes place in the communal setting of an ensemble with chorus. Bakhtin's connection of festive laughter with death and regeneration will be used in Chapter 2.2 to examine two key numbers: 'È scherzo od è follia' and 'Ve' se di notte'.

Bakhtin saw another expression of the 'carnival sense of the world' in the diverse practices in which everyday expectations and norms were disrupted by masking, disguise, cross-dressing or turning upside down. All kinds of customs acted out a challenge to the established order, showing that external appearances could be changed and were therefore an unreliable guide to rank or value. If the 'official world' promoted rigid categories and unbending rules, there were a thousand ways in which carnival practices transgressed them, demonstrating through confusion, change and surprise a deep understanding of the shifting, cyclical nature of human life:

Carnival celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world - the new year, the new spring, the new kingdom. The old world that has been destroyed is offered together with the new world and is represented with it as the dying part of the dual body. This is why in carnivalesque images there is so much turnabout, so many opposite faces and intentionally upset proportions. We see this first of all in the participants' apparel. Men are

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<sup>34</sup> *Rabelais*, 12.

transvested as women and vice versa, costumes are turned inside out, and outer garments replace underwear.... This logic of the “wrong side out” and of “bottoms up” is also expressed in gestures and other movements: to walk backward, to ride a horse facing its tail, to stand on one’s head, to show one’s backside.<sup>35</sup>

The simplicity of gestures of reversal and opposition means that they can be deployed in many ways as a non-verbal challenge to the established order, and are therefore one of the most frequent means by which carnival enters works of art through the process of carnivalization, as I shall show in Part II of this study.

Although Bakhtin developed his theory of carnival to examine the rise of the novel as a genre, and in order to explain particular characteristics of the work of Rabelais and Dostoevsky, many of the examples he uses in his discussion of carnivalization are drawn from performance genres. He places Shakespeare the dramatist alongside the novelists Cervantes and Rabelais in his survey of the way sixteenth-century writers drew on popular-festive forms.<sup>36</sup> He also cites medieval performance genres such as *soties* and *farces*, and examines in some detail a thirteenth-century French play, *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*, which he claims as a forerunner of Rabelais’ carnivalized art.<sup>37</sup> This was written by Adam de la Halle for performance on May Day 1262, and Bakhtin finds it significant that the feasting and traditions of the season are incorporated into the dramatic action, drawing attention to the way in which the play ‘has scarcely any footlights, one might say, to separate it from real life’.<sup>38</sup> Bakhtin used the term ‘footlights’ to designate the barrier between a performance and its audience, excluding from his concept of carnival the sort of theatre in which spectators maintain a distance from what is happening on stage:

Carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rabelais, 410-1.

<sup>36</sup> Rabelais, 11, 52, 66, 72, 275. See Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985) for a detailed discussion of Bakhtinian theory in relation to Shakespeare and English performance genres of his time.

<sup>37</sup> Rabelais, 257-63.

<sup>38</sup> Rabelais, 257.

<sup>39</sup> Rabelais, 7.

However, he does see that a work created especially for performance in carnival, and reflecting carnival practices within it, may cross the 'footlights' to its audience in a way not possible for dramas that follow classical models. (Racinian tragedy or *opera seria* are closed off from their audience and assert eternal truths through the mouths of heroic figures of antiquity; they could be performed at any time of year without being any more or any less relevant to their spectators.) In the *Jeu de la Feuillée* local characters are mocked in a comic scene with a doctor and a recent papal decree is criticized by a madman; fairies traditionally associated with May Day revels foretell the future for the author, Adam de la Halle, who appears as a character in the play; the feast to celebrate May Morning is enacted on stage, and the play closes as the festive season ends and all go to church. Bakhtin examines it as a drama intimately connected with the time and place for which it was written, and the customs of the people who would be watching it, and he described it as 'typically carnivalesque from beginning to end'.<sup>40</sup> He values the way that its imaginative space allowed local figures of authority, and even the Pope, to be discussed freely. He also notes the importance of the theme of madness and folly in the play, which are set up as an alternative 'world view' to the generally accepted truths of life outside the festival season:

The feast grants a right to folly. Folly is, of course, deeply ambivalent. It has the negative element of debasement and destruction (the only vestige now is the use of "fool" as a pejorative) and the positive element of renewal and truth. Folly is the opposite of wisdom - inverted wisdom, inverted truth. It is the other side, the lower stratum of official laws and conventions, derived from them. Folly is a form of gay festive wisdom, free from all laws and restrictions, as well as from preoccupations and seriousness.... It permitted the people to see the world with "foolish eyes", and this right belonged not to the "feast of fools" alone but to every feast in its popular marketplace aspect.<sup>41</sup>

As I shall show in Part II, *Un ballo in maschera*, an opera composed for the Carnival season and with a number of explicit carnival features, is an opera that hinges on a deliberate act of folly, an overturning of prudence, laws and restrictions, which leads to other truths being shown to its audience. Riccardo invites his courtiers to 'follegiar' - to engage in folly - at the close of the opening scene, and describes Ulrica's later prophecy as 'folly'. Fooling is a concept that underlies the dramatic action of the opera.

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<sup>40</sup> Rabelais, 257.

<sup>41</sup> Rabelais, 260.

Recent research by Brian Poole and others has shown how far Bakhtin used others' work in the writings in which he set out his theories on literature and language.<sup>42</sup> As Poole puts it, 'when Bakhtin made all his important discoveries and developments he was standing fairly squarely on someone's shoulders'.<sup>43</sup> One of the sturdiest pairs of shoulders he found to stand on were those of Victor Hugo. In the opening paragraphs of Bakhtin's study of Rabelais, he refers to Hugo's inclusion of the Renaissance writer in the pantheon of genius, and he regularly mentions Hugo in his study. However, such mentions are generally to point out that Hugo misunderstood Rabelais; Bakhtin does not make clear how far his own discussion of the grotesque body is based on Hugo's view of Rabelais a century before. In his *William Shakespeare* of 1864 Hugo devoted a major chapter to 'the dynasty of genius' culminating in Shakespeare, in which Rabelais occupied a major place between Dante and Cervantes. He noted particularly that Rabelais was writing at a time when all the medieval certainties were being challenged, and that he used the imagery of the belly - Bakhtin's 'lower bodily stratum' - and of festivity to celebrate the dying of the old world and the birth of the new:

Rabelais a fait cette trouvaille, le ventre.... Lois, moeurs et croyances sont fumier. *Totus homo fit excrementum*. Au seizième siècle, toutes les institutions du passé en sont là: Rabelais s'empare de cette situation; il la constate; il prend acte de ce ventre qui est le monde.... La religion a pris des flancs, la féodalité digère, la royaute est obèse; qu'est-ce que Henri VIII? une panse. Rome est une grosse vieille repue.... Rabelais, médecin et curé, tâte le pouls à la papauté. Il hoche la tête, et il éclate de rire. Est-ce parce qu'il a trouvé la vie? non, c'est parce qu'il a senti la mort. Cela expire en effet. Pendant que Luther réforme, Rabelais bafoue le moine, bafoue l'évêque, bafoue le pape; rire fait d'un râle. Ce grelot sonne le tocsin. Hé bien, quoi! j'ai cru que c'était une ripaille, c'est une agonie; on peut se tromper de hoquet. Rions tout de même. La mort est à table. La dernière goutte trinque avec le dernier soupir.... Tout ce vieux monde festoie et crève. Et Rabelais intronise une dynastie de ventres, Grandgousier, Pantagruel et Gargantua.... Mangez donc, maîtres, et buvez, et finissez. Vivre est une chanson dont mourir est le refrain.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Brian Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer' (cited above) and 'From Phenomenology to Dialogue: Max Scheler's Phenomenological Tradition and Mikhail Bakhtin's Development from "Toward a Philosophy of the Act" to his Study of Dostoevsky' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* Second Edition, 109-35. Ken Hirschkop reports the difficulties faced by the editors of Bakhtin's *Collected Works* in deciding whether to retain or discard plagiarised elements they have detected, in 'Bakhtin in the Sober Light of Day (An Introduction to the Second Edition)' in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* Second Edition, 3-5.

<sup>43</sup> Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer', 567.

<sup>44</sup> Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare* [1864] in *Oeuvres complètes: Edition chronologique* ed. Jean Massin (Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1969) Vol. 12:1, 184-6. 'Rabelais made this discovery: the belly... Laws, customs and beliefs are dung. *All of man becomes excrement*. In the sixteenth century,

Soon after Bakhtin's work became known in the West, the Hugo scholar Anne Ubersfeld noted how closely his theory of carnival fitted Romantic drama, and saw that there were many points of similarity between Bakhtin's theorization and that of Hugo in his 1827 *Préface de Cromwell*.<sup>45</sup> In particular, Hugo devoted much attention to the grotesque, seeing it as constantly in contrast and opposition to the sublime, and he saw drama as the art form which most fully expressed this intersection between the 'downward' and 'upward' impulses of humankind.<sup>46</sup> Long before Bakhtin, he drew attention to the grotesque in the performances of medieval farces, and of the Basoche, in court fools and in depictions of hell.<sup>47</sup> He also wished the language of literature to throw off its classical restrictions (particularly powerful in the tradition of Corneille and Racine) to embrace all the kinds of language, from abuse to Latin tags, which could be heard outside the theatre. More than a century

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all the institutions of the past have reached that point: Rabelais grasps this situation; he notes it; he records this belly which is the world.... religion is heaving its flanks, feudalism is letting its dinner go down, royalty is obese; what is Henry VIII? a paunch. Rome is a fat old lady who has eaten her fill.... Rabelais, doctor and priest, takes the papacy's pulse. He shakes his head, and bursts out laughing. Is it because he has found life there? No, it is because he has sensed death. In fact, it's dying. While Luther is reforming, Rabelais is making fun of the monk, of the bishop, of the pope; laughter made from a death-rattle. The jingles on his cap sound a death-knell. Hey, what's this! I thought it was a party, but it's a death agony; one can mistake a gasp for a hiccup. Let's have a laugh all the same. Death is sitting at table. The last drop is drinking a toast with the last sigh.... All this old world is making merry and dying. And Rabelais enthrones a dynasty of bellies, Grandgousier, Pantagruel and Gargantua.... Let us eat then, my masters, and drink, and be done. Living is a song with death as the refrain.'

<sup>45</sup> Anne Ubersfeld, *Le Roi et le bouffon: étude sur le théâtre de Hugo de 1830 à 1839* (Paris: J. Corti, 1974), 461-5.

<sup>46</sup> Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell* [1827] in *Oeuvres complètes: Édition chronologique*, Vol. 3:1, 59-60: 'Du jour où le christianisme a dit à l'homme: "Tu es double, tu es composé de deux êtres, l'un périssable, l'autre immortel, l'un charnel, l'autre éthéré, l'un enchaîné par les appétits, les besoins et les passions, l'autre emporté sur les ailes de l'enthousiasme et de la rêverie, celui-ci enfin toujours courbé vers la terre, sa mère, celui-là sans cesse élancé vers le ciel, sa patrie"; de ce jour le drame a été créé.... La poésie née du christianisme, la poésie de notre temps est donc le drame; le caractère du drame est le réel: le réel résulte de la combinaison toute naturelle de deux types, le sublime et le grotesque, que se croisent dans le drame, comme ils se croisent dans la vie et dans la création.' 'From the day when Christianity said to man: "You are double, you are made up of two beings, one perishable, the other immortal, one carnal, the other ethereal, one chained by appetites, needs and passions, the other carried on the wings of enthusiasm and reverie, this part always bent down towards the earth, its mother, that part ceaselessly leaping up towards heaven, its homeland"; from that day drama was created.... The poetry born of Christianity, the poetry of our time is therefore the drama; the characteristic of drama is the real; the real results from the quite natural combination of two types, the sublime and the grotesque, which intersect in drama, as they intersect in life and in creation.' Hugo's emphasis on the origins of the grotesque in Christian theology may have been of particular interest to Bakhtin, who is now increasingly being explored as a religious thinker. Charles Lock has traced the Eastern Orthodox theology of the incarnation in Bakhtin's carnival theory; 'Carnival and Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology' in *Journal of Literature and Theology* 5:1 (1991), 68-82.

<sup>47</sup> Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell*, 50-9.

before Bakhtin, he aimed to incorporate the freedom of marketplace abuse and street cries into his work:

Que si nous avions le droit de dire quel pourrait être, à notre gré, le style du drame, nous voudrions un vers libre, franc, loyal, osant tout dire sans pruderie, tout exprimer sans recherche... pouvant parcourir toute la gamme poétique, aller de haut en bas, des idées les plus élevées aux plus vulgaires, des plus bouffonnes aux plus graves, des plus extérieures aux plus abstraites, sans jamais sortir des limites d'une scène parlée.... Le vers au théâtre [est] une forme qui doit tout admettre, qui n'a rien à imposer au drame, et au contraire doit tout recevoir de lui pour tout transmettre au spectateur: français, latin, textes de lois, jurons royaux, locutions populaires, comédie, tragédie, rire, larmes, prose et poésie. Malheur au poète si son vers fait la petite bouche!<sup>48</sup>

It is well known that Verdi admired the dramas of Victor Hugo and chose them as operatic subjects. His enthusiasm went beyond mere approval of a suitable libretto plot, as his correspondence indicates. When *Hernani* was suggested for Venice in 1843, he was keen to persuade Piave to make the adaptation, showing in his letters to the management of La Fenice that he already knew the play well and had picked out the scenes which would be most effective in an opera.<sup>49</sup> Six years later he drew up a list of possible opera subjects which included three Hugo dramas: *Le Roi s'amuse*, *Marion de Lorme* and *Ruy Blas*, and when he was commissioned to write another opera for Venice in 1850, it was *Le Roi s'amuse* that he suggested to Piave, even though he knew it would be difficult to push past the censor.<sup>50</sup> He described the play as 'the greatest opera subject and perhaps the greatest drama of modern times' and called the character Triboulet 'a creation worthy of Shakespeare'.<sup>51</sup> Verdi's knowledge and enthusiasm for the play must have come

<sup>48</sup> *Préface de Cromwell*, 74-5. 'If we have the right to say what should be the style of drama, we should wish for verse that is free, frank, loyal, daring to say everything without prudery, to express everything without trying too hard... able to run through the whole poetic scale, to go from high to low, from the most elevated ideas to the most vulgar, from the funniest to the most serious, from the most exterior to the most abstract, without ever going beyond the bounds of a scene which is to be spoken... Verse for the theatre [is] a form which should include anything, which has nothing to impose on the drama, and which, on the contrary, should receive everything and transmit it to the audience: French, Latin, legal texts, royal oaths, popular turns of phrase, comedy, tragedy, laughter, tears, prose and poetry. Woe to the poet if his verse purses its lips!'

<sup>49</sup> Verdi's letters to Mocenigo, 5 September 1843, to Brenna, 15 November 1843, and to Piave, 2 October 1843, quoted in introduction to *Ernani* ed. Claudio Gallico, Series 1, Vol. 5 of *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan and Chicago: Ricordi and University of Chicago Press, 1985) xxxviii, xl-xli.

<sup>50</sup> The list of possible opera subjects, which Marcello Conati dates to 1849, appears as Plate XI (adjoining page 423) of the *Copialettere* ed. Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio (Milan:[n.pub] 1913 reprinted by Arnaldo Forni Editore, [n.p.]1979).

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Piave, 8 May 1850: 'Oh *Le Roi s'amuse* è il più gran sogetto e forse il più gran dramma dei tempi moderni. *Triboulet* è creazione degna di Shakespeare!!' (Introduction to *Rigoletto* ed. Martin

from the printed page, since the play had been banned in France after the first performance and could not penetrate the censorship of any state in Italy. As he feared, the Venice censor would not pass the first version of the libretto which was submitted, and Verdi's comments on the changes required demonstrate that he had thoroughly absorbed Hugo's theory of the grotesque:

Osservo in fine che s'è evitato di fare Tribolotto brutto e gobbo!! Un gobbo che canta? Perchè no!... Farà effetto? non lo so; ma se non lo so io non lo sa, ripeto, neppure chi ha proposto questa modificazione. Io trovo appunto bellissimo rappresentare questo personaggio esternamente deformè e ridicolo, ed internamente appassionato e pieno d'amore. Scelsi appunto questo soggetto per tutte queste qualità, e questi tratti originali, se si tolgono, io non posso più farvi musica.<sup>52</sup>

Ugliness had become a key concept in the popular understanding of Hugo's theory. In 1842 Benjamin Roubaud published a caricature of the main Parisian literary figures of the day entitled 'Le Grand Chemin de la Postérité', in which the procession is led by Victor Hugo mounted on a winged chimera and carrying a banner inscribed 'Le laid, c'est le beau'.<sup>53</sup> By 1845 Verdi himself owned a copy of this lithograph, which in his sparsely furnished workroom in Milan had pride of place in a frame above the piano.<sup>54</sup> This motto would therefore have been in front of him throughout the composition of *Macbeth* at this period, and goes some way to explaining his famous requirement that Lady Macbeth should be 'ugly and evil' and should sing with a 'harsh, stifled, hollow voice'.<sup>55</sup>

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Chusid, Series 1, Vol. 17 of *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Ricordi and University of Chicago Press, 1983) xiii.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Marzari, President of La Fenice, 14 December 1850, in Introduction to *Rigoletto* Chicago edition, xli. 'Finally I see that they have avoided making Triboulet ugly and a hunchback!! A hunchback who sings? Why not!... Will it be effective? I don't know; but if I don't know, then neither does whoever has proposed this change. I find it quite beautiful to represent this person who on the outside is so deformed and ridiculous, and on the inside so passionate and full of love. I chose this subject just for these qualities, and these original features, and if they are taken out, I cannot write the music for it.'

<sup>53</sup> Reproduced and discussed in James Smith Allen, *Popular French Romanticism: Authors, Readers and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 2-5.

<sup>54</sup> Reported by Marie Escudier after a visit to the composer in May 1845. See Marcello Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1984) 7-9.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Cammarano, 23 November 1848: 'La Tadolini ha una figura bella e buona, ed io vorrei Lady Macbeth brutta e cattiva. La Tadolini canta alla perfezione; ed io vorrei che *Lady* non cantasse. La Tadolini ha una voce stupenda, chiara, limpida, potente; ed io vorrei in *Lady* una voce aspra, soffocata, cupa. La voce della Tadolini ha dell'angelico; la voce de *Lady* vorrei che avesse del diabolico.'; *Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook* ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter (New York: Norton, 1984), 66-67.

Although Verdi did not write another opera on a libretto drawn from Hugo after *Rigoletto* it is clear that his admiration for the French dramatist was undiminished. At the beginning of his collaboration with Antonio Somma he stressed the importance of variety and contrast within opera, and indicated that he found the comic character Don César de Bazan an essential element which he would keep in any adaptation he made of Hugo's drama *Ruy Blas*.<sup>56</sup> At about the same time he was corresponding with Cesare De Sanctis about possible opera subjects for Naples, and finding fault with what was offered:

Non conosco la *Mendicante* e dallo schizzo del sig. Bolognese forse non capisco bene, nonostante parmi un sogetto non tanto originale, nè variato come desidererei.... Dopo l'effetto potente dei drammi di Victor Hugo tutti hanno cercato l'effetto senza badare, secondo me, che in Victor Hugo havvi sempre uno scopo, e dei caratteri potenti, appassionati e soprattutto originali. Osservate quali caratteri sono il Silva, Maria Tudor, Borgia, Marion, Triboulet e Francesco ecc., ecc.<sup>57</sup>

This letter shows how familiar Verdi was with Hugo's whole dramatic *oeuvre*, including plays which had been turned into operas by other composers. His mention of Marion de Lorme alongside Triboulet in the list of Hugo characters echoes his pairing of Violetta and Rigoletto in another letter to De Sanctis, which suggests that he saw the 'fallen woman' capable of redeeming love, whether Hugo's Marion or Dumas' Marguerite, as a similar mixture of the grotesque and the sublime to the mixed character of the court jester.<sup>58</sup> In the years before *Un ballo in maschera*, and in correspondence with Somma, the librettist for that work, Verdi continued to

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Somma, April 1853, in *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma* ed. Alessandro Pascolato (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1913) 46-7. 'Molti hanno trattato *Ruy Blas* escludendo la parte di D. Cesare. Ebbene, s'io dovessi musicare quel soggetto, mi piacerebbe principalmente pel contrasto che produce quel carattere originalissimo.' Salvadore Cammarano had made an adaptation of *Ruy Blas* for de Giosa at Naples in 1851 which cut out Don César and moved the action to fifteenth-century Provence under the title *Folco d'Arles*; see John Black, *The Italian Romantic Libretto: A Study of Salvadore Cammarano* (Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 131-2.

<sup>57</sup> Letter to Cesare De Sanctis, May 1853, in *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 19. 'I don't know the *Mendicante* and from Signor Bolognese's outline perhaps I haven't grasped it properly, but it seems to be a subject which is not as original and varied as I should like.... After the powerful effect of the dramas by Victor Hugo everyone has sought the effect without noticing, as I see it, that in Victor Hugo there is always a purpose, and characters who are powerful, passionate and above all original. Look at characters like Silva, Mary Tudor, Borgia, Marion, Triboulet and François, etc., etc.'

<sup>58</sup> Letter to De Sanctis, 1 January 1853, in *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 26-17: 'A Venezia faccio la *Dame aux Camélias* che avrà per titolo, forse, *Traviata*. Un soggetto dell'epoca.... Io lo faccio con tutto il piacere. Tutti gridavano quando io proposi un gobbo da mettere in scena. Ebbene: io era felice di scrivere il *Rigoletto*... Così del *Macbeth* ecc. ecc.'

admire the dramas of Victor Hugo and to follow his theory outlined a quarter of a century before in the *Préface de Cromwell*.<sup>59</sup>

Verdi and Bakhtin, then, draw much of their aesthetic thinking from Hugo, and in particular, from his theorization of the grotesque. It is thus not surprising that Bakhtinian carnival theory may be applied to many aspects of Verdi's work since the composer sought to incorporate elements of the grotesque, the comic and the lighthearted into many of his operas, in accordance with the precepts of Hugo. As his career developed, his musical language extended to include a diversity of styles and effects, seeming to echo Hugo's desire in his *Préface* for a dramatic language which would include everything from legal texts to popular sayings. It is therefore possible to see in certain scenes the deliberate avoidance of stylistic unity which Bakhtin regarded as a marker of the 'carnival sense of the world', with its rejection of a single authoritarian truth. In particular I shall discuss in Chapter 2.3 the Ball Scene which closes *Ballo* as an example of this kind of carnivalization in music.

Bakhtin's theory of carnival has been used occasionally in musicology. The most notable application has been made by Caryl Emerson, who has used her profound knowledge of the theorist to explore the Kromy Scene in Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Her analysis expresses caution about how far the carnivalization of the dramatic action extends to the music, and in her more recent writing on the opera she plays down the Bakhtinian interpretation.<sup>60</sup> Lawrence Kramer has used the metaphor of carnival cross-dressing to explore the musical structure of Schumann's

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<sup>59</sup> Hugo's discussion of Rabelais in print did not appear until after *Ballo* was written, but there is some evidence that Verdi was familiar with Rabelais from a comment by Giuseppina Strepponi in a letter of 15 January 1859. While Verdi was in Rome preparing *Ballo* for its première, his wife wrote to Mauro Corticelli 'Verdi è così stanco, annoiato, schifato di palcoscenico, che v'è tutta probabilità ch'ei dica riguardo al teatro quanto disse Rabelais ne' suoi ultimi momenti riguardo alla vita: "Baissez le rideau, la farce est jouée"'; quoted in Eugenio Gara, 'Il cammino dell'opera in un secolo d'interpretazioni' in *Bollettino dell'Istituto di Studi Verdiani*, 1:1 (1960), 112. Rabelais' last words, cited in Motteux' biography, may be apocryphal, but Giuseppina's inclusion of them indicates that Rabelais was a writer she might expect an educated Italian to know.

<sup>60</sup> Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 198-206. Caryl Emerson and Robert William Oldani, *Modest Musorgsky and Boris Godunov: Myths, Realities, Reconsiderations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 221-3. Verdi's *La forza del destino*, premiered at St Petersburg in 1862, with its mixture of ceremonial and comic elements, tragic characters and entertaining ones, is a highly carnivalized opera (see my Conclusion to this dissertation) and Verdi's influence on Musorgsky in the composition of *Boris* in the 1860s is acknowledged by Emerson and Oldani.

*Carnaval*.<sup>61</sup> Julie Brown has examined the timbres and structure of Bartók's Third String Quartet in relation to Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque body, seeing a carnival challenge to decorum and tradition in the 'earthy' sounds and styles which disrupt the chamber conventions of the quartet.<sup>62</sup> Matthew Head's work on Mozart's Turkish music has used the Bakhtinian theorization of masking and the grotesque to discuss the musical gestures associated with Turkish exoticism, and has related it to the Vienna Carnivals in which Mozart was an enthusiastic participant.<sup>63</sup>

Surprisingly, few have looked at the performance genre most closely associated with carnival itself: Italian opera, which was until the late nineteenth century commissioned for first performance in the annual Carnival season of each major city. Pierpaolo Polzonetti has applied Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body to certain scenes in Verdi's operas, but has limited his exploration to the belly, leaving aside wider questions of carnivalization.<sup>64</sup> It seems appropriate to look at Italian opera to see how far the gestures and practices of the Carnival might have worked their way into the works commissioned for the festive season, taking Bakhtin's own examination of the medieval May Day play *Le Jeu de la Feuillée* as permission to extend his theorization beyond the novel to a performance genre. Verdi himself described opera in Italy as 'the short-lived child of the Carnival', and the opera which offers itself most readily for such an exploration is the one which takes its name from the entertainment which took place in the closing days of every carnival: *Un ballo in maschera*.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence Kramer, 'Carnaval, Cross-Dressing, and the Woman in the Mirror' in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 305-25.

<sup>62</sup> Julie Brown, *Bartok and the Grotesque* (RMA monograph, forthcoming).

<sup>63</sup> Matthew Head, *Orientalism, Masquerade and Mozart's Turkish Music* (London: Royal Musical Association Monograph 9, 2000) 88, 100-3.

<sup>64</sup> Pierpaolo Polzonetti, 'Feasting and Fasting in Verdi's Operas' in *Studi verdiani* 14 (1999), 69-106. Also 'Anorexia and Gluttony in Verdi's Operas' in *Verdi 2001: Atti del Convegno internazionale* (Florence: Olschki, 2003), Vol. 2, 841-53.

<sup>65</sup> Verdi made a comparison of opera in Germany and in Italy to a German visitor in about 1883, and his comment shows how far Italian opera was still seasonal even at the end of his career: 'Theatres, in the sense of your stable German Court theatres, do not and cannot exist in Italy.... Our winter is not long, and our opera is still the short-lived child of the Carnival, in the impresario's care.' See Marcello Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1984), 147.

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**Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*:**  
**an approach through Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival**

**PART II**

***UN BALLO IN MASCHERA***

## CHAPTER 2.1

### CARNIVAL KINGS: CROWNING, UNCROWNING AND RULE IN *UN BALLO IN MASCHERA*

#### A prince joins in the Carnival

The Carnival [of 1859] was unusually brilliant. The presence of [a] Prince gave an added zest to the revellers and maskers, and shed a fresh lustre over the exciting amusements. His Royal Highness entered with the greatest spirit into the lively scene, driving through the crowded streets, and sharing in the mimic warfare of the confetti.

An apartment in the Corso was engaged for his especial use, and a plentiful supply of bags of confetti and bouquets stored up to pelt the merry maskers with. All eyes wandered to the favoured balcony, where stood the fair and graceful Prince laughing merrily, and showering down a rain of bonbons, for which there was a general scramble amongst the fairer portion of the assemblage, who were all desirous to possess some favoured token from the Royal hand, and bright eyes flashed with triumph when they obtained the coveted prize, or perceived that their own answering shots had reached the right mark, and fallen at [his] feet.<sup>1</sup>

The lively Prince who threw sweets and flowers at pretty women and was pelted in return during the Rome Carnival of 1859 was the future King Edward VII of Great Britain and Ireland. Aged 17, he had been sent on a European tour by his parents with a programme carefully structured by Prince Albert to complete his education, especially in the arts, and to introduce him to his public role through formal audiences intended to cement relations between the British monarchy and rulers whom Queen Victoria's advisers believed were important to their political strategy.<sup>2</sup> Immediately on his arrival in Rome the teenage Prince of Wales paid a visit to Pope Pius IX, the first time since the Reformation that a member of the British Royal Family had entered the Papal presence and therefore a significant pointer to new diplomatic alignments. He had already met King Vittorio Emanuele of Piedmont on the latter's state visit to

<sup>1</sup> 'A', *Early Years of His Royal Highness Albert Edward, Prince of Wales* (London: Ward Lock, 1859), 75. The author was almost certainly the Revd. C. E. Tarver, appointed by Prince Albert to accompany his son on his European tour; the memoir was published to mark the Prince's eighteenth birthday in November 1859.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Sidney Lee, *King Edward VII: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1925), 58-62.

Windsor in 1855, and it was arranged that one of the King's most senior ministers would visit Rome to confer the Order of the Annunciation on the Prince, using traditional ceremonial to demonstrate that the House of Savoy now enjoyed close diplomatic relations with Britain and its rulers.<sup>3</sup> He politely declined a meeting with a French General, Comte Guyon, on the grounds that he was travelling *incognito*.<sup>4</sup> As well as the formal meetings approved by his parents and their political advisers, the Prince of Wales toured the monuments and artists' studios of the city, entertained with dinners and concerts at his apartment in the evening, and attended the opera twice a week.<sup>5</sup> He noted in the journal he was required to keep by Prince Albert that the operas he most enjoyed were *Norma* and Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, the première of which he attended on 17 February 1859.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Vittorio Emanuele and his Chief Minister Cavour had wanted the Prince of Wales to make Turin his first stop in Italy, but according to Lee, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert felt that the lax morality of the Piedmont court might be a bad influence on their son, hence the substitution of an investiture in Rome for a formal visit to Turin. It was the influential writer and politician Massimo d'Azeglio who pinned the Order of the Annunciation on the Prince; he had served as Vittorio Emanuele's minister in London and was therefore well acquainted with Queen Victoria's court and her Government. The investiture was conducted in French and followed by a dinner at which toasts were proposed to both monarchs. (Queen Victoria's determination to keep her son away from the contaminating moral influence of Vittorio Emanuele made no difference to his subsequent conduct; the future Edward VII soon showed he had nothing to learn from the King of Piedmont about keeping mistresses and enjoying himself with card parties and bets on the horses.)

<sup>4</sup> *Incognito* was a device which allowed members of ruling families to visit one another's territories without complying with the strict rules governing state visits during which a prince was treated as the representative of his country. No attempt was made to disguise the real identity of the visitor, but he was able to attend social occasions and meet a wide range of people with greater freedom than would be possible if the usual deference was required to his position as head of state. Gustav III travelled *incognito* as 'Comte de Gotland' to France in 1771, where he was warmly received by Louis XVI but also visited the theatre and met a number of the leading *philosophes*; in 1783 he visited Italy *incognito* and in Rome the Lutheran King of Sweden attended the Christmas Mass celebrated by Pope Pius VI as the 'Count of Haga', at which the Emperor of Austria, Joseph II, was also present under the *incognito* 'Count of Falkenstein'. See *Gustave III par ses lettres* ed. Gunnar von Proschwitz (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 1986), 105-18, 248-50.

<sup>5</sup> The poet Robert Browning was a guest at one of the Prince of Wales' dinners in February 1859. See Jacob Korg, *Browning and Italy* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983), 145.

<sup>6</sup> The *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* of 6 March 1859 reported that the première was attended by 'milordi, altezze e sovrani, la famiglia reale di Prussia, Maria Cristina, e il principe ereditario d'Inghilterra'. See David Rosen and Marinella Pigozzi (eds.), *Un ballo in maschera di Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Ricordi, 2002) 188. Queen Victoria had married her eldest daughter to the heir to the Prussian throne, and the alliance had just been cemented by the birth of a son, the future Kaiser Wilhelm; the public appearance at an important opera première of representatives of these two royal families may have been the occasion to signal their political relationship to observers in Rome. See Jennifer Lee Hall's *The Refashioning of Fashionable Society: Opera-going and Sociability in Britain 1821-1861* (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1996) for a study of public appearance in the opera house as a means of developing and maintaining alliances amongst the hereditary aristocracy.

Nearly seven decades after the reign of Gustav III of Sweden, the monarch on whom the opera's leading role was based, a young prince might still recognise in the stage action of the opening scene a reflection of the world of European courts into which he was making his first entry as a future King. The Prince of Wales himself was expected to behave graciously at formal receptions, to accept petitions and hold levées or dinners to meet subjects and foreign visitors. On such occasions he would expect strict protocol to be observed, but it was possible for him to enjoy himself by choosing an attractive dance partner at a ball, while the custom of *incognito* allowed him to escape from the dignity of his royal status from time to time. The Prince was delighted to be able to go out into the crowd on the Corso to take part in the Carnival, and to experience for himself the freedom from deference which marked the season in Italy. His comments in his journal show that he was pleasantly shocked by customs which were very different from city life in London and his sober and isolated upbringing under the supervision of Prince Albert:

We were pelted continually with bouquets and confetti; and we pelted our assailants with a good will in our turn. We all entered into the fun of it with great spirit.... The good temper of the people was very observable. For in spite of the pushing and the roughness of the play perfect good humour prevailed and one could not help thinking how much violence and quarrelling would ensue if such amusements were attempted in Regent Street.<sup>7</sup>

### **Princes and their powers**

Prince Albert Edward was brought up to take his place at the head of a long-established constitutional monarchy which had worked with elected Parliaments for two hundred years. His mother's policy was guided by her Prime Minister, and she had no power to introduce laws by edict or to imprison her subjects without trial. In Italy the situation was very different. Apart from the brief period of Napoleonic rule, during which a new legal code was introduced and some institutions reformed, Enlightenment concepts of liberty and equality had scarcely left a mark on the way Italians were governed by their princes. The powers of Italian rulers remained much the same as they had been in the medieval world described by Bakhtin, whether they

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Lee, 62.

bore the title King or Archduke, Duchess or Pope.<sup>8</sup> In most of Italy the ‘King’ was all-powerful. His laws and edicts governed all aspects of the lives of his subjects and he had at his command armed men, courts and prisons to enforce them. He had the power of life and death, giving orders to execute transgressors and to conscript men to fight and die in wars he might choose to wage. He was seen as the embodiment of the State and the fountain of all authority within it - institutions could only be set up by Royal Charter, individuals might hold public office only by swearing an oath of loyalty to the King, and most of the work of administration and enforcement was carried out by men who were perceived as ‘the King’s servants’. Crossing the borders of the state was a matter for permission or order of the King: he could refuse a passport or issue a decree of exile.

The power retained by Italian rulers well into the nineteenth century meant that personal petitions to the ruler continued to be the manner in which objectives were sought. At the start of his career Verdi himself sought favours in this way as a subject of the Duchess of Parma. His application for a scholarship to study music in Milan was granted by the local Monte di Pietà only after his father had appealed to Maria Luigia, and the passport which allowed the eighteen-year-old to travel to Milan was headed in enormous letters ‘In nome di sua Maestà la Principessa Imperiale MARIA LUIGIA Arciduchessa d’Austria, Duchessa di Parma, Piacenza e Guastalla.’<sup>9</sup> The appointment as *maestro di cappella* in Busseto was in her gift; in order to secure it he and his supporters sent petitions and visited her court, where her court organist subjected him to a music examination before he was appointed to the post in 1836.<sup>10</sup> In 1843 he begged leave to dedicate *I Lombardi* to her. At an audience with the Duchess he received a diamond and gold pin in return, and shortly afterwards she

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<sup>8</sup> In this chapter I shall use the term ‘King’ for any ruler of an Italian state. During the period 1815-1859 the Pope’s secular rule extended across the central region of Italy, the ‘Papal States’; Southern Italy and Sicily were ruled by the King of Naples as the ‘Kingdom of the Two Sicilies’; the Venetian Republic surrendered to Napoleon in 1797 and after the Restoration was merged with Milan into a larger state ‘Lombardy Venetia’ as part of the Austrian Empire, with rulers appointed from Vienna; Tuscany, Modena and Parma were ruled by Dukes or Duchesses; the former Republic of Genoa was merged with Piedmont and Savoy and ruled by the King of Sardinia.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 38-9. Verdi’s first passport is reproduced in William Weaver, *Verdi: A Documentary Study* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), Plate 19.

<sup>10</sup> Phillips-Matz, 70-4.

attended the Parma première of *Nabucco* in the ducal theatre she had built, at which Verdi was presented with a laurel crown.<sup>11</sup>

As a composer of opera, Verdi worked in an environment subject to regulation by court officials. In Naples, Turin and Parma the leading opera house was located alongside the Royal Palace, forming an extension to the Court, and in other cities the principal theatre was designed to give prominence to the Royal Box.<sup>12</sup> In such princely theatres, the ruler and his officials might decide on the allocation of boxes, or the timing of performances, and there were strict rules about behaviour and applause when the ruling family attended a performance.<sup>13</sup> Members of the Royal Household and Army officers were often granted free entrance as ‘the King’s servants’, and the ruler might order armed men to be present inside the theatre to police the audience during performances.<sup>14</sup> Singers, impresarios, composers and librettists all ran the risk of imprisonment if they displeased the monarch - it was under such a threat from the King of Naples that Cammarano and Verdi prepared *Luisa Miller* in 1849.<sup>15</sup> In such an environment, it is no surprise to find that the ruler also exercised his authority over the kind of work that might be presented and the words that might be sung. The censor in each state was generally a court official and one of his responsibilities was to check any proposed opera for material which might give offence to the monarch, or suggest that monarchs were ever anything but noble, just and chaste.

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 145-6, 149. The Nuovo Teatro Ducale (later renamed Teatro Regio) was commissioned by Maria Luigia as Duchess of Parma and opened in 1829. The Duchess took a close interest in all matters relating to opera performed in it, even setting the starting time of each performance. See John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 85. As Rosselli has observed, this courting of an Austrian princess shows that ‘in the years around 1840 ... Verdi did not behave like [a] rock-hard nationalist’. See Rosselli, *The Life of Verdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the position and role of the San Carlo in Naples, see Michael F. Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 7-10.

<sup>13</sup> Rosselli, *The Opera Industry*, 41-2, 85, 95-6; also John Rosselli, ‘Sociology of opera’ and Edward A. Langhans, ‘Theatre architecture’ in *New Grove Opera*.

<sup>14</sup> Rosselli, *Music and Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (London: Batsford, 1991), 58-9, 63-6.

<sup>15</sup> Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, revised edition 1992), Vol. 1, 419. See also Rosselli, *The Opera Industry*, 13-14, for the imprisonment of impresario Osea Francia by Duchess Maria Luigia of Parma, and 96-8 for arrests as late as the 1850s.

The Church also retained great power in Italy. Until 1870 the Pope was still the ruler of a large State and a major political player. Education was everywhere in the hands of the clergy, and in village communities the parish priest held great power, both of punishment and patronage. Verdi's first paid work as a musician was in his parish church, where he was appointed organist at the age of 10, and it was through Latin lessons with local priests that he was able to advance his education beyond that available at the village school.<sup>16</sup> In Busseto in 1834 his appointment as the town's *maestro* was blocked by the local priest, backed by his Bishop, resulting in a major row, with violence between factions and anti-clerical libels put about, until a compromise was accepted, splitting the town's musicmakers between those who performed in church and those who performed under Verdi's direction in secular concerts.<sup>17</sup> As his career as an opera composer developed, Verdi and his librettists had to ensure that their work conformed to the requirements of religious censorship. No church or Christian ritual was permitted to be shown on stage: the Archbishop of Milan objected to the on-stage baptism of Oronte and other religious elements in *I Lombardi* in 1843.<sup>18</sup> Although the German play on which *Attila* was based had the historic figure of Bishop (later Pope) Leo turn the Hun and his army back from the gates of Rome, the adaptation by Temistocle Solera for Verdi in 1846 was censored by the religious authorities in Venice. No comprimario bass could be permitted to impersonate a Pope, so the character was described as 'Leone, vecchio romano'.<sup>19</sup>

Religious authority still upheld regal authority in 1850s Italy. When Pius IX was elected Pope in 1846, many reformers looked to him as the potential leader of an Italy freed from Austrian domination, through the neo-guelph programme for a federation of Italian states proposed by Vincenzo Gioberti.<sup>20</sup> However, their hopes that the Pope might support the overthrow of Austrian rule were crushed when the

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<sup>16</sup> Phillips-Matz, 17-22. Frank Walker, *The Man Verdi* (London: Dent, 1962), 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> Phillips-Matz, 54-61, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Budden, Vol. 1, 116, 130; Rosselli, *Music and Musicians*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Budden, Vol. 1, 247, 256-7. The religious authorities managed to have it both ways, censoring the appearance of Pope Leo yet retaining the vision of St Peter and St Paul defending Rome which he conjures up to the terrified Attila. The King of the Huns prostrates himself in a display of submission to the power of the Church of a kind prelates would have been glad to see from Catholic Kings.

<sup>20</sup> Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli Italiani* [1843], extracts translated in *The Making of Italy 1796-1866* ed. Denis Mack Smith (London: Macmillan, 1988), 74-84.

uprisings of Spring 1848 were met with a Papal Allocution in which all Italian subjects were ordered to remain obedient to their sovereigns; Catholics must not take up arms against Austrian rulers and must trust in the benevolence of those set in authority over them.<sup>21</sup> The Divine Right of Kings was therefore still maintained in Italy, long after it had ceased to be claimed by monarchs in Northern Europe.<sup>22</sup> Pius IX was himself deposed and forced to flee Rome late in 1848; he was restored to power by a French army in 1850 and subsequently asserted the authority of the Church ever more strongly in the face of anti-clericalism and the advance of secular ideology.<sup>23</sup>

### Monarchy on the opera stage

Although it was not permitted to present a Pope on the opera stage, the origins of Italian opera in imitation of Classical drama meant that other figures of authority were regularly shown, as the deities and rulers of the ancient world were accepted as suitable characters, and the roles were played by singers chosen for their musical ability rather than their social status. (An obvious point to make, perhaps, but one which might surprise those from other cultures where performance has a more ritual function.) *Opera seria* flattered the prince in the Royal Box by demonstrating the power of magnanimous rulers to reward virtue, punish vice and pardon offenders in works such as *La clemenza di Tito* by Metastasio, which was set 40 times between its first appearance for the name-day of Emperor Charles VI in 1734 and its best-known incarnation as the opera commissioned from Mozart to celebrate the

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<sup>21</sup> Papal Allocution of 29 April 1848, extract translated in Andrina Stiles, *The Unification of Italy 1815-70* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986), 23.

<sup>22</sup> The doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings was set out by James I of England as follows: 'Kings are justly called gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth; for if you will consider the attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a king. God hath power to create or destroy, make or unmake, at his pleasure, to give life or send death, to judge all and to be judged nor accountable to none; to raise low things and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both souls and body due. And the like power have kings: they make and unmake their subjects, they have power of raising and casting down, of life and death, judges over all their subjects and in all causes and yet accountable to none but God only. I conclude then this point touching the power of kings with this axiom of divinity, That as to dispute what God may do is blasphemy, so is it sedition in subjects to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power.' James I, *Works*, Chapter 20 quoted on [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine\\_Right\\_of\\_Kings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_Right_of_Kings) (5 February 2004)

<sup>23</sup> Pius IX proclaimed the doctrine of Papal Infallibility in July 1870, just three months before Vittorio Emanuele's army and a democratic plebiscite put an end to the Papacy as a Temporal Power and completed the unification of Italy under a constitutional monarchy; see Stiles, *Unification of Italy*, 81-2.

coronation of Emperor Leopold II as King of Bohemia in 1791.<sup>24</sup> In nineteenth-century Italy there were still many operas on subjects drawn from classical antiquity: amongst others *Semiramide* (Rossini, 1823), *Belisario* (Donizetti, 1836), *Medea* (Pacini, 1843), and *Orazi e Curiazi* (Mercadante, 1846). However, after the upheavals of the French Revolution, Napoleonic rule and the Restoration made by the Congress of Vienna, theatrical tastes began to change. The English tradition of history plays influenced the development of new styles of drama and opera across Europe, and the works of Sir Walter Scott became immensely popular.<sup>25</sup> At Paris in the 1820s and 1830s the new generation of dramatists led by Hugo and Dumas drew on *mélodrame* and the plays of Shakespeare and Schiller to devise *drames* on subjects from medieval and Renaissance history, which were rapidly adapted for Italian audiences in the new operatic genre of *melodramma*.<sup>26</sup> Western European royalty were impersonated on the operatic stage with increasing frequency: Elizabeth I of England appeared in Rossini's *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* (1815), Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* (1835) and *Roberto Devereux* (1837), while Carlo Coccia and his librettists took audiences on a tour of European courts with *Donna Caritea, regina di Spagna* (1818), *Maria Stuarda, regina di Scozia* (1827), *Edoardo in Iscozia* (1831), *Enrico di Monfort* (1831), *Caterina di Guisa* (1833) and *Giovanna II, regina di Napoli* (1840).

Carnival was the season in which such presentations of monarchy on stage were made. *Opera seria* was the most prestigious and expensive genre of performance, and it was customary for the leading opera house in each major city to commission one as the highlight of the Carnival season, while the cheaper *opera buffa* could be put on to fill the bill at other times of year. When *opera seria* gave way to *melodramma*, it was still usual to put the lion's share of the annual budget into the kind of opera commission which would make the best display during Carnival, and this was generally a subject which offered opportunities for palatial sets, lavish silk

<sup>24</sup> *New Grove Opera*, 'La Clemenza di Tito'.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Osborne in *The Bel Canto Operas* (London: Methuen, 1994) indicates that by 1840 there were at least 25 Italian operas based on Scott (94). See also Roger Fiske, 'Sir Walter Scott' in *New Grove Opera*.

<sup>26</sup> See Christopher Smith, 'Victor Hugo' in *New Grove Opera*, also David Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) for the change in taste in Italy from the 1820s (395-8).

costumes and a chorus of courtiers, loyal subjects or soldiers. Audiences wanted to see princely grandeur on stage during Carnival, and grumbled if the impresario skimped in his presentation of Court life.<sup>27</sup>

At the time Verdi was learning his trade as a composer the major theatres were expected to offer fresh commissions or local premières of recent works in their Carnival season. (Repertory opera only began to make inroads in Italy in the late 1840s, with the slump in opera takings during the upheavals of 1848-9 pushing theatre managements into looking through the back catalogue for successful works that might be revived without too much outlay.<sup>28</sup>) A composer and librettist who received a new commission would be looking for a subject which would catch the attention of a particular audience at a particular point in time. If an opera based on an English novel or a French play had been successful last season, they could skim through other similar publications to find a setting and plot to catch the prevailing fashion. If a dramatic situation had made an impact in the theatre, they could shape their subject to create a similar scene to delight their audience again. By the late 1850s Verdi had read widely and regularly attended the theatre in Paris, as well as keeping up to date with the latest operas by his contemporaries, and he was always alert to audience reaction, either to his own work or that of others. In choosing an opera subject and developing a musical treatment of it, he kept his eye firmly fixed on the audience who would be in the theatre in six months' time, not on the canonisation of posterity.

The rigours of censorship to which *Ballo* was exposed in 1858-9 were only the most extreme form of the usual princely regulation within which Verdi had worked since the start of his career. Composers, librettists and audiences accepted that opera subjects, especially those originating from north of the Alps, would be checked by an official, just as imported goods were subject to customs inspection at the borders of the state. The removal of a few words or a change of setting was the price that had to be paid to bring home something interesting and enjoyable. Verdi had imported French subjects into Italian opera houses previously, generally reaching

<sup>27</sup> Rosselli, *The Opera Industry*, 34, 40, 71, 162.

<sup>28</sup> *The Opera Industry*, 169-171.

a compromise without recourse to threats of litigation. Victor Hugo was considered a dangerous liberal by many in the *ancien régime* courts, and his play *Le Roi s'amuse* had even been banned in Paris after its first performance. Nevertheless, in Verdi's operatic adaptation it played all over Italy, whether as *Rigoletto* with the 'King' turned into the Duke of Mantua, or as *Viscardello* where he is the Duke of Nottingham, or as *Lionello* where he is a Venetian patrician, or as *Clara di Perth* where he is Enrico di Rotsay, Barone di Perth; in fact, Martin Chusid notes that in the first ten years after its première the opera was performed more often in one of its other disguises than as *Rigoletto*.<sup>29</sup> However, opera audiences had no difficulty in identifying the subject and outside the theatre the music was published and played everywhere as 'from *Rigoletto*', whatever the literary censors insisted on calling the work in the printed libretto. *Les Vêpres siciliennes* could not be brought uncensored from Paris into Italian theatres as the legend of the Sicilian Vespers was a powerful myth of the patriotic movement, demonstrating violent opposition to foreign rule. The version premièred in Italy moved the setting to seventeenth-century Lisbon under Spanish rule, and gave the opera the name of the soprano character, *Giovanna de Guzman*. In Naples in 1857 the opera was put on in the Teatro Nuovo as *Giovanna di Sicilia*, set in Sicily but at the time of Saracen rule, and six months later at the San Carlo as *Batilde di Turennna*, set in thirteenth-century France with no nationalist element at all in the plot.<sup>30</sup> It was this bowdlerized version of his opera that was put on at Naples to greet Verdi's arrival there in January 1858; he was quite happy to attend a performance and accept ovations as composer. It is clear that everyone knew quite well that the opera was his *Vêpres*, and a local poet wrote a verse to him invoking the 'shade of Procida'.<sup>31</sup> In other words, Verdi and his audiences played the game of compliance with censorship, and were adept at seeing beneath the *incognito* of changed names and settings to the dramatic substance beneath.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Martin Chusid, 'Verdi and censorship', paper presented at Tenth International Conference on 19th-century Music, Bristol, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Chusid, 'Verdi and censorship'.

<sup>31</sup> Alessandro Luzio, introduction to 'Le caricature verdiane di Melchiorre Delfico' in *Carteggi verdiani* (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1935) Vol. 1, 312-32.

<sup>32</sup> Similar skills were deployed in Russia during its long history of repressive government: Caryl Emerson draws attention to the way 'Aesopian language' was used in nineteenth-century Russia in *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8-9.

F. W. J. Hemmings has shown how audiences at Paris used the strategy of applauding lines in a well-known play to signal a critique of government or a view of a current political topic; this technique of ‘making applications’ allowed public opinion to be expressed with impunity in a repressive society.<sup>33</sup> While the practice died out in the French theatre as censorship was relaxed, in Italy audiences still made use of a similar response to signal their opinion even in an auditorium policed by carabinieri. At a performance in Rome of *Attila* in late 1847, an American visitor noted that Ezio’s patriotic cabaletta ‘È gettata la mia sorte’ was greeted with great applause, commenting ‘The music is in itself very pleasing, but that was not the reason ... It was an Italian who sang this strain.’<sup>34</sup> In the heated atmosphere which preceded the insurrections of 1848, expressions of patriotic enthusiasm became so common in the theatre that an edict was issued by the governor of Milan prohibiting any applause or whistling which singled out certain passages in a drama.<sup>35</sup> Eleven years later, during the same Carnival season in which *Ballo* was premiered, the chorus ‘Guerra, guerra’ in *Norma* was loudly applauded with calls for an encore, and performances of *Le Prophète* and *La Muette de Portici* were also taken as opportunities for patriotic opinion to be expressed.<sup>36</sup>

The literate classes who attended opera performances read newspapers, essays, pamphlets and fiction published in states with constitutional governments; court censors might regulate opera libretti but found it impossible to control the circulation of books and ideas. The audience at the Teatro Apollo in 1859 was living under *ancien régime* rule, both ecclesiastical and temporal, but they had come to watch an opera based on a subject drawn from the Paris theatre and this always brought with it the possibility that ideas and values had been smuggled in which might be at odds with the ideology of absolutism. The opera house offered the chance to

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<sup>33</sup> F. W. J. Hemmings, *Theatre and State in France 1760-1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 123-36.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Fuller writing from Rome, 30 December 1847 in *These Sad but Glorious Days: Dispatches from Europe 1846-1850* ed. Larry J. Reynolds & Susan Belasco Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 180.

<sup>35</sup> Notice in the *Gazzetta privilegiata di Milano*, 22 February 1848, quoted in Roger Parker, *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 36.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Sawall, “‘Viva V.E.R.D.I.’: Origine e ricezione di un simbolo nazionale nell’anno 1859” in *Verdi 2001: Atti del convegno internazionale* (Florence: Olschki, 2003), Vol. 1, 123-31 (p.127).

glimpse on stage an alternative to the official life of princely regulation and deference, an opportunity to imagine a world different from the status quo.

### **Bakhtinian crowning and uncrowning**

Bakhtin saw carnival festivities as a ‘second life outside officialdom, a world in which all ... participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year’.<sup>37</sup> As I have shown in the previous chapter, he saw the practice of crowning a lowly person or a child and then uncrowning him at the close of the feast as one of the central practices of carnival, expressing a challenge to the claims of Kings and other authorities to enduring, God-given power. The Carnival season in the opera house was a time when singers, generally outsiders to the city and sometimes considered to be of dubious morality, were elevated to royal status on the stage, magnificently robed and attended by ranks of followers and servants, commanding the attention of all present, even when the King himself was watching from the Royal Box. When the curtain fell, they put on their street clothes and went back to live in lodgings, and at the close of the season they packed their trunks and left town.

Carnival crowning and uncrowning were therefore enacted regularly in the theatre whenever the character of a ruler was performed on the stage. The Carnival Kings of opera issued proclamations, declared war, ordered executions and pardoned offenders; their status was signalled by hymns of praise, during which the chorus might perform gestures of deference such as bowing, kneeling or raising their hands in supplication. For Carnival commissions, the presentation of such rulers was generally solemn and serious, but in the genre of comic opera the elevation of a nobody to a position of authority could be viewed comically. Rossini’s *La Cenerentola* provokes laughter through the exchange of status between the Prince and his valet Dandini, and the joking appointment of Don Magnifico to preside over the royal cellars creates the opportunity for a parodic ‘decree’ about the typically carnival practice of getting drunk. At the start of his career Verdi wrote a single comic opera, *Un giorno di regno*, in which a commoner briefly takes the place of King Stanislas of Poland; he tricks the greedy State Treasurer, presides over a duel between cowards which pokes

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<sup>37</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6.

fun at the aristocratic honour code, and is uncrowned at the end of the opera when the real King has established himself on his throne. However, Belfiore also recognises and rewards loyalty and military courage in the young officer Edoardo, commenting that even if he only reigns for a day he can show how a King should rule. Verdi did not choose the libretto himself, and the opera was not a success, but it was a chance to see how the presentation of a Carnival King on stage might work as a critique of the rule of real kings.<sup>38</sup>

The circumstances of opera as a central part of the Italian Carnival season suggest that it is a genre in which the process of carnivalization might take place, incorporating carnival gestures and practices within the work of art itself. In the previous chapter I have discussed the example Bakhtin himself gave of a play, *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*, written for the medieval May Morning celebrations, which took the festive traditions of the day into the script and action of the performance. He was careful to distinguish between the activity of the crowd in the marketplace (carnival) and the use artists make of popular customs and gestures within their authored work (carnivalization). As the spirit of carnival is a challenge to all claims of enduring value and authority, when it enters an art work it is essentially ambivalent. A carnivalized work never asserts a final truth, or brings its audience to an inescapable conclusion. Bakhtin saw the novels of Verdi's contemporaries Balzac, Sand, Hugo and Dostoevsky as carnivalized literature because in them the position of the author 'excludes all one-sided or dogmatic seriousness and does not permit any single point of view, any single polar extreme of life or of thought, to be absolutized'.<sup>39</sup> The concept of carnivalization is helpful in distinguishing between a closed political message, and the creation of an open-ended imaginative space in which a contemporary audience might visualise an alternative reality. *Un ballo in maschera* is not a polemic opera. With the exception of *La battaglia di Legnano*, Verdi's

<sup>38</sup> The opera was revived at a minor theatre in Naples in July 1859, when the *ancien régime* was beginning to totter after the outbreak of the war to oust the Austrians from Northern Italy. The impresario may have chosen *Il finto Stanislao*, as it was titled, to appeal to a local audience familiar with the recent history of Verdi's clash with the authorities over the presentation of a King from Northern Europe on the stage of the San Carlo. Cesare de Sanctis' letter reporting on it to Verdi mixes comments about the music and the applause it received with news of how keenly the progress of the war was being followed in Naples; *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 165.

contribution to the 1848 Revolutions, the composer never wrote an opera with an explicit patriotic message. Audiences may have ‘made applications’ from time to time by applauding numbers like ‘Va pensiero’ and ‘O Signore, dal tetto natio’ to give vent to their own patriotic feelings, but there is little support in Verdi’s correspondence or in the reception history of his works to show that he intended to write operas with a ‘message’, or that audiences always found a ‘message’ in them.<sup>40</sup>

The season of Carnival was a time when the hungry poor of medieval Europe could imagine what the world would be like if they could eat their fill and drink till they fell over; many popular rituals centred on communal eating and alcohol consumption, and the presiding Carnival Kings were often chosen for their immense girth or notorious drunkenness. In the Italy of the 1850s the opera-going classes were well-fed, but they hungered for the freedoms and benefits which were enjoyed by Europeans beyond the Alps. This dissertation does not argue that *Un ballo in maschera* is ‘about’ Italian politics of the 1850s. Its carnivalization works in many directions and the attention of the audience is not focused by composer and librettist on a single meaning. However, I do wish to argue that one of the ways it fed the imaginations of its audience in the late 1850s was by setting up a Carnival King who during his brief reign on stage presides over a Land of Cockayne in which his rule is validated by the love of his people, where he endeavours to make them happy, to respect their rights, to reward them for their service and to lead them to military success. The violent ‘uncrowning’ of this King by an assassin demonstrates the fragility and mutability of any régime, good or bad.

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<sup>40</sup> See Roger Parker, “‘Va pensiero’ and the Insidious Mastery of Song” in *Leonora’s Last Act* for an examination of the reception history of the famous chorus (33-8). Rosselli’s *Life of Verdi* explores the shifting situation in which reception of Verdi’s works as ‘patriotic’ changed with the political climate (73-9).

## A different kind of King

I have outlined earlier in this chapter the characteristics of absolute rule of the kind that was exercised by most princes in the Italy of the late 1850s. There was, however, an exception: after 1848 Piedmont was governed by a King whose powers were limited by a written constitution. The Statuto had been drawn up in a rush as insurrections broke out across Italy in the Spring of 1848, and King Carlo Alberto of Piedmont followed the lead of the King of Naples and the Grand Duke of Tuscany in granting a constitution with an elected assembly. Although Carlo Alberto had initiated some modest liberal reforms and relaxed press restrictions before 1848, it is likely that he saw the signing of the Statuto as a temporary tactic to keep his throne in troubled times, intending to withdraw it once he had regained the upper hand.<sup>41</sup> He led the military campaign in Northern Italy against the Austrians, but the Piedmontese and their volunteer allies were not equal to the reinforced might of the Austrian army under Marshal Radetzky. They were defeated at Custoza, Milan was reoccupied by the Austrians, and in March 1849 another defeat at Novara was swiftly followed by the abdication of Carlo Alberto in favour of his son, Vittorio Emanuele.

The circumstances of Vittorio Emanuele's accession were unusual and highly dramatic by the standards of nineteenth-century European monarchs, and indicate why he was subsequently perceived as a soldier of experience and courage. He was 29 years old and had been participating in the campaign against the Austrians for twelve months. During the battle of Novara he was in the thick of the fighting, seeing his friend have an arm blown off beside him and his brother have three horses killed under him. After the defeat the starving troops mutinied and began to pillage the town; Vittorio Emanuele dodged the bullets of his own men to try to stop the looting and rape, splitting heads open with his sabre as his fellow officers killed many deserters. It was at this point that his father decided to abdicate and left the battlefield in a carriage; Vittorio Emanuele's first night as King of Piedmont was spent in a bivouac under four inches of snow.<sup>42</sup> His first task was to seek an honourable peace from

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Clark, *The Italian Risorgimento* (Harlow: Longman Seminar Studies in History, 1998), 48, 51.

<sup>42</sup> Vittorio Emanuele wrote regularly to his wife in 1848-9, giving a vivid picture of the military campaign and his thoughts about it. These letters in endearingly misspelled French are collected in

Marshal Radetzky in order to allow his starving men to go home.<sup>43</sup> He was doubly disappointed, since his ambition had been to distinguish himself as a soldier rather than to step into his father's shoes so soon. His longing for the military life did not wane after his accession, and in 1855 he confided to Queen Victoria that he did not like being a King, and that fighting was the only thing he had learned how to do.<sup>44</sup>

Within months of Vittorio Emanuele's accession the constitutional governments set up the previous year in Milan, Tuscany, Venice, Sicily, Naples and Rome had all been defeated, and the absolutist *régimes* reinstated with greater severity than before. Austrian troops were stationed in the major cities of Northern Italy and the Papal States, while Napoleon III kept French troops in Rome after restoring the Pope as Temporal Power.<sup>45</sup> Only in Piedmont did the ruler uphold the constitution granted in 1848. Vittorio Emanuele had publicly sworn allegiance to it in front of his troops, and when peace terms were offered by Austria that were an acceptable compromise, the King submitted them for ratification to the new Piedmont Parliament, elected in accordance with the Statuto. The Preamble to the Statuto set out the presumed relationship between the King of Piedmont and his people:

Considerando Noi le larghe e forte istituzioni rappresentative contenute nel presente Statuto Fondamentale come un mezzo il più sicuro di raddoppiare i vincoli d'indissolubile affetto che stringono all'Itala Nostra Corona un popolo, che tante prove ci ha dato di fede, d'obbedienza e d'amore abbiamo determinato di sancirlo e promulgarlo, nella fiducia che Iddio benedirà le pure

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*Le Lettere di Vittorio Emanuele II* ed. Francesco Cognasso (Turin: Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, 1966), Vol. 1.

<sup>43</sup> His concern for the ordinary soldiers is made clear in his letter to his wife on the day after his accession: 'J'ai fait une allocution aux troupes aujourd'hui, elles ont prêté serment. Ces pauvres soldats ont tant crié *Vive le roi* et m'ont fait tant tant de fêtes. Ils sont si contents que cette maudite guerre soit finie et puis ils me veulent tant de bien. Cette nuit passée par comble de malheur il vint encore 4 doigts de neige au bivouac et on vit d'air car on ne trouve pas à manger depuis bien des jours. J'ai fait déjà tant de bonnes choses hier et ce matin et j'ai tout combiné dans ma tête pour ce pauvre pays.' (25 March 1849 in *Lettere*, Vol. 1, 286) 'I made a speech to the troops today, and they swore their oath. These poor soldiers shouted *Long live the King!* and gave me such a warm reception. They are so happy that this wretched war is over and they wish me well so much. Last night, as if things weren't bad enough, four inches of snow fell on the bivouac and we are living on fresh air as there hasn't been anything to eat for days. I have already done so much that is good yesterday and this morning and I have thought up so much in my head for this poor country.'

<sup>44</sup> Queen Victoria in Journal entry, December 1855, cited in Denis Mack Smith, *Victor Emanuel, Cavour and the Risorgimento* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 54.

<sup>45</sup> Clark, *The Italian Risorgimento*, 62.

Nostre intenzioni, e che la Nazione libera, forte e felice, si mostrerà sempre più degna dell'antica fama, e saprà meritarsi un glorioso avvenire.<sup>46</sup>

The constitution reserved many powers to the King, including that of commanding all land and naval forces, declaring war and making peace. However, it did provide for a parliament composed of an elected House of Deputies and an appointed Senate, with the right to approve any taxes and to impeach ministers. The Statuto guaranteed individual liberty, equality before the law, privacy and property rights, and a free press within certain limits. Article 68 declared that 'Justice emanates from the King and shall be administered in his name by the judges whom he appoints' while Article 8 provided that the King might grant pardons and commute sentences.

The King's commitment to the Statuto struck a very different tone from that of the rulers of other parts of Italy, and Piedmont began to look an increasingly attractive state to those forced into exile because of their political activities in 1848, and to those who remained at home to ponder the failure of their hopes. When Radetzky imposed severe economic sanctions on those who participated in the Lombardy uprising and a failed uprising in Milan in 1853, exiles flocked to Turin, encouraged by subsidies from the Piedmont parliament.<sup>47</sup> Vittorio Emanuele's reputation as a soldier and his commitment to maintain an effective army began to figure in the calculations of patriots whose efforts to establish democratic government in 1848 had been swept away by the military forces of Austria and France. Giorgio Pallavicino, a Lombard exile in Turin, published an open letter in 1854 pointing out that the Austrian army could not be driven from Italian territory without regular troops and artillery; as Piedmont could supply these, patriots aspiring to Italian independence would have to rally behind the King of Piedmont.<sup>48</sup> Daniele Manin,

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<sup>46</sup> Preamble to the Constitution of Piedmont, granted 4 March 1848, in *Lo Statuto Albertino Commentato* ed. Giovanni Conti (Rome: Libreria Politica Moderna, 1945) 13-14. 'As we consider the broad and strong representative institutions contained within the present Basic Statute as the most secure means of reinforcing the bonds of indissoluble affection which bind to Our National Crown a people which has given so many proofs of its loyalty, its obedience and its love, we have determined to sanction and promulgate it in the confidence that God will bless Our good intentions, and that the Nation, free, strong and happy, will show itself always worthy of its ancient reputation, and will know how to gain the reward of a glorious future.' Mack Smith translates the main Articles of the Statuto in *The Making of Italy*, 136-9.

<sup>47</sup> Clark, 63.

<sup>48</sup> Open letter from Giorgio Pallavicino, 14 November 1854: 'Italiano anzitutto, io cerco forze italiane per la santa guerra della nostra indipendenza. Non bastarebbe a tal uopo l'insurrezione

who had been the leader of the Venetian Republic established in 1848, published from exile in Paris a call to former republicans to accept the leadership of the King of Piedmont, provided that all were working together to 'make Italy'.<sup>49</sup>

The credibility of Vittorio Emanuele as a military and political leader was enhanced in 1855 when the King insisted on sending troops to the Crimean War in support of the British and French forces. 18,000 Piedmontese fought in the war, and as a result the Italian Kingdom secured a place at the table with France and Britain for the peace conference which followed it.<sup>50</sup> Vittorio Emanuele's Chief Minister, Camillo Cavour, used this platform to establish the status of Piedmont as a constitutional monarchy on the same footing as those of Northern Europe, and to form political alliances with France and Britain, both countries with an interest in reducing the power of the Austrian Empire. A state visit to Queen Victoria by the King of Piedmont set a public seal on the new alliance.

London, Paris and Turin were centres to which Italians had fled after the crackdowns and orders of exile which followed the failure of the 1848 Revolution, and from those cities poured a stream of publications addressed to fellow patriots debating the future of Italy and how it was to be achieved. Newspapers in France, Britain and Belgium were willing to publish material submitted by Italian political exiles, and articles printed there were often reproduced in newspapers and journals based in Piedmont. Giuseppe Mazzini, Manin and Pallavicino maintained networks of correspondents and supporters who were frequently called upon to offer articles to

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popolare, noi lo vedemmo: un popolo insorto può conseguire vantaggi momentanei fra le mura delle sue città, ma non saprebbe, senza un miracolo, combattere e vincere truppe regolari in aperta campagna. Per vincere cannoni e soldati, occorrono cannoni e soldati, occorrono buone armi; buone armi e non ciancie. Il Piemonte ha soldati e cannoni: *dunque io sono piemontese*. Il Piemonte, per antica consuetudine, per educazione, per genio e dovere, è monarchico: *io dunque non sono repubblicano*. See *Daniele Manin e Giorgio Pallavicino: Epistolario Politico (1855-57)* ed. B. E. Mainieri (Milan: Bortolotti, 1878), 327. 'As an Italian before all else, I seek Italian forces for the holy war of our independence. For this work popular insurrection is not enough; we have seen that. A people in rebellion may achieve shortlived gains within the walls of their own city, but without a miracle cannot fight and defeat regular troops in open country. To defeat cannon and soldiers, you need cannon and soldiers, you need good weapons: good weapons and not a lot of talk. Piedmont has soldiers and cannon: *therefore I am a Piedmont man*. Piedmont, by ancient custom, by training, in its spirit and duty, is governed by a monarchy: *therefore I am not a republican.*'

<sup>49</sup> Daniele Manin statement in *Il Diritto*, 19 September 1855 (*Epistolario politico*, 333): 'Fate l'Italia e son con voi. - Se no, no.' 'Make Italy, and I am with you; if not, not.'

<sup>50</sup> Clark, 71-2.

friendly editors, and to pass on copies of publications within Italy and the exile communities.<sup>51</sup> Sawall has drawn attention to the way newspapers from the more liberal states could be read in foreign embassies, in cafés and in reading rooms funded by subscribers, some of which offered dozens of current publications.<sup>52</sup> The debate about the future of Italy was carried on outside the states where most Italians lived, and those who had no opportunity to express their views through a free press or an open political meeting looked to the exiles for leadership.

One of the most important exiles was Giuseppe Garibaldi, who had gone to America after fighting his last-ditch defence of the Roman Republic in 1849. By the summer of 1856 he had returned and was gathering keen young followers who wished to start a military campaign to oust the Austrians. Garibaldi knew from his experience at Rome that an army of volunteers would not succeed without assistance from regular soldiers, which could only come from Piedmont. He sent a message through Pallavicino to Vittorio Emanuele, urging him to stop sitting on the fence and begin preparations for war.<sup>53</sup> Garibaldi was an influential figure and had many supporters outside Piedmont, so his willingness to fall in behind Vittorio Emanuele carried great weight.<sup>54</sup> The pro-Piedmont nationalists now formalised their programme by setting up the Italian National Society, led by Giuseppe La Farina, funded by Pallavicino and supported behind the scenes by Cavour.<sup>55</sup> The Society did not aim for mass membership, but when it published its *Political Creed* in February 1858, this sold 100,000 copies. Their aim was the unification of Italy under the leadership of the King of Piedmont, but with the warning to Vittorio Emanuele that the Italian people must be free and independent.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, *Scritti editi ed inediti*, Edizione Nazionale (Imola: Galeati, 1929); *Daniele Manin e Giorgio Pallavicino: Epistolario Politico*.

<sup>52</sup> Sawall, “‘Viva Verdi’”, 126.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Io offro il mio braccio, la mia vita all’Italia, e per essa alla Corona sabauda; ma vorrei vedere preparativi, udire assicurazioni d’appoggio: maneggi, movimento, vita!’ Words of Giuseppe Garibaldi to Felice Foresti, reported to Pallavicino in a letter of 7 August 1856 (*Epistolario Politico*, 164). ‘I am offering my right arm, my life to Italy, and through it to the Crown of Savoy; but I want to see some preparations, to hear some assurances of support: manoeuvres, movement, life!’

<sup>54</sup> Stuart Woolf, *A History of Italy 1700-1860: the Social Constraints of Political Change* (London: Methuen, 1979), 445.

<sup>55</sup> Manin died at Paris in 1857, so was not involved in the founding of the Society.

### The time of *Un ballo in maschera*: 1857-59

It was in this climate of fervent political debate and preparation for war against Austria that Verdi and Somma were writing their new opera. Few commentators have raised the issue of politics in discussion of *Un ballo in maschera*, beyond mentioning that Felice Orsini's assassination attempt was the trigger for the tightening of censorship at Naples. The opera is generally treated as a love story, and the fact that it was composed in the same year as Wagner's *Tristan* has often been pointed out, with the similarities noted between the plot of adulterous love and the placing of a night-time love duet at the centre of each opera.<sup>57</sup> Mila calls it 'un puro, esclusivo poema d'amore', though he also terms it Verdi's only politically reactionary opera.<sup>58</sup> Jean-François Labie, however, has noted the political dimension of both *Simon Boccanegra* and *Ballo*, seeing in them signs of the composer's 'cavourisme', especially in the sympathetic presentation of the ruler Riccardo.<sup>59</sup>

During the decade 1849-1859 Verdi wrote four works - *Trovatore*, *Vêpres*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *Ballo* - which deal with civil strife, political aspiration and identity, all critical issues for Italian patriots of the time, shaken by the failure of their insurrections and unsure of how to go forward. At this stage of his career he was able to choose his own subject for commissions, and in his three operas of the late 1850s his choice fell on stories which present rulers who face conspiracy and challenge from their subjects, and which deal with the legitimacy of assassination. This is surely no coincidence. One of the central issues debated by Italian patriots in the late 1850s was the *teoria del pugnale*, the question of whether assassination was acceptable as a means to a political end. Mazzini had long advocated it, and his strategy for ousting the Austrians from Italy relied on small cells of activists using what would now be termed terrorist methods to pick off rulers and officials in preparation for a popular uprising to establish republican rule. The failure of the republics established in 1848 led to a reassessment of this approach, and by 1856 Manin had come to the

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<sup>56</sup> An extract from the *Political Creed of the National Society* is translated in Mack Smith, *The Making of Italy*, 226-7.

<sup>57</sup> Budden, Vol. 2, 48. Gilles De Van, *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music* trans. Gilda Roberts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 260.

<sup>58</sup> Massimo Mila, *L'arte di Verdi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 132-3.

<sup>59</sup> Jean-François Labie, *Le Cas Verdi* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 68-71.

conclusion that political assassinations were counterproductive, as they alienated the support of moderates and made it difficult to secure the backing of rulers with armies, such as Vittorio Emanuele and Napoleon III. He published a renunciation of the *teoria del pugnale*, calling the doctrine of political assassination the ‘great enemy of Italy’ and calling on nationalists to renounce murder:

È un dolore, è una vergogna sentir tutto giorno raccontare fatti atroci di accoltellamenti avvenuti in Italia. So che la più parte di queste nequizie hanno per autori i sozzi partigiani del despotismo austro-clericale. Ma possiamo noi negare che una parte sia commessa da uomini che si dicono patriotti, aessono dalla teoria del pugnale accecati o pervertititi? ...

Le nostre mani debbono essere nette. Sia questo uno dei principali contrassegni per distinguere i nobili difensori della patria dai sudici istromenti dei nemici di lei.<sup>60</sup>

Mazzini published a furious response, urging his readers to use any weapons to resist their oppressors, giving amongst his examples of heroic assassination ‘la daga dei Vespri’ - a reference to the Sicilian Vespers.<sup>61</sup> As this was the subject of Verdi’s most recent opera, it shows how the composer’s work was intimately bound up with contemporary political debate, whether or not he took sides in it.

This debate about the *teoria del pugnale* is unlikely to have escaped the attention of Verdi’s librettist Somma. He was a Venetian who had been elected to the

<sup>60</sup> Manin article published in *Italia e Popolo* and *Diritto* in June 1856, in Appendix to Mazzini, *Scritti editi ed inediti* Vol. 55, 355. ‘It is a matter for grief and shame that we hear every day about atrocious stabbings which have occurred in Italy. I know that most of these evil deeds have been carried out by the filthy partisans of Austro-clerical despotism. But can we ourselves deny that some are committed by men who call themselves patriots, and who have been blinded and perverted by the theory of the dagger?// Our hands must be clean. Let that be one of the principal distinguishing features of the noble defenders of the fatherland from the foul instruments of their enemies.’

<sup>61</sup> Mazzini open letter to Manin, published in *Italia e Popolo*, 19 June 1856 after publication in *The Times* (*Scritti editi ed inediti*, Vol. 55, 152): ‘Se i vostri oppressori v’hanno disarmato, create l’armi a combatterli: vi siano strumenti di guerra i ferri delle vostre croci, i chiodi delle vostre officine, i ciottoli delle vostre vie, i pugnali che la lima può darvi. Conquistate colle insidie, colle sorprese, l’armi colle quali lo straniero vi toglie onore, sostanze, libertà, diritto e vita. Dalla daga dei Vespri al sasso di Balilla, al coltello di Palafox, benedetta sia nelle vostre mani ogni cosa che può strappare il nemico ed emanciparvi.’ (‘If your oppressors have disarmed you, create weapons to fight them: let your instruments of war be the blades of your crosses, the nails in your workshops, the stones in your streets, the daggers made from your chisels. Conquer by stealth, by surprise, the weapons with which the foreigner is taking from you honour, property, freedom, rights and life. From the dagger of the Vespri to the stone of Balilla, to the knife of Palafox, blessed be anything in your hands which can consume the enemy and emancipate you.’) Balilla was a Genoese boy who in 1746 started an insurrection by throwing a pebble at an Austrian official. Palafox was a Spanish general who, besieged in Saragossa in 1808, refused to surrender to the French with the words ‘Guerra y cuchillo’ (‘War and the knife’).

Assembly of the Venetian Republic in February 1849 and was one of those who signed the Decree of Resistance with Manin when the city was besieged by the Austrians.<sup>62</sup> After the fall of the Republic Manin fled to exile while Somma kept a low profile in the city, but the poet would have been able to read articles by his former leader and to follow his debate with Mazzini in the pages of *Italia e popolo*. It was at the time of this debate in 1856 that Manin first summarised support for the pro-Piedmont programme in the slogan ‘Vittorio Emanuele, Re d’Italia’. He saw that the patriotic movement needed to offer a simple and memorable means by which all classes of Italians could demonstrate their support for the aim of a united and independent Italy, and he realised that a short slogan could be taken up in many different ways:

L’anime consentimento nella formula nazionale  
INDEPENDENZA ED UNIFICAZIONE  
e nella presente sua pratica applicazione  
VITTORIO EMANUELE, RE D’ITALIA  
dovrebbe d’un capo all’altro della Penisola manifestarsi in alcuno dei mille  
modi che sa inventare iniziativa feconda di un popolo in agitazione.<sup>63</sup>

Again, this met with an angry response from Mazzini, enraged that more and more of his former supporters were being persuaded to abandon revolutionary republicanism in favour of the military leadership of a King he did not trust; he accused the monarchists of opportunism and rejected the idea that freedom from Austrian rule could only be secured with the aid of a regular army.<sup>64</sup> By the time that Somma and Verdi were writing their opera for Naples, the nationalist movement was split between two opposing camps: the pro-Piedmont National Society and its followers who looked to Vittorio Emanuele as military leader and future King of Italy, and the republican followers of Mazzini who were bitterly opposed to monarchy in principle and prepared to use assassination to secure their aims.

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<sup>62</sup> Alessandro Pascolato, who collected Verdi’s letters from Somma’s sisters after his death, gives these details in his introduction to *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma* (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1913), 6.

<sup>63</sup> Manin article in *Diritto*, 11 June 1856 (*Epistolario politico*, 356): ‘The unanimous consent to the national slogan INDEPENDENCE AND UNIFICATION and now its practical application VITTORIO EMANUELE, KING OF ITALY must be demonstrated from one end of the Peninsula to the other in any of the thousand ways that may be invented by the fertile imagination of a people in ferment.’

<sup>64</sup> Mazzini article in *Italia e Popolo*, 21 September 1856 (*Scritti editi ed inediti*, Vol. 55, 263-75).

Verdi was a subject of the Duchy of Parma, and in 1854 its Duke Carlo III had been stabbed to death by an assassin.<sup>65</sup> In 1856 the King of Naples had survived stabbing by a soldier at a military parade.<sup>66</sup> One of the most notorious assassinations of the nineteenth century, the stabbing of the heir to the French throne in 1820, had been witnessed by a member of the Naples royal family: the Duchesse de Berry was a Bourbon princess, and was carrying their child when her husband was murdered, which made her a significant political figure for French ultraroyalists.<sup>67</sup> It is no wonder that the King of the Two Sicilies reacted nervously in January 1858 to the news of another major assassination attempt in Paris, the bomb thrown by Felice Orsini at Napoleon III as he arrived at the Opéra, missing him but killing eight bystanders and wounding 150 more.<sup>68</sup> The bomb plot had been hatched by four Italian exiles based in Britain, followers of Mazzini, who believed that a terrorist assassination would push the French into armed support for the cause of Italian independence. Worryingly for the rulers of Italy, the conspirators came from different Italian states (Tuscany, Venice, Naples and the Romagna), and had co-operated in a complex plot involving the manufacture of bombs in Birmingham and their transport to the French capital.<sup>69</sup>

The subject of assassination was therefore highly topical as Verdi arrived to begin rehearsals of his new opera in Naples, and it was not only the Bourbon monarchy that needed to fear the assassin's dagger. The Orsini plot showed that even rulers favourable to the cause of Italian independence, as Napoleon III undoubtedly was, were at risk. Given Mazzini's implacable hostility to Vittorio Emanuele, it was

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<sup>65</sup> Phillips-Matz, 385.

<sup>66</sup> Roberto Andreotti, 'La tradizione parmense su Gustavo III ed *Un ballo in maschera*' in *Bollettino Quadrimestrale dell'Istituto di Studi Verdiani* (1960) Vol. 1:2, 799.

<sup>67</sup> The Duc de Berry was killed during Carnival 1820 as he stepped out of the Paris Opéra following a performance of *Le Carnaval de Venise*. The 17-year-old Victor Hugo composed an Ode on the sad event, making explicit reference to the contrast between the joy of Carnival brought to an abrupt close by mourning and the start of Lent. (*Ode sur la mort de Son Altesse Royale, Charles Ferdinand d'Artois, duc de Berri, fils de France* [1820] in *Oeuvres complètes* ed. Jean Massin (Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1967) Vol. 1 Part 2, 783. Louis XVIII apparently shed tears on reading the poem and liked to quote the verse describing his own appearance at the deathbed of his heir.

<sup>68</sup> The French Emperor and Empress were on their way to a performance of *Guillaume Tell*, an opera by an Italian composer about patriotic resistance to foreign rule. To show that they were unhurt, they took their places in the Royal Box, and were greeted with cheers by the audience. See J. M. Thompson, *Louis Napoleon and the Second Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 176-7.

<sup>69</sup> Thompson, 177.

by no means certain in the late 1850s that the King of Piedmont would survive long enough to lead an army against the Austrians and institute constitutional government. There were still many exiles in Genoa and Turin who espoused the Mazzinian ideology of republican resistance, and any one of them could easily kill off the King with a knife or a bullet. Such an assassination would be a fatal blow to the programme of the National Society, and would destroy the support Cavour had been diligently working to build up from the governments of France and Britain for a united and independent Italy.

### Verdi's subject and its setting

Verdi's choice of subject for Naples was the story of a European monarch who had died at the hand of an assassin less than seventy years before.<sup>70</sup> Audiences and censors were not used to seeing settings and characters from the recent past - even Verdi's 'private life' dramas of the 1850s, *Stiffelio* and *Traviata*, could only be put on in Italy by moving their settings and costumes back to a much earlier period in history. The monarchs who appeared on stage in Carnival were generally figures from at least a couple of hundred years before; it is hard to think of any Italian opera before 1860 which shows a ruler in a setting later than 1700. Verdi knew that the Naples censor would make difficulties about the presentation of the historical King Gustav, and he was prepared to compromise by making him a fictional ruler, but he dug his heels in over the period. The 'King' must not be a figure from the distant past; his demeanour and the customs of his court must be recognisable to a contemporary audience:

Mi pare proprio che il XII secolo sia troppo lontano per il nostro *Gustavo*. È un'epoca così rozza, così brutale, specialmente in quei paesi, che mi pare grave controsenso mettere dei caratteri tagliati alla francese come Gustavo ed

<sup>70</sup> There is no evidence that Verdi was ever aware of his own family connection to King Gustav III. A distant cousin on his mother's side of the family, Francesco Uttini, spent thirty years at the Swedish Court, wrote the music for Gustav's coronation and composed the opera *Thetis och Pelée* in 1773 to a Swedish libretto as the King was determined to introduce Swedish-language opera as one of his cultural reforms. (Phillips-Matz, 4, 770. *New Grove Opera*, 'Uttini, Francesco Antonio Baldassare') During his *incognito* visit to Italy in 1784 Gustav was welcomed by the Duke of Parma with a spectacular week of entertainments: a fancy-dress pageant, three operas, a ballet, a play, the launch of a hot-air balloon, a grand ball and a concert of contemporary music conducted by Mozart's rival, Vicente Martin y Soler. (Andreotti, 'La tradizione parmense su Gustavo III', 802-3.) Verdi's musical mentors in Busseto, Ferdinando Provesi and Pietro Seletti, might have seen these extravagant and memorable entertainments in their youth, as they were aged about 14 at the time of Gustav's visit.

Oscar, ed un dramma così brillante e fatto secondi i costumi dell'epoca nostra. Bisognerebbe trovare un principotto, un duca, un diavolo, sia pure del Nord, che avesse visto un po' di mondo e sentito l'odore della corte di Luigi XIV.<sup>71</sup>

The draft libretto approved by the Naples censor in late 1857, *Una vendetta in domino*, made the Gustav character a Duke of Pomerania with a setting in the eighteenth century. However, the assassination fright in January 1858 led the Naples management to have a local poet prepare an alternative libretto, *Adelia degli Adimari*, which set the action in medieval Florence with the ruler downgraded to the leader of the Guelph faction. This was completely unacceptable to Verdi who protested that the opera would be ruined by changing the era and the status of the leading character. The Gustav role must be a ruler, he insisted, or much of the verse and the dramatic action would be meaningless.<sup>72</sup>

As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, Verdi was unusually intransigent about the changes in the libretto demanded by the censor in 1858, and hired a lawyer to threaten litigation over the contract with the theatre management. The progress of the case was followed, not just in other parts of Italy, but internationally. Emanuele Muzio wrote to Verdi from London in May 1858 to tell him that he was sending cuttings from French and Belgian papers that had been reporting on the affair, and on Verdi's success in resisting the demands of the censors. He noted that the political correspondents reporting from Naples had been including a progress report on the

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<sup>71</sup> Verdi to Somma, 26 November 1857 (Pascolato, 85). 'I really think that the twelfth century is too distant for our Gustavo. It's such a rough and brutal time especially in those countries [Pomerania] that I find it sheer nonsense to have characters sculpted in the French manner like Gustavo and Oscar, and a drama which is so sparkling and made according to the customs of our own era. We should need to find a princeling, a duke, some devil or other - all right, in the North - who's seen a bit of the world and had a whiff of the court of Louis XIV.'

<sup>72</sup> Marginal comments by Verdi on the *Adelia degli Adimari* libretto ('Il libretto del *Ballo in maschera* massacrato dalla Censura Borbonica' in *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. I): 'Questo cambiamento d'epoca e di luogo toglie il carattere al dramma ed alla musica .... Gli uomini del 400 avvevano costumi e sentimenti diversi da quelli del 800: nè gli uomini del Nord somigliano a quelli del Mezzogiorno.' (244) 'Queste parole, che riuscivano chiare e nobili in bocca di un Duca, tornano enigmatiche e insolenti in bocca di un capo di parte.' (247) 'Poteva benissimo Renato dire al Duca "Te perduto ov'è la patria?" ma non può senza viltà e bassezza dire un partigiano al suo capo: "Te perduto ov'è la gloria?" (248) 'This change of time and place robs the drama and the music of their character.... The men of 1400 had customs and feelings different from those of 1800; nor are the men of the North the same as those of the South.' 'These words, which sound clear and noble in the mouth of a Duke, become enigmatic and insolent in the mouth of a faction chief.' 'It is fine for Renato to say to the Duke "If you are lost, where is the fatherland?" but a follower can only appear grovelling if he says to his chief "If you are lost, where is the glory?"'

lawsuit at the end of each of their bulletins.<sup>73</sup> In other words, Verdi's determination not to compromise with the censor appointed by the King of the Two Sicilies was seen to have a political significance and attracted notice beyond the musical trade press. It is no coincidence, then, that it is at this point in 1858 that the slogan 'Viva V.E.R.D.I.' began to link the composer very specifically with support for Vittorio Emanuele as the unifying King of Italy. Manin had called on supporters of the patriotic cause to find a thousand ways to express their allegiance to the 'King of Italy' and someone spotted that the composer's name formed an exact acrostic of his slogan. Sawall's research has shown that by the end of December 1858 the use of 'Viva V.E.R.D.I.' in graffiti and in verbal exchanges between young people was widely recognised as a sign of support for the pro-Piedmont patriotic movement.<sup>74</sup> This 1858 adoption of a double meaning for Verdi's name was reported a century ago by Pascolato, who drew on the memories of Somma's family; his evidence has often been discounted but the reports from the contemporary Turin press which Sawall has uncovered back up his story.<sup>75</sup>

Verdi was now free to take his opera to another theatre and began negotiations with Rome. Somma was keen to reinstate Gustav III as the ruler in the opera, and pointed out to Verdi that Del Testa's tragedy *Gustavo III* had recently been given at Rome, with minor alterations. When the Papal Censor began to make difficulties, Somma was determined to push the subject of Gustav III as a suitable

<sup>73</sup> Emanuele Muzio to Verdi, 5 May 1858 (*Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 305): 'Spero che riceverà *L'Illustration* che gli mandai. Gli spedirei altri giornali che parlano della quistione finita di Napoli, a narrano la sua partenza trionfale sul *Pompei*.... I corrispondenti politici di Napoli finivano sempre le loro lettere colle notizie de l'andamento della sua causa. Persino *L'Indépendance Belge* di stamattina ne parla.' ('I hope you will receive *L'Illustration* which I have sent you. I shall send the other newspapers which talk of the dispute which has been concluded at Naples and recount your departure in triumph on the *Pompei*... The political correspondents in Naples were always finishing their reports with news of the progress of your case. Even this morning's *L'Indépendance Belge* speaks of it.')

<sup>74</sup> Sawall, 125-6.

<sup>75</sup> Pascolato, 37. 'Il Maestro non cedeva alle esigenze della Censura, che voleva conservata la musica e cambiato il soggetto, e il popolo lo seguiva per le vie acclamandolo. E il *W Verdi* [= *Viva Verdi*] cominciò forse allora ad assumere il doppio significato di omaggio al Maestro e di aspirazione a V.E.R.D.I. (Vittorio Emanuele re d'Italia.)' ('The Maestro did not give in to the demands of the Censor, who wished to keep the music and change the subject, and people ran after him in the street cheering. And the cry 'Viva V.E.R.D.I.' began perhaps at that time to assume a double significance of homage to the Maestro and of aspiration to V.E.R.D.I. - Vittorio Emanuele, King of Italy.') Note that Pascolato also dates the use of the slogan no earlier than the period between the Naples censorship lawsuit of early 1858 and the outbreak of the war in 1859.

opera for any of the main political centres of Northern Italy, pointing out that potentially inflammatory operas about national resistance were regularly staged in those cities, where he foresaw no interference from the censors:

Il *Gustavo III* era un bel soggetto per Torino, per Firenze, per Genova, per Trieste, per Milano, per Verona e in questi teatri dove si dà a tutto pasto il *Guglielmo Tell*, la *Muta* e che so io la censura non avrebbe trovato a ridire.<sup>76</sup>

Somma's list of cities where operas with a patriotic theme might be put on without censorship corresponds broadly to those cities in which Sawall reports the appearance of the 'Viva V.E.R.D.I.' slogan at this time. As Sawall has also shown, Florence was a city where the *Muette de Portici* was put on in the following Carnival season to a rapturous reception from the supporters of a war against Austria.<sup>77</sup> The former republican delegate Somma seems to have wanted the opera performed in a setting and to an audience which would have made its political dimension more explicit.

Verdi nevertheless continued to negotiate for a première in Rome. The Papal Censor required the setting to be changed to remove the action from any part of Europe. By now it was clear that Somma has lost interest in the project, and it was Verdi himself who suggested that the setting should be moved to North America at the time of English colonial rule. This has always puzzled critics, and has often been taken as indicative of a profound ignorance of American history.<sup>78</sup> However, if we look at the resonances America had for a patriotic Italian public in the late 1850s, the choice may not seem quite so bizarre. Firstly, it was known as a place where political exiles had gone after 1848, either willingly, like Garibaldi, or unwillingly like the troublemakers who were regularly shipped out when there was a crackdown on

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<sup>76</sup> Somma to Verdi, 26 May 1858 (*Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 238): 'Gustavo III was a fine subject for Turin, for Florence, for Genoa, for Trieste, for Milan, for Verona and in those theatres where *William Tell* and the *Muette de Portici* are being given all the time and I know the censors wouldn't have found anything to object to.'

<sup>77</sup> Sawall, 127.

<sup>78</sup> Rosen cites historical evidence to counter the stereotyped view of a Puritan Boston where balls and aristocratic luxury were unthinkable; by the late seventeenth century a Governor appointed by Charles II carried out official ceremonies and gave balls at his residence in Boston; Introduction to the *Disposizione scenica* 2002 edition (50-1). Given that the King of England at this time was a cousin of Louis XIV, that his mother and sister lived at the French court, and that his brother had served in Louis' army, a Governor sent by Charles II to Boston might very well have 'sentito l'odore della corte di Luigi XIV'.

political activity.<sup>79</sup> America was also known as a country where colonial rule had been shaken off and a democratic constitution established. In 1848 Italian patriots at Milan copied the action of the Boston Tea Party in organising a boycott of commodities on which the Austrians levied a tax: tobacco, the lottery and performances at La Scala.<sup>80</sup> Verdi was certainly not ignorant about that period in American history and in correspondence with Clara Maffei about the progress of the war in 1859 spoke of his adoration for George Washington.<sup>81</sup> America, then, could operate as a stage setting which would suggest to the audience a place where things were run differently from *ancien régime* Europe. Even though the Governor is presented as the ruler of his territory, it is a place associated in Italian minds with democracy and a written constitution, a place where a ruler might really die with the words 'diletta America' on his lips.<sup>82</sup>

### On the threshold of war

The Carnival season of early 1859 was a period of intense political ferment. Vittorio Emanuele had concluded a secret agreement with Napoleon III to provoke a war with Austria, which would open the way for France to intervene in support of Italians seeking their independence. On 10 January the King of Piedmont made a speech at the opening of a Parliamentary session - an occasion which underlined his constitutional rule - in which he referred to the *grido di dolore*, the cry of anguish, which was reaching him from all over Italy and which might lead him to action.<sup>83</sup> When he attended a performance of *Robert le Diable* in Turin a few days later, the

<sup>79</sup> After the assassination attempt by Felice Orsini, Vittorio Emanuele sought to mollify Napoleon III by reassuring him that whenever any *émigrés* in Piedmont were considered to be dangerous they were sent off to America; Letter of Vittorio Emanuele to his Paris envoy, 8 February 1858, in *Lettere*, Vol. 1, 466.

<sup>80</sup> Clark, 50. Clara Lovett, *The Democratic Movement in Italy 1830-76* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 106.

<sup>81</sup> Verdi to Clara Maffei, 23 June 1859 (*Copialettere*, 578)

<sup>82</sup> The title chosen for the Governor 'Riccardo, Conte di Warvich' may have been found in Hugo's *Cromwell*. The play is set in London in the middle of the seventeenth century, and includes amongst its characters Richard Cromwell and Le Comte de Warwick, who advises the Protector to make himself King during a scene in which Cromwell invites his Council to debate whether England should be governed as a republic or as a monarchy. As an admirer of Hugo, Verdi had read the famous *Préface de Cromwell* and it is likely that he had a copy of the text on his shelves; he might even have been reading it at a time when Italians were divided between republicans and constitutional monarchists. Scribe certainly knew *Cromwell* as he seems to have lifted scenes and ideas from it for his *Gustave* libretto.

<sup>83</sup> Vittorio Emanuele's speech from the throne, 10 January 1859, translated in Clark, 112-13.

audience at the Teatro Regio shouted ‘Evviva il re d’Italia!’. In the same week in Milan ‘Viva l’Italia! Viva VERDI!’ graffiti appeared on walls; when the Austrian authorities sent out night-time patrols to scrub off the slogans, the graffiti reappeared next morning in even bigger letters.<sup>84</sup>

*Un ballo in maschera* was premièred the following month, on 17 February, and might have been expected to serve as an occasion for political outbursts at the Teatro Apollo. The Papal authorities obviously feared as much, because they took careful steps to prevent them. Carabinieri were deployed to patrol the theatre and an official was stationed in the centre of the auditorium watching out for the first person to shout ‘Viva VERDI!’. The standing audience - more likely to be disruptive than the princes and nobility in the boxes - was packed with state employees, including ‘agenti di polizia in platea travestiti’.<sup>85</sup>

While the composer and the music critics recorded afterwards that some of the performers were inadequate and the run of performances was cut short by the illness of two of the singers, the appearance of Verdi himself at the première was greeted with huge applause, there were thirty curtain calls and the composer was serenaded at his lodgings.<sup>86</sup> It is possible that this enthusiasm was as much an expression of political allegiance as it was appreciation for the opera itself and its composer, the Roman audience using the curtain calls to shout ‘Viva VERDI!’ in a context in which it could not raise objections from the police.<sup>87</sup> In reviewing the new opera for the Rome weekly *Il filodrammatico* Nicola Cecchi admitted that the cast had not sung well but used his long article to proclaim Verdi a thoroughly Italian composer, untainted by the German school. His characterizing of Italian music as melodic, and

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<sup>84</sup> Sawall, 126.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* Sawall quotes a report from the Rome correspondent of the Turin newspaper *L’opinione*, published 24 February 1859: ‘Temendo dimostrazioni a Verdi, come fu a Milano, prese misure tali, come se si trattasse di prevenire una insurrezione. Carabinieri in istrada, agenti di polizia in platea travestiti, e l’immancabile Nardoni nella corsia di mezzo, sempre coll’occhio attento al primo che avesse osato gridare un evviva a Verdi.... La maggior parte della platea era quasi tutta occupata da impiegati di governo e di polizia.’ One can only speculate on whether the Pope’s men saw the funny side of disguising themselves to attend a performance of an opera about disguise and *travesti*; their disguises do not seem to have fooled the correspondent of *L’opinione*.

<sup>86</sup> Eugenio Gara, ‘Il cammino dell’opera in un secolo d’interpretazioni’ in *Bollettino Quadrimestrale dell’Istituto di Studi Verdiani* 1:1 [1960], 122.

his remarks on German style, are clearly based on Mazzini's *Filosofia della musica*. In 1836 Mazzini had used quasi-religious language to prophesy that an Italian genius would appear who would unite German harmony and Italian melody in a new musical expression with a social purpose. Cecchi subjected the music of *Ballo* to patriotic scrutiny in order to reassure his readers that every number was authentically Italian:

Nel *Ballo in maschera* di Verdi noi troviamo l'elemento melodico dominare sovranamente anche ne' pezzi i più elaborati e di pieno concerto. Non è forse bel canto e canto italiano quello della cavatina di Renato 'Alla vita che t'arride'? Non è un canto pieno di grazia italiana quello che veste la ballata del Paggio 'Volta la terrea fronte alle stelle'? E la barcarola 'Di' tu se fedele', cantata da Riccardo, sarebbe forse una melodia oltramontana? Questa ci sembra anzi popolarissima poichè ha una certa somiglianza con i canti dei marinari baresi....

La melodia di concerto che domina ed è distinta nel pieno del finale ultimo avrebbe potuto crearla un ingegno che non fosse nato in Italia, o che si fosse studiato di tentare foglie straniere?<sup>88</sup>

Cecchi's welcome to the opera indicates that he is looking beyond it to the long term, to a future of reform and Italian leadership in music. Despite the shortcomings of the performers at Rome, he is confident that the opera will prove successful in the long run and urges Verdi to continue his reform of opera, always taking care to employ good poets 'che fanno onore all'Italia'.<sup>89</sup> (This last comment was probably a side-swipe at Somma who had refused to put his name to the libretto.) Cecchi's deeply nationalist review indicates that the campaign between Italian and Austrian forces had already been opened on the stage of the opera house before a shot was fired on the battlefield.

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<sup>87</sup> Sawall sees a disjunction between support for Verdi as a national icon and the reception of his works at this period.

<sup>88</sup> Nicola Cecchi, review in *Il filodrammatico* 36, 10 March 1859, quoted in *Bollettino ISV* 1:1, 125. 'In Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* we find the melodic element dominating supremely even in the most elaborate and heavily scored sections. Can Renato's cavatina 'Alla vita che t'arride' not be regarded as Italian bel canto? Is not the style of singing which adorns the Page's ballad 'Volta la terrea fronte alle stelle' full of Italian grace? How could the barcarole 'Di' tu se fedele', sung by Riccardo, possibly be a tune from beyond the Alps? On the contrary, this seems to us to be very much of our people [*popolarissima*] since it bears a resemblance to the songs of the sailors of Bari.//... Could the melody which is dominant and distinctive in the tutti of the finale have been created by a genius not born in Italy, or endeavouring to try out foreign manners?' (Translation, *ibid*, 441-2). The ambiguity of *popolarissima* makes it difficult to know whether Cecchi is reporting that the number has already gained popularity with audiences, or asserting that it has a strongly 'folk' character.

<sup>89</sup> Cecchi, 128.

Within weeks, however, the war did break out in earnest. Napoleon kept his side of the treaty and brought 200,000 troops to back up the Piedmontese army of 60,000. Huge numbers were killed at the battles of Magenta and Solferino, but with the assistance of Garibaldi's volunteers and the fact that Italian soldiers deserted from the Austrian army, Milan was 'liberated' in June 1859. Pro-Piedmont groups in Parma, Modena, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany took advantage of the war to rise against their rulers, and invite Vittorio Emanuele to rule them. Napoleon had not foreseen that his intervention would result in such a rapid expansion of the territory of the 'Re d'Italia' and quickly concluded a peace with the Austrians without consulting his ally.<sup>90</sup> Verdi, who had described Napoleon as a second George Washington in a letter shortly before, was disgusted and raged to Clarina Maffei about the loss of life and the sacrifice of principles that had been made, only to be let down by the French:

E dov'è la tanto sospirata e promessa indipendenza d'Italia? ... Dopo tanta vittoria quale risultato! quanto sangue per nulla! quanta povera gioventù delusa! E Garibaldi che ha perfino fatto il sacrificio delle sue antiche e costanti opinioni in favore d'un Re senza ottenere lo scopo desiderato. C'è da diventare matti!<sup>91</sup>

Verdi was keenly aware of the bloodshed and loss of life the war had brought, and opened a fund at Busseto for the wounded and the families of those who had been killed, with donations from himself and other members of his family at the head of the subscription list.<sup>92</sup>

### Verdi talks politics

Verdi's status as an icon of pro-Piedmont nationalism was confirmed in September 1859 when he was unanimously elected as one of the representatives from Parma who would go to Turin to start the process of formal annexation to the Kingdom of Vittorio Emanuele. Conscious of his heavy responsibility as his community's delegate in the dawn of a new constitutional era, Verdi sent a formal political declaration to the Mayor of his home town:

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<sup>90</sup> Clark, 75-8.

<sup>91</sup> Verdi to Clarina Maffei, 14 July 1859 (*Copialettere*, 579-80). 'And where is the independence of Italy that has been so longed for and promised?... After such a victory what a result! How much blood shed for nothing! How many poor young people disappointed! And what about Garibaldi who even sacrificed his longstanding and constant views to support a King without obtaining his aim. It's enough to drive you mad!'

<sup>92</sup> Subscription list, 20 June 1859, reproduced in *Copialettere*, 577.

L'onore che i miei concittadini vollero conferirmi nominandomi loro rappresentante all'Assemblea delle Provincie parmensi mi lusinga, e mi rende gratissimo. Se i miei scarsi talenti, i miei studi, l'arte che professò mi rendono poco atto a questa sorta d'uffizi, valga almeno il grande amore che ho portato e porto a questa nostra nobile ed infelice Italia.

Inutile il dire che io proclamerò in nome dei miei concittadini e mio:

*la caduta della Dinastia Borbonica;*

*l'annessione al Piemonte;*

*la Dittatura dell'illustre italiano Luigi Carlo Farini.*

Nell'annessione al Piemonte sta la futura grandezza e rigenerazione della patria comune. Chi sente scorrere nelle proprie vene sangue italiano deve volerla fortemente, costantemente; così sorgerà anche per noi il giorno in cui potrem dire di appartenere ad una grande e nobile Nazione.<sup>93</sup>

No sooner had the people of Parma liberated themselves from one prince than they were hurrying to become subjects of another; they must have been very sure that the government of Vittorio Emanuele was going to be different from ducal rule. Verdi is careful to use the new language of democracy in writing to the Mayor, referring to his 'fellow citizens', speaking of the honour he feels in being allowed to serve them and telling them clearly what position he intends to take on their behalf. He is forthright in assuring his electorate that the future greatness and regeneration of their country lies in the annexation to Piedmont, and suggests that it would show a lack of patriotism to disagree. In other words, Italy's most famous composer was entirely committed to the Political Creed of the National Society.

A few months later the Municipality of Busseto approached Verdi inviting him to compose a celebratory Hymn to Vittorio Emanuele. The composer's commitment to the King of Piedmont was beyond question, and he gave his full backing to the military campaign that was needed to unite Italy, yet he refused the commission, as he had refused two earlier requests from much more prestigious municipalities - the King's own capital, Turin, and the city he had liberated, Milan.

<sup>93</sup> Verdi to the Podestà of Busseto, 5 September 1859; *Bollettino ISV*, 1:3 (1960), 1106. 'The honour which my fellow citizens have wished to bestow on me by nominating me their representative to the Provincial Assembly of Parma flatters me and fills me with gratitude. If my limited talents, my studies, the art I profess leave me poorly prepared for this sort of office, may the great love I have felt and feel for this noble and unhappy Italy at least have its value.// Needless to say, I will proclaim, in the name of my fellow citizens and in my own: - *the fall of the Bourbon Dynasty*; - *the annexation to Piedmont*; - *the Dictatorship of that eminent Italian, Luigi Carlo Farini* [the temporary governor of Parma, following the collapse of Ducal rule].// In annexing to Piedmont lies the future greatness and regeneration of our country. Whosoever feels Italian blood coursing his veins must desire it, strongly

Il Municipio di Busseto fece opera lodevolissima votando, e donando un cannone al Re, il quale preferirà certo a qualsivoglia altro dono. Vorrei che ogni paese italiano ne imitasse l'esempio, chè, non colle feste e le illuminazioni, ma colle armi e coi soldati potremo divenire forti, rispettati, e padroni in casa nostra. E non bisogna dimenticare che lo straniero potente e minaccioso è tuttavia in Italia.

Se io non accetto di musicare la poesia inviatami si è che oltre al sentirmi poco atto a comporre Inni di circostanza (ed a che gioverebbe un Inno!) io non potrei farlo senza recare offesa ai Municipi di Torino, e Milano a cui risposi negativamente, quantunque ne fossi ripetutamente pregato. Voglia il Municipio tener valide queste mie ragioni.<sup>94</sup>

Verdi's polite reply suggests that he kept his 'official life' as a citizen separate from his creative imagination. He was willing to serve as an elected representative in the 'real world' of politics, money and guns, but the idea of composing a *pièce de circonstance* in praise of the King made him uncomfortable. As I shall show later in this chapter, he had no difficulty in composing choral hymns in praise of rulers within his operas, but he would not put his music at the service of the state. The line that Verdi draws here seems to support my thesis that the imaginative space of the opera house stage was separate from the official world of government and deference.

### Is there a King in *Un ballo in maschera*?

The political context in which *Ballo* was written, and the way Verdi was perceived by pro-Piedmont nationalists at the time it was composed, must invite the question: does the ruler in the opera bear any resemblance to Vittorio Emanuele? There seem to be four major similarities between Riccardo and the King of Piedmont:

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and constantly; thus the day will come for us as well when we will be able to say that we belong to a great and noble Nation.'

<sup>94</sup> Verdi to the Busseto Signori Assessori, April 1860; *Bollettino ISV*, 1:3 (1960), 1117. 'The Municipality of Busseto has done a highly laudatory thing by choosing to donate a cannon to the King which he will certainly prefer above any other gift. Would that every Italian town might imitate this example for, not with festivities and lights, but with soldiers and guns may we become strong, respected and masters in our own house. And it must not be forgotten that powerful and menacing foreigners are in Italy still.// If I do not accept to set the verses sent to me to music, it is because, aside from feeling poorly suited to composing Hymns for special occasions (and what would be the use of a Hymn!), I could not do so without offending the Municipalities of Turin and Milan whom I refused in spite of repeated requests. May the Municipality accept these reasons as valid.' (Translation, *ibid.*, 1434-5).

- Riccardo is a ruler in his territory;
- Riccardo is willing to die on the battlefield to win victory;
- Riccardo has ‘something French’ about him;
- Riccardo has many followers pinning their hopes on him.<sup>95</sup>

On the first point, I have noted Verdi’s stubborn insistence that the Gustav character must be someone exercising power over a territory, and that he must be a ruler in a relatively recent era.<sup>96</sup> When Riccardo first appears, he is presented as a ‘King’ whose rule is justified by the benefits he brings his subjects:

Bello il poter non è, che de’ soggetti  
 Le lacrime non terge, e ad incorrotta  
 Gloria non mira.<sup>97</sup>

This presumed relationship with his subjects echoes the Preamble of the Statuto of Piedmont, in which the King tells his people that he is granting the constitution to make them happy and secure a glorious future.<sup>98</sup> This ideology of Kingship is echoed later in the scene when Renato urges him to arrest and execute those conspiring against him:

Taci: nel sangue  
 Contaminarmi allor dovrei. Non fia,  
 Nol vo’. - Del popol mio  
 L’amor mi guardi, e mi protegga Iddio.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> There is a fifth similarity: Riccardo is an ardent lover. However, I am not convinced that Verdi and Somma intended their audience to see in Riccardo’s love for Amelia any reflection of the King of Piedmont’s many extramarital affairs, which made him more of a Duke of Mantua than a Governor of Boston. On the other hand, Vittorio Emanuele did marry off more than one of his mistresses to a minister or general, and sometimes sent the couple abroad when the situation at Court became troublesome or he wanted to work diplomatically through a private agent he could trust.

<sup>96</sup> Through all the changes of setting and title Verdi insisted that the Gustav character must be a ruler, holding court and exercising power. For this reason I shall retain the designation ‘King’ to describe the character who in the final version is downgraded to Governor of Boston.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Power is not fine, which does not dry the tears of subjects, and aim towards incorruptible glory.’ Libretto, *Un ballo in maschera: Melodramma in tre atti* (Rome: Tipografia Tiberina, 1859), 6. This libretto is reproduced in the *Disposizione scenica* 2002 edition.

<sup>98</sup> See Note 46 above.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Be silent: with blood/I would then contaminate myself. It must not be,/ I do not wish it. My people’s/ Love watches over me, and God protects me.’ This is the text given in twentieth century editions of *Ballo*, drawing on Verdi’s autograph score and the earlier libretto drafts by Somma. The libretto printed for the Rome première bore amendments requested by the censor. This is therefore one of those points of ‘bitextuality’ identified by Rosen and discussed in my Introduction. It seems very likely that it was the uncensored lines that were sung in the theatre.

This represents a change from the response of Scribe's King in *Gustave*, who asserts that no conspirator will dare to lift a hand against 'son père et son Roi'.<sup>100</sup> Scribe's King is of the *ancien régime*, personally brave but with a profound belief in the difference between his Royal person and those he commands. Somma's King is a figure of authority, but not an absolute ruler. He will not have any of his subjects killed unless they can be proved to have committed some crime, and he relies on the good relations he has established with his people to protect him from attack. In other words, this is a King who rules in the spirit of the Statuto Albertino of Piedmont. Not only does he curb his power to execute his enemies but he will not sign an order of exile without full information. I have pointed out earlier in this chapter that the rulers of Italian states regularly used exile to rid themselves of those whose views displeased them, so a King who hesitates before signing a warrant to ban Ulrica was likely to be perceived in 1859 as a good and merciful character. Even when Ulrica has given the King bad news - the worst news possible, that of his impending murder - he does not send her into exile; instead he grants her a reprieve and gives her money. Vittorio Emanuele did not issue banning orders on his own subjects, and his government even offered financial help to exiles who came to Piedmont from other parts of Italy. A King who allows Ulrica to remain in his territory might well remind an audience of the ruler of Piedmont. At the close of the opera the dying Riccardo asks his officers to raise him to his feet, and he uses his royal authority one last time to pardon his murderer and anyone else who has conspired against him. The Statuto Albertino set out amongst its first articles the King's authority to pardon and commute sentences, and stated that 'Justice emanates from the King'. On stage a ruler is presented who, even while dying, does not seek revenge on his murderer.<sup>101</sup>

I have shown earlier in this chapter that Vittorio Emanuele's military experience and willingness to go to war were the clinching factor in turning many Italian republicans towards acceptance of him as their future King. In their presentation of the Gustav character, Somma and Verdi jettison completely Scribe's

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<sup>100</sup> Scribe, libretto for *Gustave ou le bal masqué* (Paris: Brandus Dufour, n.d.), 58.

<sup>101</sup> The real Gustav III wanted to spare the lives of his murderer Anckarström and his co-conspirators, and begged his brother to be merciful when he succeeded him as Regent. Once Gustav was dead Anckarström was given a long-drawn-out and sadistic execution, and the others sent into

opening in which the King greets his court artists and launches into an aria in praise of the *beaux-arts*. The first words of the King in *Ballo* are ‘Amici miei, soldati’, and in the scene he makes references to the glory he has won and intends to win - ‘gloria’ in this context signifying the fame which results from military success. When he visits the fortuneteller in disguise he overhears Silvano enquiring anxiously about the future:

Qual sorte pel sangue versato  
M’attende?<sup>102</sup>

to which the disguised King’s immediate response is

Favella da franco soldato.<sup>103</sup>

Technically, Silvano is a ‘marinaro’, but Somma’s choice of word widens the context in which the King’s attitude and action is to be understood. While Ulrica looks at her client’s palm, the King takes the initiative to scribble out his own commission and stuff it with money into the man’s pocket. This is a King who is prompt to recognise and reward every ‘franco soldato’ who is prepared to serve him, especially when the shedding of blood is imminent.<sup>104</sup> Not only is this King a generous and just leader to serve, he is himself an active and brave soldier. When Riccardo consults the fortuneteller in disguise, her first words on reading his palm present him as an experienced and significant military man:

È la destra d’un grande, vissuto  
Sotto l’astro di Marte.<sup>105</sup>

She then foretells his death, to which the King’s immediate response is that he is willing to die on the battlefield. Even when she tells him he will be killed by a friend, he expresses no fear and stands out from the rest of the crowd by laughing at the danger that has been foretold. He is shown as a man who cannot be intimidated and is ready to face death bravely. This was certainly the reputation enjoyed by Vittorio Emanuele; even Napoleon III, who was unimpressed by his grasp of strategy, allowed that he was brave.<sup>106</sup>

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exile. See R. Nisbet Bain, *Gustavus III and his Contemporaries 1746-1792* (London: Kegan Paul, 1894), Vol. 2, 209-10.

<sup>102</sup> ‘What fate awaits me for blood that is shed?’ Libretto, 13.

<sup>103</sup> ‘He speaks like a forthright soldier.’ *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Where Scribe’s Christian looks back to the past and tallies the wounds he has suffered for no reward, Somma’s fighting man wants to know about the future.

<sup>105</sup> ‘It is the right hand of a leader, who has lived under the sign of Mars.’ Libretto, 18.

<sup>106</sup> Napoleon III is supposed to have commented on Vittorio Emanuele: ‘Le Roi de Sardaigne est un brave sous-officier, qui ne passera jamais officier.’ (Mack Smith, *Victor Emanuel, Cavour and the*

Verdi described his Gustav character as ‘sculpted in the French manner’ and wanted him to show some familiarity with the court of Louis XIV.<sup>107</sup> Note that the character is not actually to be a Frenchman, any more than Scribe’s Gustave is, but that the audience must recognise some kind of French touch about him and his Court. That Verdi gave his King and Page a musical characterization in the French style has long been agreed by critics (with the obvious exception of Cecchi, whose patriotic project would not allow him to see any such influence in 1859). Joseph Kerman has sneered at the ‘vulgarity’ of the ‘Frenchified *brillantes* of Oscar’ and Budden has pointed out that ‘*Un ballo in maschera* abounds in gallicisms, especially in the scenes depicting Riccardo and his court’.<sup>108</sup> Parker has highlighted the way *Ballo* draws on the musical style of *opéra comique*.<sup>109</sup> Anselm Gerhard has even included a whole chapter on the opera in his study of ‘Music Theatre in Paris in the Nineteenth Century’ viewing this opera commissioned in Italy for an Italian theatre as ‘the settling of Verdi’s account with grand *opéra*’.<sup>110</sup> If the King and his court have something French about them in this opera, to Italians from other parts of the peninsula there was more than a little Frenchness about Vittorio Emanuele and those who surrounded him. The King spoke French as his first language, as did his Ministers Cavour and d’Azeglio. Until 1860 the Kingdom included Savoy, which was French-speaking, as well as the Provençal-speaking territory of Nice, in which Garibaldi was born. The Statuto made Italian the language of debate in both houses of the Parliament, but most of the deputies found it difficult to speak fluently in what was their second language.<sup>111</sup> Cavour was reported to be a good speaker in French, but his Italian was sometimes unintelligible. Not only did the Piedmontese speak French amongst themselves, but they were seen to be linked politically to the France of Napoleon III, and at the time *Ballo* was written it was becoming increasingly clear that the future of Italy was going to depend on a military alliance between Piedmont

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*Risorgimento*, footnote to p. 54.) ‘The King of Sardinia is a brave NCO, who will never make it to officer.’

<sup>107</sup> See Note 71 above.

<sup>108</sup> Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (London: Faber, 1988 revised edition), 127. Budden, Vol. 2, 38.

<sup>109</sup> Parker, ‘Verdi’ in *New Grove Opera*; also programme article ‘Verdi’s Gallic Muse’ for *A Masked Ball* (English National Opera, Spring 2002).

<sup>110</sup> Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 456.

and France. All these connotations might be evoked by the French musical style Verdi chose for his King.

The hopes of many Italians outside Piedmont were pinned on Vittorio Emanuele in the late 1850s and his Chief Minister Cavour worked hard to build support in other states (an effort which led to the simultaneous uprisings of 1859 that took Napoleon by surprise). In *Ballo Somma* introduces an aria in Act I which has no parallel in Scribe's libretto: the minister Renato gives advice to his King, in a manner that might suggest the way Cavour advised Vittorio Emanuele. 'Alla vita che t'arride' sits at the centre of the first scene of the opera, and it sets out the King's responsibility as a leader. For Renato the personal safety of the King has much wider implications than for other individuals since his death may affect thousands of other people who look to him for leadership and protection. Somma in his opening lines does not use the word 'popolo', which would imply that only the King's subjects might be the losers by his death; he uses the more general phrase 'altre mille e mille vite'.<sup>112</sup> This is a King to whom people might look for leadership from outside the borders of his own territory, a King whose responsibilities to a wider public are very great.

Verdi was at great pains to make this aria dramatically effective. He objected to the change in *Adelia degli Adimari* which turned it into sycophantic flattery, instead of a plea to a ruler: 'Te perduto ov'è la patria?'.<sup>113</sup> Somma's revision for Rome did not meet with his approval and he complained that the new version lacked the declamatory force he was looking for:

Quel 'Te perduto' dava un rilievo e campo alla declamazione: ciò era teatrale e mi faceva gioco. Procurate di conservarlo, e non mi par difficile in due versi dire: 'Te perduto, a questa terra è tolto ogni avvenire'.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Nassau William Senior, *Journals Kept in France and Italy from 1848-52* (London: King, 1871) 291-2. Mack Smith, *The Making of Italy*, 70.

<sup>112</sup> Libretto, 8. 'To the life which smiles on you/ Full of hopes and glory,/ Of other thousands and thousands of lives/ The destiny is chained!'

<sup>113</sup> See note 72 above: 'If you are lost, where is the Fatherland?'. Gossett & Narici's 'Gustavo III' gives the line as 'Te perduto, ov'è la Svezia?', based on the skeleton score for Act I; however, the Luzio edition of Verdi's marginal comments on *Adelia degli Adimari* indicates that Somma's line referred to 'la patria' in the libretto which Verdi set for Naples as *Una vendetta in dominò*. (248).

<sup>114</sup> Letter to Somma, September 1858 (Pascolato, 94). "That "If you are lost" gave it a higher profile with scope for declamation: that was good theatre and gave me something to play with. Try to keep

Verdi did not change the verse in his autograph score, so it is likely that the words sung by Renato at the Rome première gave just that scope for theatrical declamation that Verdi sought. The ‘Te perduto’ text is repeated no less than seven times, as Verdi departs from the usual practice by taking the last lines of the first stanza and setting them again in the final section of the aria. The audience are thus reminded again and again of the fragility of the hopes that are placed on a single man. The aria closes with a magnificent cadenza on the word ‘patria’ in the phrase, which guarantees excited applause even in a twenty-first-century opera house, and no doubt stirred up much more for an 1859 audience on the lookout for patriotic references.

### **The assassination plot and the *teoria del pugnale***

The opening scene of the opera is a formal occasion at which Riccardo is shown acting as the Ideal King: benevolent, brave, merciful and just. Somma and Verdi work together to present an attractive case to the audience: ‘If you are going to have a monarchy, with a King at the top of the social pyramid, then this is the kind of King you want to have.’ At the central point of the scene Renato exposes the vulnerability of this model: good government and military success are in the hands of a single individual, who can be killed. If we keep in mind Mazzini’s bitter criticisms of former republicans who decided to back Vittorio Emanuele and his urgent incitement to patriots to continue the use of violence for political ends, the words Somma puts into Renato’s mouth have an ominous resonance:

Dell’amor più desto è l’odio  
Le sue vittime a colpir!<sup>115</sup>

The ‘declamazione’ which Verdi makes out of the phrase ‘Te perduto ov’è la patria’ had a very topical meaning at a time when bombs were being put together in Birmingham to kill off Emperors and maybe Kings.

Renato is shown throughout the opera as noble and honourable, which gives added force to the presentation of the assassination plot. Until the final Act of the

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it in; it doesn’t seem difficult to me to say in two verses: “If you are lost, all future is taken from this land.””

<sup>115</sup> ‘Than love more alert is hate/ Its victims to strike’; Libretto, 8.

opera the conspirators Samuel and Tom and their followers are just grumblers who add to the musical texture of the piece but are not central to its action. It is only when Renato invites them to come to his home that they begin to take on the status of patriotic plotters. Scenes showing men swearing oaths of allegiance to one another and to a cause became immensely popular in the second quarter of the nineteenth-century; Gerhard has shown how they moved from the picture gallery to the opera tableau as powerful images of communal political power.<sup>116</sup> Earlier in his career Verdi had created his own powerful conspiracy scene in *Ernani*, where the nobles gather in Act III to draw lots for the right to assassinate the King then join in the patriotic hymn ‘Si ridesti il leon di Castiglia’. When Renato, Samuel and Tom meet in Act III of *Ballo* they also draw lots to choose the assassin and sing their vow to exact revenge, ‘Dunque l’onta di tutti sol una’, with a harp and brass accompaniment which gives connotations of military courage and solemnity to their action.

It is a striking tableau, and one that Verdi fought to keep from the meddling of the Naples censor, but it is balanced at the close of the opera by an equally striking tableau showing the consequence of their plot.<sup>117</sup> In Scribe’s *Gustave the King* adheres to a princely policy of ‘Never apologise, never explain’ so Ankastrom never learns that his wife is innocent. Somma’s King is more determined to deal justly and put matters right before he dies. He calls Renato to him and exonerates Amelia, showing the letter of appointment that would have taken them both away from the Court. Where Ankastrom has nothing of his own to sing at the close of the opera, Somma and Verdi make Renato’s remorse explicit. The *disposizione* directs him to show desperate grief as he comes down to the proscenium on the words ‘Ciel, che feci!’ and his regret for shedding blood is set as an unaccompanied line, allowing it to be heard almost as a direct address to the audience across the footlights:

Ciel! che feci e che m’aspetta  
Esecrato sulla terra!...

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<sup>116</sup> Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 86-7. Such scenes may also have carried connotations of the oaths sworn by *carbonari* planning resistance to oppressive rule earlier in the century.

<sup>117</sup> Verdi’s marginal comments on the *Adelia degli Adimari* libretto show that he was determined to retain the conspirators’ drawing of lots, which he regarded as a key scene in the drama, describing it repeatedly as ‘la più potente situazione’, ‘la terribile situazione’, ‘una grande situazione’ and indicating that it could not be changed without losing a powerful effect on the audience; *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 259-60.

Di qual sangue e qual vendetta  
M'assetò l'inausto error.<sup>118</sup>

In this way Somma and Verdi stage a renunciation of the *teoria del pugnale*, which Manin claimed had ‘blinded and perverted … men who call themselves patriots’. Renato’s loyalty and patriotism have been presented earlier in the opera in a very positive light; it is he himself who draws attention again and again in ‘Alla vita che t’arride’ to the danger the King faces from assassins, and to the threat to the Fatherland if he is killed. Somma uses dramatic irony to reinforce the point as he has Renato declare his own grief at having done the very deed he feared. Renato is not a bad character, yet he has been drawn into murder and the destruction of the hopes of a whole people whose future depended on this King. Anyone whose heart was warmed in Act I by Renato’s magnificent cadenza on the word ‘patria’ might also take note of the terrible mistake he has made, and ensure they are not misled by anyone proposing assassination of a King.

### Carnival imagery and gesture

Italians of the mid-nineteenth century were so familiar with the customs and gestures of carnival that these could be used to make comments on politics and to convey messages of challenge to the established order. Giuseppe Giusti, writing satirical poems against the status quo in the 1830s and 1840s, used the imagery of carnival masquerade in his ‘Rassegnazione e proponimento di cambiar vita’.<sup>119</sup> He describes how a young man might ‘buy a mask at the Sanfedesti shop’ to achieve social acceptance and clerical approval by pretending to belong to the pro-Jesuit, anti-Mazzinian group, the Sanfedesti. An illustration by the cartoonist Adolfo Matarelli shows the doorway of a shop bearing the sign ‘Vestuario da maschere’ with the young man and a masked shopkeeper pointing to various masks and to formal tailcoats and

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<sup>118</sup> ‘Heavens! What have I done and what awaits me/ Execrated on earth!.../ With what blood and what vengeance/ Was I made thirsty by a fatal error.’ Libretto, 45. See *Disposizione scenica*, 37, for Renato’s move downstage.

<sup>119</sup> ‘La Rassegnazione e proponimento di cambiar vita’ [1833] in Giuseppe Giusti, *Poesie* with illustrations by Adolfo Matarelli (Florence: Carnesecchi, 1868). Giusti was an admirer of Verdi’s early work and in his poem ‘Sant’Ambrogio’ describes the effect of hearing a band play ‘O Signore dal tetto natio’ during a mass attended by Italians and Austrian soldiers in Milan, the chorus ‘che tanti petti ha scossi e inebriati’. After the première of *Macbeth* in 1847 he wrote to the composer begging him to keep to Italian subjects which would express ‘the pain of a people who feel the need

monk's habits, which also seem to be available to hire as disguises.<sup>120</sup> (See **Illustration 2.**) Giusti's 'Lo stivale' takes the image of the Boot of Italy and uses its 'cobbling' to review Italian history and to express the aspiration for a united and independent Italy.<sup>121</sup> *Commedia dell'arte* figures had long been associated with Carnival, both as street entertainment and as a popular disguise (Tiepolo's paintings of Venetian Carnival show numerous examples).<sup>122</sup> In his poem Giusti says that Italy is made up of multi-coloured patches 'like a Harlequin' and he wants to make it 'all of one piece and all of one colour'.<sup>123</sup> When Matabelli came to illustrate this poem in the 1860s he showed the Boot of Italy with figures in Carnival disguise trying to join hands across the grinning death's head of Papal Rome. (See **Illustration 3.**) However, the ambivalence of carnival is also present in the poems and their illustrations. Giusti ends his poem with a warning that if anyone tries to lord it over Italians, they will kick him out.<sup>124</sup> Matabelli illustrates the closing section with portraits of Vittorio Emanuele, Cavour and Garibaldi, but his closing image shows a large boot kicking a crowned and ermine-robed figure out of doors; although the face is not shown, the robe is hitched up to show military side-striped trousers, a sign that it is the soldier King of Italy who will 'get the boot' if he displeases Italians.

The gesture of arse-kicking is well understood throughout Europe as one that degrades. The foot is lifted upwards from the ground to bring another person down, perhaps physically but certainly in respect and social standing.<sup>125</sup> It is related to other

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of a better future'. See *Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook* ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 56.

<sup>120</sup> Giusti, *Poesie*, 23.

<sup>121</sup> 'Lo stivale' in *Poesie*, 67-78. Giusti mentions the Sicilian Vespers in his review of Italy's past.

<sup>122</sup> Bakhtin discusses Harlequin and the *commedia dell'arte* frequently in relation to carnival in *Rabelais*, and notes that the grotesque gestures he sees as typical of popular-festive forms are often incorporated into stage works through the *lazzi* of *commedia* characters. 'King Harlequin' is also a character in his early example of a carnivalized work, *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*.

<sup>123</sup> 'E poi vedete un po'; qua son turchino,/ Là rosso e bianco, e quassù giallo e nero,/ Insomma a toppe come un arlecchino:/ Se volete rimettermi per davvero/ Fatemi con prudenza e con amore,/ Tutto d'un pezzo e tutto d'un colore.' In the 1868 edition Matabelli illustrates this section of the poem with a portrait of Vittorio Emanuele.

<sup>124</sup> 'E se quando a costui mi trovo in pie,/ Si figurasse qualche buon padrone/ Di far con meco il solito mestiere'/ Lo piglieremo a calci nel sedere'; *Poesie*, 78. The Italian phrase is more explicit about kicking his backside.

<sup>125</sup> Probably the best known kick up the backside in music history is that administered to Mozart on Archbishop Colloredo's orders; his employer not only terminated his service but humiliated him through this physical gesture. In the next chapter I discuss at more length the grotesque body, and Bakhtin's view of the importance of the lower bodily stratum in carnival practice, so I shall not dwell

physical gestures which express challenge to the status of others by a movement upwards. In different European cultures fingers are jabbed upwards singly or in pairs to convey an insult, especially by one man to another. Examples are the British V-sign, the cuckold sign and the middle finger used in Mediterranean confrontations, as well as the upward hand gesture that signifies in Britain that its target is a masturbator. Such gestures are the reverse of the downward movements which express deference: bowing, curtseying, kneeling or doffing one's hat, in all of which an individual makes himself lower than another as a mark of respect. Bakhtin has drawn attention to the way in which the 'top-down' order of the official world is overturned in carnival, and sees a wide variety of practices as embodying a challenge to claims to authority and enduring values by making everyday things 'topsy turvy' or 'inside out'.<sup>126</sup> As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, a central feature of carnival is the elevation of a King to preside over the feast, his crowning enacting a reversal of the established structure of society:

Crowning/decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the joyful relativity of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position. Crowning already contains the idea of immanent decrowning: it is ambivalent from the very start. And he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester; this act, as it were, opens and sanctifies, the inside-out world of carnival. In the ritual of crowning all aspects of the actual ceremony - the symbols of authority that are handed over to the newly-crowned king and the clothing in which he is dressed - all become ambivalent and acquire a veneer of joyful relativity.<sup>127</sup>

Within carnival authority is never absolute, and gestures are used to make this clear, either by mock reverence to a crowned slave, or in reversals of the usual gestures of deference. At the start of this chapter the Prince of Wales is described standing on a balcony above the crowd, much as other members of the British Royal Family might stand on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to receive the cheers and reverence of their subjects. However, in the Corso at Carnival time the Prince is no longer treated to bows and curtseys; people throw things at him. It would be unthinkable for a subject to pelt Queen Victoria with sweets, but carnival allows the people down

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here on the implications of the spot the foot connects with. For a wealth of examples of the backside in carnival imagery, see *Carnivalesque*, Catalogue of a National Touring Exhibition (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2000).

<sup>126</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 126.

<sup>127</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 124.

below to aim things at their social betters on the balcony above. ‘Bottom up’ gestures are part of the language of carnival, and I shall continue this chapter by examining the way Verdi uses both downward and upward musical gestures in *Ballo* in a way that suggests that he has incorporated carnival crowning and uncrowning into the musical structure of the opera.

### The musical gestures of authority and challenge

Marco Beghelli has shown how what he terms the *salto d’ottava* is used in different ways in Verdi’s operas to give emphasis and intensity to text, and he notes that the ‘top-down’ authority of rulers and high priests is often expressed in orders which use an octave fall.<sup>128</sup> He styles this kind of rhetorical utterance ‘parlar ampio’ and comments on it thus:

Il parlar ampio melodrammatico rispecchia dunque l’enfasi dell’eloquio autoritario, la *grandeur* di chi lo pronuncia, la sacralità e ineluttabilità delle parole espresse, la forza dell’emissione commisurata all’effetto che si vuole ottenere. Tutto ciò, nel linguaggio fortemente sillabico del melodramma di metà Ottocento, si tradurrà musicalmente in una recitazione stentorea su nota ribattuta, che denota la solennità e la forza rituale delle parole pronunciate, suggellata dall’intervallo ‘potente’ per eccellenza: il salto di ottava discendente, che fornisce al gesto vocale l’ampiezza necessaria.<sup>129</sup>

Beghelli also points out the use of the *salto d’ottava* in ritual scenes, and in the swearing of oaths; one of the examples he gives is the oath Renato swears to Riccardo in Act II that he will escort the unknown lady to the city without a word or glance.

In the Introduction I drew attention to the trend in recent years of examining the conventions of the *melodramma* within which Verdi was working, and to look at how he used and developed them through his career. The use of the octave leap downwards was frequently used, as Beghelli has pointed out, by Verdi and others to

<sup>128</sup> Marco Beghelli, ‘Atti performativi nella drammaturgia verdiana’ (Tesi di Laurea, University of Bologna, 1985) 190.

<sup>129</sup> Marco Beghelli, ‘La retorica del melodramma: Rossini, chiave di volta’ in *Gioachino Rossini 1792-1992: Il testo e la scena* ed. Paolo Fabbri (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini, 1994). Despite its title, Beghelli’s chapter deals as much with Verdi’s use of musical rhetoric as it does Rossini’s. (‘The *parlar ampio melodrammatico* thus reflects the emphasis of authoritarian utterance, the *grandeur* of the person uttering it, the sacredness and ineluctability of the words spoken, the force of the utterance proportionate to the effect aimed at. All of this, in the strongly syllabic language of the mid-nineteenth century, is translated musically into a stentorian recitation on a single note, which denotes the solemnity and ritual force of the words spoken, stamped at the close with the interval which is most suggestive of power: the descending octave leap, which provides the necessary breadth to the vocal gesture.’)

express the finality imposed by figures of authority on their utterances, a musical sign of their absolute power. I want to suggest that in *Ballo* Verdi takes this convention and moves it around between different characters in order to map the shifts in authority which are taking place. When a ruler sings a *salto d'ottava* in addressing his subjects, that is a convention. When another character sings it, the convention is being manipulated to signal that power has moved elsewhere. When the conventional downward gesture is reversed, this may be a sign that power and authority are being challenged. Such fluidity and flexibility in the use of the octave convention suggests the ‘joyful relativity’ Bakhtin believes is expressed by carnival gestures: the utterance of authority is not always in the mouth of the King, and it may be overturned.

From the very start of the opera Verdi hints that the octave will be a significant part of the musical realisation of the drama. In the first bars of the Preludio the violins mark out pizzicato F# octaves while flute and oboe are given a little rising figure through the same octave. (See **Musical Example 1.**<sup>130</sup>) The curtain rises on a formal levée, an occasion for subjects to pay their respects to their ruler and to invite him to exercise his power by granting their petitions. In the scene the ‘top down’ relationship between Riccardo and those he governs is enacted physically through the bowing and deference indicated in the *disposizione scenica*, and in the musical gesture of the *salto d'ottava*. The King’s first utterance is to invite the petitions of his subjects, and promise to grant them if they are justified: his power to do so is signalled by the *ottava* on ‘giusto’ which closes his phrase. When Renato enters, the bow that he makes to the King is coupled with an *ottava* on his salutation: ‘Conte’. After the Minister has warned Riccardo of the conspiracy, the King’s refusal to make arrests is followed by the a declaration which makes use of two *ottava* gestures to set out his ‘ideology of monarchy’: that his rule is validated by the love of his people and by the protection of God. (See **Musical Example 2.**) The octave gestures on ‘L’amor mi guardi’ and ‘mi protegga Iddio’ give a sense of closure and authority to each of the two balancing halves of the statement (‘the people’s love’ and ‘God’s protection’). As well as using the *salto d'ottava* here, Verdi also takes from the *parlar ampio* style an accompaniment of brass and timpani, punctuating the

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<sup>130</sup> Musical Examples are to be found on pages 221 to 249 below.

declaration to give it the character of a Proclamation to which the attention of the citizens is drawn by the military instruments: trumpets and drums. The only other person on stage at this point is Renato, but Verdi uses these musical conventions to indicate that Riccardo is speaking as a ruler, not in an ordinary conversation with an equal.

The Judge's arrival is announced to the King with a *salto d'ottava* and Riccardo gives him permission to approach on another ('Il primo Giudice' 'S'avanzi'). Riccardo is still firmly at the top of the social hierarchy and even a Judge must seek his ratification for decisions. However, as soon as he sees the paper ordering a woman into exile, the King's authority begins to slip. The first mentions of Ulrica are given with a succession of octaves, giving early signals that her authority will supersede the King's in the next scene. (See **Musical Example 3.**) The Judge says her name for the first time on a *salto d'ottava*, and immediately Oscar interrupts the consultation between the King and his most senior Judge to describe her power as a fortuneteller, two octaves on D preparing for an excited rise to an octave on F on 'divinatrice'.<sup>131</sup> Oscar's intervention transgresses the rules: a Page has no business taking part in judicial decisions. The Judge outlines the case for banning Ulrica, and asserts his own authority with an *ottava* on 'mio' at the close. Now comes the critical moment of carnival overturning in the opera. In the 'official world' Riccardo should consider the request of his senior Judge and grant it if it is justified; he has promised to act in that way at the opening of the scene. However, he turns unexpectedly to the youngest member of his Court for an opinion. Just as Boy Bishops were elected to reign for a brief festive period, the page Oscar is suddenly chosen to exercise judicial authority. He and the Judge have already engaged in a power struggle over the as-yet-unseen character Ulrica, the *salto d'ottava* signalling the assertions of authority that each of them is making. It is clear that Oscar is going to win since not only does he sing another *ottava* on 'Difender vogl'io' but the *disposizione scenica* indicates that he moves forward to take the Judge's place at the centre of the stage beside Riccardo, while the Judge moves to the outside of the group as Oscar launches into

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<sup>131</sup> The Gossett & Narici 'reconstruction' of *Gustavo III* does not have the *salto d'ottava* on the first mention of 'Ulrica', so this must have been a finishing touch Verdi added between Naples and Rome.

‘Volta la terrea’. The Judge’s defeat is complete when Riccardo dismisses him wordlessly before announcing the masquerade to the rest of the Court.<sup>132</sup>

Ulrica is the subject of ‘Volta la terrea’. The Judge has already described her in terms of disgust as an outsider, racially other, inhabiting a cave and attracting the worst kind of people, but Oscar presents her as a figure of authority who draws followers to her through a prophetic power bestowed by a deity. She is being elevated as a Carnival King, a person of low estate who presides as a parodic version of the anointed King. Whereas earlier in the scene Riccardo has declared himself to be under the protection of God, Oscar declares that Ulrica is in league with Lucifer. Both Oscar and Ulrica are characters of low status, the Page exercising authority to defend the ‘low-life’ Fortuneteller, but between the strophes of his song, the King merely laughs at this unlikely pairing: ‘Che vaga coppia, che protettor!’.<sup>133</sup> The challenge to judicial and regal authority that is being made in ‘Volta la terrea’ is shown in the music by the series of reversals of the *ottava* within its melody. (See **Musical Example 4**.) The octave falls of authority which have been repeatedly used in the preceding passage are now reversed, with upward octave leaps in Oscar’s *brillante* celebration of this disruptive outsider. The piccolo, often used for music expressing laughter and *diablerie*, echoes with the flute the octave leap up on ‘terrea’ and ‘sfavilla’. The musical convention of the falling *ottava* has been reinvigorated by turning it upside down to make a gesture of challenge: Oscar is putting two fingers up musically to the authority of the Judge and the stability of Christian society.

The King now abandons his authority and calls his courtiers to join him in a disguised visit to see the fortuneteller Ulrica. There are no more falling octaves in this scene, no more royal pronouncements, no more bowing. The King has uncrowned himself to join his subjects as an equal, declaring that he will dress as a fisherman.<sup>134</sup> He invites those around him to join in a collective folly - one of the key ideas of

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<sup>132</sup> *Disposizione scenica*, 9.

<sup>133</sup> Note the pauses between the strophes of Oscar’s song, which show that he is the person in authority on the stage, with licence to hold everyone’s attention as they wait to hear what he has to say.

<sup>134</sup> The question of masquerade and disguise is discussed at more length in Chapter 2.3.

Bakhtin's carnival, and one which he saw as important in the early carnivalized drama, *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*.<sup>135</sup> 'Ogni cura si dona al diletto' is a number in which Riccardo joins his subjects as a musical equal: they dialogue with one another, the repeated 'Si!' and 'Alle tre!' from the chorus a very different response to the King from the deferential hymn which opened the Act, and Riccardo closes in unison with everyone else. The *disposizione* does not indicate any dancing, merely a couple of steps forward at the *stretta*, but the insistent rhythm of the piece suggests a collective song-and-dance number, and Knud Arne Jürgensen lists it as a 'Gallop' amongst the pieces he identifies as having been structured by Verdi with certain dance-forms in mind.<sup>136</sup> I shall discuss dancing within Carnival at more length later in the dissertation, but note here that the musical style of a *galop* at this point demonstrates that the formality of the Court has been abandoned for the freedom and equality of carnival, and prefigures the masked ball at the close of the opera at which the consequences of Riccardo's act of folly will be played out.

In the next scene a different figure of authority is holding court.<sup>137</sup> Ulrica is the ruler of her own sphere. Just as the male chorus of Riccardo's loyal courtiers intone *sottovoce* their wishes that he may rest undisturbed at the opening of Act I, the female chorus of Ulrica's followers open the scene with a *sottovoce* injunction of silence so that she may not be disturbed during her incantation. In the next chapter I shall discuss her *Invocazione* and the way in which it presents her authority as an opposite of that of Riccardo, but here I note that the reversal of their roles is staged within the *Invocazione* itself. After the first section Riccardo slips into the scene, dressed as a fisherman and pushing his way through the crowd. He is not accompanied by courtiers, or announced by his Page, and no-one bows to him as he enters. He uses no *parlar ampio* for his first pronouncement, merely remarking on a monotone that he is the first to arrive. Instead of being listened to respectfully, he is told rudely to get out of the way by the woman crowding round Ulrica. He has

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<sup>135</sup> See page 40 above.

<sup>136</sup> Knud Arne Jürgensen, *The Verdi Ballets* (Parma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 1995), Appendix V, 364.

<sup>137</sup> The characteristics of Ulrica's domain are discussed in Chapter 2.2 in relation to the Bakhtinian grotesque.

uncrowned himself and become an ordinary man of low status, while Ulrica has assumed power as the Carnival Queen.

Ulrica uses the *salto d'ottava* to issue orders: on ‘La mano’ when she tells Silvano to put out his palm to be read; on ‘Ascoltate’ and ‘Partite’ to Amelia, a lady of higher social standing than Ulrica in the ‘official world’. However, her authority does not go unchallenged when Riccardo and his courtiers approach her. The noblemen still order her about, even when they are in disguise, and their offstage shouts to her to open up and tell their fortunes use the *salto d'ottava* to show that these are men of high rank, not the women and sailors who defer to her authority. After Riccardo has tried to pose musically as a fisherman in ‘Di’ tu se fedele’ she admonishes him in a solemn syllabic utterance which falls slowly down the octave, warning him that insolence will be punished (‘Chi voi siate, l’audace parola’). Their rival authorities are then asserted through the use of the *salto d'ottava* in the fortunetelling passage. (See **Musical Example 5**.) Riccardo exercises his right as the most senior person to go first, pulling rank musically in ‘L’onore a me cedi’. Ulrica recognises his status as a military leader, an *ottava* falling on ‘sotto l’astri di Marte’. When she foresees death on his hand and refuses to continue, Riccardo insists on knowing the truth: first he asks her on a monotone ‘Parla’ and when she resists, commands her on an *ottava* ‘Parla’. She regains her authority through her fortunetelling power; as he wants to hear the worst, she will tell it, and there is an *ottava* on the pronouncement that he will die at the hand of a friend (‘Per man d’un amico’). This is at first met with awe, but after a moment it is the octave interval which signals that her authority is about to be challenged. Little woodwind figures with an upward octave leap break the solemn mood induced by Ulrica’s prophecy, and prepare for Riccardo’s laughing rejection of her authority over his future in ‘È scherzo od è follia’.<sup>138</sup> (See **Musical Example 6**.)

Beghelli has noted that the *salto d'ottava* is regularly used in Verdi’s work for acclamations to rulers. He points out the way in which Silvano and the female chorus use a typical Verdi acclamation form to hail Ulrica when she has correctly predicted

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<sup>138</sup> The number itself is discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.2.

success for him: ‘Evviva la nostra Sibilla immortale’. He goes on to consider the hymn, which he terms ‘un’acclamazione fatta canto’, and cites as an example ‘O figlio d’Inghilterra’ which closes this scene.<sup>139</sup> It is Silvano who is the soloist at the head of the chorus for both these passages, and each time he uses a *salto d’ottava* to acclaim the person in authority, addressing ‘Evviva!’ to Ulrica, and ‘l’inno suoni della nostra fè’ to introduce the choral hymn to Riccardo. (See **Musical Examples 7 and 8.**) This doubling of the act of acclamation within a single scene makes clear the carnival reversal which elevates Ulrica to authority at the beginning, then restores Riccardo to power at the close. The moment at which the Carnival Queen is uncrowned is set on a *salto d’ottava*: when Renato arrives and speaks the King’s name, Ulrica recognises him and exclaims ‘Il Conte’. Riccardo is immediately put back on top of the social pyramid, exercising his power by telling her that she will not be exiled, and giving her a purse of money. Her reply underlines that he has returned to his position as the Good King: ‘Magnanimo tu sei’.

The good and magnanimous king is now acclaimed by his subjects. I have pointed out that Verdi refused repeated invitations to write a Hymn to Vittorio Emanuele after his military success began to win Italian independence. He does in *Ballo* write a hymn of patriotic acclamation to a ruler, and the scene works in such a way that it may be read by the audience as a greeting to any Good King. The chorus are first heard offstage shouting ‘Viva Riccardo!’ and are preceded on to it by Silvano, who recognises Riccardo as his benefactor and calls the others in to pay their respects.<sup>140</sup> The words in which he does so are deliberately vague:

È lui, ratti movete, è lui:  
Il nostro amico e padre.  
Tutti con me chinatevi al suo piede  
E l’inno suoni della nostra fede.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Beghelli, ‘Atti performativi’, 239-49.

<sup>140</sup> The chorus are invited to perform a gesture of deference to Riccardo. Silvano asks them to bow at his feet, the printed libretto (see below) indicates that they should prostrate themselves, and the *disposizione* directs that from the start of ‘O figlio d’Inghilterra’ to the close of the scene the crowd should wave their hats and caps in the air joyfully.

<sup>141</sup> ‘It is he, move quickly to him, it is he: our friend and father. All with me bow at his feet and sound the hymn of our faith.’ These are the words of the Ricordi score, and therefore, according to Rosen’s concept of the ‘bitextuality’ of *Ballo*, probably the ones that were sung in Rome. The printed libretto has for the third line: ‘Si prostri ognuno; amor, dovere il chiede’, presumably an amendment by the Papal censor, although the rationale does not seem obvious; Libretto, 21.

A group of loyal patriots offstage move towards an unnamed but benevolent monarch: is this a way of staging the aspirations of those outside Piedmont who were looking for a Good King and wanting to submit themselves to his rule, the ‘mille e mille vite’ Renato refers to in his aria in the previous scene? Is Silvano leading them towards the King in the way Verdi himself will go ahead of his fellow citizens to Turin to acclaim Vittorio Emanuele as King of Italy and lay Parma at his feet? It is possible that Verdi refused invitations to write a Hymn to his King because he felt that he had already done so in the ‘acclamazione fatta canto’ which closes this Act: ‘O figlio d’Inghilterra’.<sup>142</sup>

Renato is the character in the opera who constantly upholds the social order and the ties of loyalty which make it work. When he joins the enemies of the King, it is because Riccardo has failed to respect the marriage vows between Renato and Amelia which should be upheld by the ruler. He never laughs or takes part in carnival tricks. In his music, therefore, the *ottava* is always ‘top-down’; he makes no upward carnival challenges to authority. His first entry is marked with a *salto d’ottava* as he bows deferentially to the King. In Act II he demonstrates his loyalty to Riccardo on downward octaves. He begs the ‘unknown lady’ not to expose the King to assassins (‘Nè voi già vorrete segnarlo’) and even more emphatically swears to his master that he will conduct the lady back to the city without a word or a look. (See **Musical Example 9**.) ‘*Lo giuro*’ is his oath on a *salto d’ottava*, but it is repeated a third lower with a drum roll for even greater solemnity; when Renato takes an oath he really means it. The moment at which he realises his loyalty has been betrayed both by his wife and by his King is also set on an *ottava*: as Amelia’s veil falls, he cries out ‘Amelia!’. The mockery and laughter of the conspirators in ‘*Ve’ se di notte*’ uses a reversed octave but Renato’s line in the ensemble begins as a monotone and never leaps; he has no ‘carnival sense of the world’ and he is outraged rather than amused by any overturning of the social order.

In Act III scene 1 the *salto d’ottava* is used repeatedly to place Renato as a character who represents hierarchy, social order and the policing - even through

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<sup>142</sup> Beghelli, ‘Atti performativi’, 245, 248-9.

murder - of the contracts which hold society together. In the next chapter I shall discuss the honour code and its treatment in this scene, but here I note the way his authority over his wife is expressed through the *salto d'ottava* with which he threatens her with death and reminds her to beg God's mercy on 'Sangue vuolsi' and 'misericordia'. He then decides that it is Riccardo who must purge the offence with his blood: 'il sangue tuo'. In Renato's eyes he is exacting punishment for a serious breach of the rules which govern society and the *ottava* signals the authority he is claiming as a wronged husband, even over Riccardo. He does not challenge the King's rule or laugh at it; it is Riccardo who is the offender and therefore must be executed.

Earlier in the chapter I have pointed out that the scene with Samuel and Tom is presented in a way which makes the conspirators appear noble and courageous, swearing an oath of allegiance to one another and to their enterprise. This impression is reinforced by the use of the *salto d'ottava*, which brings its connotations of authority and legitimate power to their plotting, replacing the upward-swelling lines and leaps in which Samuel and Tom have previously expressed their challenge to the order and benevolence of the King and his Court. As Samuel and Tom enter, Renato announces to them that he knows they desire the King's death, the *ottava* carrying the weight of his authority as the King's minister and adviser: 'Voi di Riccardo la morte volete'. He then commits himself to their conspiracy on another *ottava* 'Io son vostro', directs that the killer shall be chosen by lot: 'Chetatevi; and when his lot is picked, Samuel reads out 'Renato' on an *ottava*. Renato even uses an octave fall to order the Page to enter. This use of the convention identified by Beghelli for figures of authority and solemn oaths characterizes Renato as the antithesis of carnival, a man who is exacting legitimate punishment rather than trying to overturn the monarchy. It shows him taking power in this scene.

At the close of Act III, when Renato realises he has killed his ruler because of a false belief, he expresses his appalled knowledge that he has broken the rules of his society on the *salto d'ottava* repeated three times. I have already described how carefully a tableau is set up with Renato coming down to the proscenium to act out his desperate remorse, and this reinforcement of the prohibition against assassinating a

King is given heavy musical emphasis as he sings on falling octaves ‘esecrato sulla terra! esecrato sulla terra’. (See Musical Example 10.)

Riccardo dies as a ruler, his last actions and words underscored with the *ottava* of authority. After Renato is exposed as the murderer, the crowd are determined to kill the traitor but the King commands them to release him (*Lasciatelo!*) and the *disposizione* directs that immediately the officials let go of him.<sup>143</sup> I have already noted that Scribe’s Gustave makes no explanations or apologies at this point, and dies as a lover in Amélie’s arms. Somma and Verdi give their King a final opportunity to show how well he exercises his power. Speaking in the language of solemn oaths and contracts that Renato understands, Riccardo swears before God that Amelia is chaste, that he has respected her marital status and that he was about to use his official power to send the couple away from Court. His words ‘volli illeso il tuo nome’ recognise that in the code of honour Riccardo has a duty to Renato.<sup>144</sup> It is this reaffirmation of the social structure and its responsibilities which drives Renato to his outburst of remorse; he has executed a man who has not broken the rules after all. After witnessing Renato’s repentance, Riccardo rises from his seat, supported by two officials, in order to exercise his power one last time.<sup>145</sup> He asserts his authority - ‘Signor qui sono’ - on the same Db *salto d’ottava* on which Renato has triply declared himself ‘esecrato’ for his crime. (See Musical Example 10.) Riccardo’s last act as King is not to punish his murderer but to thank his subjects and to absolve and pardon all offenders - as he pronounces these words, the *disposizione* directs that all the chorus, dancers and extras kneel down, while the principals bow their heads. They begin to intone a hymn to their sovereign, which Renato joins *pianissimo*, followed by Samuel and Tom:

Cor sì grande e generoso  
Tu ci serba, o Dio pietoso:  
Raggio in terra a noi miserrimi  
È del tuo celeste amor!<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *Disposizione*, 57.

<sup>144</sup> Libretto, 45. ‘I wished your name to be unharmed.’

<sup>145</sup> *Disposizione*, 37

<sup>146</sup> Libretto, 45. ‘A heart so great and generous/ Keep for us, O merciful God:/ A ray on earth for us wretched ones/ Of your heavenly love.’

The words present Riccardo not just as a good King, but as a reflection of God's love on earth. As they are addressing God, the performers are now directed by the *disposizione* to rise to their feet and raise their arms towards heaven as the music reaches its climax.<sup>147</sup> The gesture is one of prayer and supplication as the King's soul is entrusted into God's keeping. At the close of the hymn the rest of the cast comment 'Ei muore!' but Riccardo has a final patriotic and benevolent utterance as King. He says farewell to his 'beloved America', sinks back on to his chair and 'making a last effort' says farewell to his subjects, addressing them as his children, the last *salto d'ottava* of the opera falling on the word 'figli' before he breaks off his phrase and dies. The *disposizione* directs that Renato prostrates himself at the King's feet in the final tableau, with his wife Amelia also at Riccardo's feet on the other side. All are to be in tears and in the greatest consternation as they exclaim in unison 'Notte d'orror!' and the curtain falls.

### After the curtain falls

Riccardo dies as a King, as the Father of his subjects, as God's representative on earth. Whatever shifts of authority, uncrownings and challenges have taken place at different points in the opera, the final scene shows the social pyramid firmly re-established, with Riccardo at the top setting out towards Heaven in an apotheosis of the kind often painted on the ceilings of palaces to flatter royalty. Perhaps Mila is right in calling the opera politically reactionary? Or is Labie correct in seeing in it support for Cavour and Vittorio Emanuele? There seems to be some evidence to support both claims, but neither can be proved beyond reasonable doubt. If it is, as I have suggested, a carnivalized work, in which the practices of uncrowning and reversal have been incorporated within the musical and dramatic structure, then it will always be ambivalent. As Bakhtin has pointed out:

The carnival sense of the world [is] hostile to any sort of *conclusive conclusion*: all endings are merely new beginnings; carnival images are reborn again and again.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>147</sup> *Disposizione*, 37. '...Cor sì grande e generoso, ecc. Al forte della musica tutti si alzano sollevando le braccia al cielo.' I have considered and rejected the possibility that what is intended is a one-armed Roman salute as a political gesture. The number of arms each person is to raise is a little ambiguous, but even if it is one each I can find no evidence of such a gesture being used with any kind of political meaning before D'Annunzio adopted it during the Fiume regency of 1919-20, after which it was taken up by Mussolini as part of his programme of *fascistizzazione*.

<sup>148</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 164.

*Ballo* has always defied easy categorization, puzzling critics with its mixture of genres, moving from the *brillante* style to the highly dramatic, from tragedy to outbreaks of laughter. That alone indicates how thorough is its carnivalization, how opposed it is to any closed meaning or well-defined genre. It may also explain its long popularity with audiences, an opera that has always been able to offer a new dimension or a fresh stimulus to the imagination, over the century and a half since it was written.

I have discussed in the Introduction the issue of the setting, and the debate about whether the opera should be given in the ‘Swedish’ or the ‘Boston’ version. The more interesting question is why Verdi, having battled with the censors over the setting in 1858, never revised the opera after its première and was content to see it put on in a seventeenth-century Naples setting which he had never been consulted about. Is this because the battle over the setting was intimately bound up with the political situation of the late 1850s and Verdi’s own involvement with it? The reflections I have detected in the opera of Vittorio Emanuele’s kingship and the rift over the *teoria del pugnale* were an essential element in its composition, not because Verdi wanted to make propaganda for the National Society but because he was an Italian who cared deeply about what was happening and could not put politics out of his mind while he and Somma were preparing their opera. However, once the War of Unification had broken out and Vittorio Emanuele was on his way to becoming King of an independent and united Italy, the connotations of Frenchness, of military courage, of the benefits of justice and good government no longer mattered. Times had moved on, and so had Verdi. The carnivalization of *Ballo* was its strength: a polemic opera would have lost its topicality once Vittorio Emanuele was undisputed ruler, but the complexity of the structure and style of *Ballo* meant there was plenty left to value even when the political elements became obsolete.

As the Kingdom of Italy settled down as a constitutional monarchy, adopting nineteenth-century models of government, press freedom and a light touch on theatre censorship, opera houses were no longer needed as separate ‘carnival spaces’ in which an alternative language of gesture and tableau could present a different kind of

ruler and way of being ruled. Repertory opera became the norm, so the opera house no longer connected with the latest ideas and interests of its audience through freshly commissioned work. Carnival itself began to die out, replaced by more formal celebrations. Italians began to lose their familiarity with the language of carnival gesture, and their adeptness at ‘reading’ censored plots and settings. The political context which made people scrawl ‘Viva V.E.R.D.I.’ on walls at the time of the première of *Ballo* was now part of history, and Verdi himself became part of the Establishment of Vittorio Emanuele’s Kingdom. Nothing demonstrates this shift more clearly than the fact that exactly two years after *Ballo* opened in Rome with police officers stationed in the audience to prevent the slogan being shouted, in February 1861 the opening of the first session of the new Italian Parliament was marked by a performance of Donizetti’s *La Favorita* at the Teatro Regio in Turin, which Verdi attended; the newly-elected Parliamentary Deputy was greeted with shouts of ‘Viva Verdi!’ and a standing ovation.<sup>149</sup> The man from Busseto was no longer working in the carnival world of the opera house in which double meanings, disguises, connotations and gestures were deployed to present stories which might suggest something to the audience which could not be caught by the censor; he had crossed the line into the official world of legislation, parliamentary debate, elected authority and clear lines of communication. He was being hailed as a Public Man with a constitutional position in the legislature of the Kingdom of Italy, a political figure who was admired for his support of Vittorio Emanuele. From this time onward he never accepted a new commission from an Italian theatre, and certainly never became the Italian patriotic composer Cecchi was looking for. Is it possible that the new political environment and his place within it stopped him from writing new work for Italian audiences? Was the *ancien régime* and its tensions a necessary stimulus to his creativity? When the Carnival season no longer offered an imaginative space to Italians hungry for change, did he no longer find a Carnival commission appealing?

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<sup>149</sup> Letter from Giuseppina Strepponi to Antonio Barezzi, 25 February 1861, in Frank Walker, *The Man Verdi* (London: Dent, 1962), 237-8. Sawall summarises the letter but claims that the cries of ‘Viva Verdi!’ were ‘con doppio significato’, whereas Giuseppina’s account makes them out to be personal appreciation for the composer himself, the reason for her telling Antonio Barezzi about the event.

## CHAPTER 2.2

### THE GROTESQUE BODY: SEX, DEATH AND LAUGHTER IN *UN BALLO IN MASCHERA*

‘Feconda di piacer’ is how Oscar describes Riccardo’s plan to make a visit in disguise to the fortuneteller in Act I of *Un ballo in maschera*.<sup>1</sup> This is a carnival escapade, in which the ruler decides to cast off his authority to merge with a group of men intent on trickery and laughter. The butt will be a woman who pretends to a solemn power of prophecy, and Oscar’s words suggest that their encounter will bring forth pleasure, just as a sexual union engenders new life. The visit to Ulrica in fact brings forth a very different outcome: both the prophecy of Riccardo’s death and the sexual encounter with Amelia which leads to it. In this chapter I shall attempt to show how Bakhtin’s concepts of the carnival grotesque and carnival laughter illuminate the connections between death, sex and laughter in the opera.

#### Bakhtin’s concept of the grotesque body

The previous chapter explored the concept of uncrowning which Bakhtin saw as an essential feature of carnival. Grotesque images were in his view related to this uncrowning as they implied a physical degradation, a ‘bringing down to earth’ in which the activities of the lower part of the body were stressed: digestion and urination, defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth. Carnival challenges all that claims to be unchanging and immortal, and a wide variety of grotesque images do this work through their form.<sup>2</sup> In his view, the ‘carnival sense of the world’ sees sex, death and birth as intimately linked in a natural cycle of fecundity, disintegration and refertilisation.<sup>3</sup> He draws attention to the way in which grotesque

<sup>1</sup> ‘Fecund of pleasure’. The Rome libretto gives the lines ‘La [l’idea] trovo anzi eccellente,/ Feconda di piacer’ to Riccardo, but Verdi has Oscar sing them, opposing his view to Renato’s warning that ‘L’idea non è prudente’. See *Un ballo in maschera* libretto (Rome: Tipografia Tiberina, 1859), 10 and *Un ballo in maschera* orchestral score (Milan: Ricordi, revised and corrected edition, 1994), 65.

<sup>2</sup> See page 37 above.

<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin uses the phrase ‘the carnival sense of the world’ in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 107, 134, 158, to highlight the way in which carnival images and gestures find their way into literature: ‘A more

images use comic gestures to show how alike are these three processes:

The great majority of these traditional gestures and tricks is based on the mimicking of the three main acts in the life of the grotesque body: sexual intercourse, death throes (in their comic presentation - hanging tongue, expressionless popping eyes, suffocation, death rattle), and the act of birth. Frequently these three acts are transformed or merged into each other insofar as their exterior symptoms and expressions coincide (spasms, tensions, popping eyes, sweat, convulsions of arms and legs).<sup>4</sup>

Such grotesque performances in carnival are intended to provoke laughter, and Bakhtin believes that those who laugh in carnival are freeing themselves from the fear of death. It is no longer annihilation and closure, but one stage in the collective renewal of the world. By the same token, love is not immortal and unchanging: in the carnival world any sexual act is celebrated as it may create new life.

One activity connected with Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body has already been used as a means of exploring certain scenes in Verdi's operas. Pierpaolo Polzonetti has used Bakhtin's statement 'No meal can be sad' as a starting point for consideration of banquets and other kinds of parties in all of the operas, showing how what he terms 'the gastronomic sign' points to underlying relationships and plot outcomes. At a party where food and drink would be expected, its omission signals that something is wrong and there will be a sad outcome. In *Ballo*, for example, no refreshments are served to the guests at the masked ball at which Riccardo is murdered; in the masked ball scene of *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, Polzonetti sees the arrival of a sorbetto as the moment which indicates that Montfort will escape assassination in that Act.<sup>5</sup> Such details may seem too flimsy to bear a great

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profound assimilation of the carnival tradition Dostoevsky found in Balzac, George Sand and Victor Hugo. Here there are considerably fewer external manifestations of carnivalization, but there is a deeper carnival sense of the world, and, most importantly, carnivalization permeates the very construction of the major strong characters and the development of the passions' (158-9).

<sup>4</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 353-4.

<sup>5</sup> Pierpaolo Polzonetti, 'Feasting and Fasting in Verdi's Operas' in *Studi verdiani* 14 (1999), 90-93. He notes that in *Vêpres* Act V the final assassination is presaged by the absence of refreshments at the wedding celebration for Hélène and Henri which precedes it. Although the libretto for the opera is by a Frenchman, Eugène Scribe, for the Paris Opera, Verdi insisted on a number of changes, especially to the final Act, which restructure the work away from Scribe's original four-act *Le Duc d'Albe* prepared for Halévy, then offered to Donizetti, in the 1830s; Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1992) Vol. 2, 169-86.

interpretative weight, but Polzonetti's study brings to the surface the cultural substructure of a society in which the tradition of carnival was still alive.<sup>6</sup>

### Ulrica and the grotesque

The moment in *Ballo* at which Oscar sings 'Feconda di piacer' is the point in the opera at which the 'official world' gives way to the world of the carnival square. The King invites his courtiers to throw their everyday cares aside and join in an act of folly and abandon by going with him to consult the fortuneteller:

Ogni cura si doni al diletto  
E s'acorra nel magico tetto:  
Tra la folla de' creduli ognuno  
S'abbandoni e folleggi con me.<sup>7</sup>

In the previous chapter I have drawn attention to the way in which musical gesture and stage action present Riccardo as an ordinary man in the crowd consulting the fortuneteller, while Ulrica is elevated as the figure of authority. The character of Ulrica only appears in a single scene of the opera, but Verdi considered it a 'very good part' rather than a comprimario role.<sup>8</sup> Carolina Ganducci was his original choice for the part when it was contracted for Naples, and she was a contralto whose abilities he knew well.<sup>9</sup> When the première was to be moved to Rome, Verdi reacted angrily to the impresario's choice of Zelinda Sbriscia for the part, offering his own help to negotiate a contract with the more expensive but more reliable Ganducci.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin devotes an entire chapter of *Rabelais* to a study of banquet imagery as he sees the 'banquet for all the world' as an important feature of popular festivity.

<sup>7</sup> 'May every care give way to delight,/ Come run to the magic roof:/ Among the crowd of the credulous/ Abandon yourselves and go mad with me.'; Libretto, 10.

<sup>8</sup> 'Oltre le tre parti grandi per soprano, tenore e baritono, vi sono altre due buonissime parti, una per contralto (*l'Indovina*), l'altra per soprano (*il Paggio*). Forse la Ganducci e la Fioretti. Vi sono pure due o tre altre seconde parti per basso.' Letter to Vincenzo Torelli, 26 December 1857 in *Copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi* ed. Gaetano. Cesari and Alessandro Luzio (Milan [n.pub.] 1913, reprinted [n.p.] Arnaldo Forni, 1979), 564 ('Apart from the three main parts for soprano, tenor and baritone, there are two other very good parts, one for contralto (the Fortuneteller) and the other for soprano (the Page). Perhaps Ganducci and Fioretti. There are also two or three other secondary parts for basses.')

<sup>9</sup> 'La Ganducci è più cantante che attrice, ed è così vero che, per esempio, l'*Azucena* non è parte per lei.'; letter to Torelli, 17 June 1857, in *Copialettere*, 484. ('Ganducci is more of a singer than an actress, and that's why, for instance, Azucena is not a part for her.')

<sup>10</sup> 'Hai avuto torto di affrettare in quel modo la scrittura della Sbriscia. Sento a dirne male e male assai!! Come diavolo dunque quando ve ne era una buona, sicura che t'avrebbe fatto eccellente servizio, ne vai prendere una che è incerta? Pensiamoci bene! Per la difficoltà di prezzo mi incarico io di procurarti facilitazioni per la Ganducci. Repeto pensaci bene: procura di scritturare questa Ganducci, e dimmi nel caso cosa potresti spendere.' Letter to Vincenzo Jacovacci, 5 April 1858 in Frank Walker, 'Unpublished Letters: A Contribution to the History of *Un ballo in maschera*' in

The composer lost this point, and was deeply dissatisfied with all three female singers cast for the Rome première. To Verdi, then, it was essential that the part was played by a prima donna contralto who could seize the attention of the audience, even though her performance would be over at the end of Act I. This points to the importance of the character as the 'carnival opposite' to Riccardo, who must be able to hold her own both musically and dramatically when they meet during her brief reign on stage.

The domain inhabited by Ulrica contrasts visually with the court which is the setting for the first scene. Riccardo's first appearance is at a morning *levée* held in an uncluttered audience chamber with no dark corners. Ulrica's dwelling has a dark recess, a little secret door and a spiral staircase which leads up out of sight into the roof. The walls are hung about with 'stromenti e arredi analoghi al luogo', and the cauldron on the hearth makes it clear that this is the kind of place where potions are brewed - set designs from the period often include a mummified crocodile or bird as a suitable prop, as well as a clutter of vessels and jugs.<sup>11</sup> Although the time of day is afternoon ('alle tre'), the scene darkens after Riccardo has arrived and the bystanders comment on the eerie half-light ('Oh come riluce di tetro!').<sup>12</sup> Whereas all the characters at the Governor's court are male, Ulrica's followers include no adult males - she is attended by a female chorus and a non-singing boy, and when Riccardo enters he is roughly pushed aside by the women as an unwelcome intruder. This is a space of female secrets, including the traditionally female mystery of bringing the material world into the body through the process of cooking. The cauldron is a grotesque emblem, pointing to the activities of eating and drinking by means of which women

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*Bollettino Quadrimestrale dell'Istituto di Studi Verdiani*, 1:1 (1960), 292. ('You were wrong to rush into an engagement with la Sbriscia, as you did. I have bad reports of her - very bad reports!!! Why the devil, then, when there was a good, reliable singer, who would have given you excellent service, have you gone and taken on one who is unreliable? Let's think very carefully about this! Regarding the difficulty over the fee, I'll undertake myself to obtain concessions for you, to secure la Ganducci. I repeat - think it over carefully. See if you can engage this Ganducci, and tell me, in that case, what you could pay.' Translation, *ibid.* 35)

<sup>11</sup> Libretto, 12; *disposizione scenica*, 10. Rosen discusses the placing of the staircase, door and recess in his Introduction to the *disposizione scenica*, concluding that the latter represents a revision in the light of rehearsal experience (Introduction p. 36). For set designs see Figs. 3, 4, 12, 17, 18, 25, 28. (David Rosen and Marinella Pigozzi (eds.), *Un ballo in maschera di Giuseppe Verdi* in series Musica e Spettacolo: Collana di Disposizioni sceniche (Milan: Ricordi, 2002.))

<sup>12</sup> Autograph score, reported by Rosen, *Disposizione scenica* Introduction p.57 and footnote 55.

may sustain life, engender sexual desire, or kill.<sup>13</sup>

In presenting the witch as a figure of female power in this scene, Verdi may have had in mind the Hecate scene interpolated into Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and included in Rusconi's 1838 translation on which Verdi based his operatic adaptation.<sup>14</sup> This scene was used by the composer for the ballet he wrote for Act III of the Paris version of *Macbeth* in 1865, in which the witches call up Hecate, whom Verdi terms 'la Dea dei sortilegi'. In Rusconi's translation, Hecate imposes her authority on the witches before the King Macbeth comes to consult them about his future in Act III, calling herself 'sovran de' vostri malefizii'.<sup>15</sup> Although Somma based the Ulrica scene on Scribe's *Gustave* libretto, Verdi's score and the *disposizione scenica* mark out the fortuneteller's zone as distinctly female, and make her more clearly a witch. Scribe's Arvedson sits at a table dealing with customers who include male sailors as well as women and Auber's chorus at the opening of this scene is mixed.<sup>16</sup> Arvedson has no magic wand, and although a cauldron is on stage, Scribe mentions just once that she throws plants into it. The *disposizione scenica* for *Ballo*, however, begins

<sup>13</sup> Although Somma and Verdi based their opera on Scribe's libretto for *Gustave* there is no evidence that either had seen the Auber opera or knew the *livret de mise en scène* prepared by Duverger and published in the *Collection de mises-en-scène de Grands Opéras et d'Opéras-Comiques représentés pour la première fois à Paris* which Palianti began to publish from 1839. (See Arnold Jacobshagen, 'Staging at the Opéra-Comique in nineteenth-century Paris: Auber's *Fra Diavolo* and the *livrets de mise-en-scène*' in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13:3 (2001) for a cautionary note on the dating of such *livrets*.) The setting for this scene in Duverger's *livret* for *Gustave* has little of the gloom and witchcraft which characterize Ulrica's space: 'une très grande fenêtre à triples battants de 10 à 19 pieds de hauteur, donnant sur un quai de Stockholm. Ces vitraux sont fermés d'abord par de grands rideaux qui s'ouvrent à volonté: au fond un peu sur la droite du public, grande porte de l'entrée générale du lieu...on voit des instruments d'astronomie ça et là, des vieux livres, des cartes de Géographie'; manuscript version reproduced in H. Robert Cohen, *The Original Staging Manuals for Ten Parisian Operatic Premières 1824-1843* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1998), 21-2. ('a very large window with three casements 10 to 19 feet high, opening on to a quayside at Stockholm. These windows are closed at first by large curtains which are opened at will: at the back, a little to the right seen from the audience, a large door which is the main entrance to the place... Astronomical instruments here and there, old books, geographical maps.')

<sup>14</sup> William Weaver, 'The Shakespeare Verdi Knew' in *Verdi's Macbeth: a Sourcebook* ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter (New York: Norton, 1984), 144-8.

<sup>15</sup> Knud Arne Jürgensen, *The Verdi Ballets* (Parma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 1995), 83, 89-91.

<sup>16</sup> Eugène Scribe and Daniel François Auber, *Gustave ou le bal masqué* [1833] Partition piano et chant (Paris: Brandus Dufour, n.d.), 122-3. In the Duverger/Palianti *livret* for *Gustave*, Arvedson carries on her fortunetelling business without magic ritual and surrounded by sailors: 'Arvedson est assise devant sa table, à gauche du public, et paraît possédée de son art. Elle est entourée de Christian, matelots, et de divers autres gens du peuple qui demandent leur bonne aventure.' (Cohen, 22.) 'Arvedson is seated before her table, to the left seen from the audience, and appears possessed by

the equivalent scene with an elaborate ritual for Ulrica, who wields her magic wand, walks around the cauldron, pours ingredients into it and draws a circle on the ground before beginning her Invocation. While this is enacted, the *disposizione* indicates that the female chorus are ‘con timorosa ansietà stando intente alle magiche funzioni’.<sup>17</sup> This scene prefigures the *Macbeth* ballet of six years later, in which Verdi’s draft for the choreography has the female chorus of sprites, devils and witches dancing round the cauldron, which Hecate then examines intently, while ‘tutti stanno religiosamente atteggiati e quasi tremando contemplano la Dea’.<sup>18</sup> There is of course a dramatic similarity between the two situations, in that a ruler is coming to consult a woman deriving her power from the Underworld about his future, and will have his death prophesied. Both Macbeth and Riccardo react to the warning with a confident belief that what is foretold is impossible, but die nonetheless.

Ulrica begins her Invocation with the word ‘Re’, but the King whom she is addressing is not the ruler Riccardo or any monarch of the official world. She is calling on the ‘Re dell’abisso’, the deity who presides over the Underworld and grants her the power of prophecy. Ulrica is a mirror image of the ruler Riccardo, and where he looks up to Heaven for his authority and for protection, the fortuneteller looks downward. The concepts of ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ are very important in Bakhtin’s theory of carnival:

“Downward” is earth, “upward” is heaven. Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts)...To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better... To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of non-existence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving.<sup>19</sup>

Ulrica is a woman with womb and breasts, surrounded by women followers, and her Invocation begins deep in the ‘downward’ musical zone, as cellos and double basses

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her art. She is surrounded by Christian, sailors and various other ordinary folk who are asking for their fortunes to be told.’

<sup>17</sup> *Disposizione scenica*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Autograph instructions for 1865 *Macbeth* ballet for Paris, cited in Jürgensen, 89-90.

<sup>19</sup> *Rabelais*, 21.

play at the very bottom of their ranges in the opening bars. ‘Re dell’abisso’ begins at *c'* in the chest voice of a prima donna contralto and her opening phrases heave themselves up through the scale of C minor in the first four bars before sinking back to the earth of the tonic *c'* in bar 8. (See **Musical Example 11.**) From bar 16 she sings that the deity who gives her power has spoken to her from the tomb - a key location in Bakhtin’s ‘downward’ sphere - and this citing of her authority is set on two *salti d’ottava*, each of which place heavy weight on the lower *c'*. The final bars of this section rise and then subside again to *c'*. Musically, Ulrica is firmly rooted to this pitch deep in her vocal range, as though deriving her strength from the earth beneath her.

The tessitura of Ulrica’s role lies low in the female voice, and Verdi’s concern about engaging the right contralto for the part indicates that he needed a singer who could make a strong impact during her limited time on stage. He described his preferred singer, Carolina Ganducci, as ‘more of a singer than an actress’ so it was clearly her voice which made her ideal casting for this role.<sup>20</sup> The first section of her Invocation ends on *c'*, and the *tempo di mezzo* involves the arrival of Riccardo in disguise. It is clear from the light woodwind accompaniment that he does not come in his official role as ruler, and the female chorus do not recognise him. He sings just a few notes to establish his presence on stage with the audience - and they are all at the same pitch as Ulrica’s closing *c'*. However, in the tenor’s voice they sound light and unforced, by contrast to the impression of weight given by Ulrica singing in her chest voice. The carnival crowning and uncrowning are therefore embodied vocally in this brief utterance: Riccardo no longer carries his authority here, in what is Ulrica’s domain. Ulrica’s voice is operating in the vocal sphere usually assigned to men, and by doing so she is commandeering the power they hold. Her vocal register indicates that she is ‘wearing the trousers’ in this scene.

Somma’s verses for the Invocation were deliberately framed in sexual language - he described them to Verdi as ‘quasi parlasse al suo amante’.<sup>21</sup> In the first

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 9 above.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Somma, 1 November 1857, in *Carteggi verdiani* ed. Alessandro Luzio (Rome: Reale Accademia d’Italia, 1935) Vol. 1, 221. ‘During her disappearance the supposition is that she is



stanza Ulrica calls upon the deity to ‘penetrate’ her roof, and the words ‘sospirò’ and ‘gemito’ can have sexual connotations. In the second stanza it is made explicit that Ulrica is experiencing sexual possession by the god which will allow her to take on his all-seeing powers:

È lui, è lui! ne’ palpiti  
Come risento adesso  
La voluttà riardere  
Del suo tremendo amplesso!<sup>22</sup>

In other words, Ulrica is connected even more firmly with the ‘downward’ sphere because she is open to the penetration of sexual possession, which will bring forth new knowledge. Bakhtin insists that the ‘carnival sense of the world’ is ever renewing, and that its characteristic degradations ‘bring forth something more and better’. He discusses the image of the pregnant old woman, commenting: ‘There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed.’<sup>23</sup> While it is not specified that Ulrica is an old woman, her presentation as a witch with a magic cauldron and a crowd of female followers suggests that she is past the first flush of youth. There is certainly something grotesque about her public declaration that she is in the grip of a Satanic sexual experience. In the Boston version her characterization as ‘dell’immondo sangue dei negri’ implies that her racial otherness is in itself disgusting, and her words about Satanic penetration reinforce the stereotype of exotic women as sexually rapacious and dangerous, enticing men to a physical degradation which may result in a socially-disruptive birth.

The *salto d’ottava* and its reversal are brought into play in the second section of the aria to indicate the authority of the God Below who is taking possession of her, and that this authority is the disruptive opposite of the deity who protects Riccardo. (Satan is described as holding the sign of his prophetic power in his left hand, with its

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conversing with the devil to whom she alludes with these words in the Invocation “He comes the eternal youth, etc.” [line changed in later versions] as though she were speaking to her lover.’

<sup>22</sup> Libretto, 13. ‘It is he! It is he! In the throbs/ How I feel now/ The desire rekindle/ Of his tremendous embrace!’ ‘Amplesso’ in nineteenth-century Italian had two meanings, one of which was sexual (since Somma’s time, the sexual meaning has become predominant.)

<sup>23</sup> Rabelais, 25-6.

sinister connotations and suggestion of a mirrored reflection.) As Bakhtin points out, ‘there is nothing completed’ in the images of carnival: they celebrate change and renewal, crowning and uncrowning, degradation and regeneration. After the closed ‘top down’ musical gestures (‘adesso’, ‘amplesso’) come the ‘down up’ reversals of the octave (‘sinistra’, ‘rifolgorar’). As in Oscar’s ‘Volta la terrea’ these leap up in mid phrase, embodying the carnival disruption which is never closed or final. (See **Musical Example 12.**)

At the close of the aria Ulrica declares her power *fortissimo* at the top of her vocal range, then drops to *c'* - then drops out of sight. As Rosen points out, the disappearance of Ulrica through a trapdoor was an invention of Somma and does not appear in *Gustave* or the other operas based on Scribe’s plot.<sup>24</sup> ‘Downward’ is here physically enacted by Ulrica at the close of her aria, which defines her as belonging to that zone. She is symbolically buried in the earth, and then, just as significantly, is ‘reborn’ by appearing again amid her followers, ready to impart the prophetic knowledge which is the fruit of her union with the God Below. Rosen discusses the difference between the autograph score, the libretto and the *disposizione*, on whether her disappearance takes place before or after the closing ‘Silenzio! Silenzio!’. The difficulty of managing the disappearance physically within the closing bars, or the loss of audibility from a singer beneath the stage, may have persuaded Verdi to the safer option of postponing her disappearance until she has finished singing. However, the pitch at which she sings her closing commands delves right to the bottom of her vocal range on *g*, and if delivered *di sotterra* as indicated by Somma, this moment presents Ulrica right in the earthy source of her power. She ceases to be an on-stage character and her voice becomes that of the unseen force which opposes itself to the official world, which holds the grotesque mysteries of death, sexual union and birth.

The Bakhtinian grotesque body is in constant interchange and contact with what surrounds it, unlike the ‘classical body’ which is closed and uncontaminated. The physicality of Ulrica’s zone has already been noted in the presence of the cauldron for brewing potions, and the ritual circling she performs before her

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<sup>24</sup> Rosen, Introduction to *Disposizione scenica*, 71.

Invocation. In order to tell fortunes, she takes her clients' hands and reads the future from the body itself. As Rosen has noted, gestures with the hand recur often in the *disposizione scenica*, and in this scene there are a number which are essential to the plot itself.<sup>25</sup> Riccardo fulfils the prophecy which Ulrica reads in Silvano's palm by writing a note and stuffing it with money into the sailor's pocket; this shows that the ruler has moved from an audience chamber where he makes promises to fulfil his subjects' requests to an environment where he uses his hands to deal out material rewards. Ulrica instructs Amelia that she must pluck the magic herb with her own hand. When she takes Riccardo's hand to read his palm, she tells him that he has 'la destra d'un grande' (note the mirror opposite of the God Below of her Invocation, who holds the future in his left hand). She foretells that Riccardo will die by the hand of a friend, and that the murderer will be the first to shake his hand. Riccardo goes to shake hands with those around him, who refuse, until he clasps the hand of Renato as the minister enters. In each of these cases, the hand is the physical means by which an individual makes contact with what is outside his or her body: an object is touched, grasped or thrown; two human beings come into contact, and this contact in some way sparks a result. In opera, hands are often mentioned in libretto verse as objects in themselves, to be gazed on, doted on, requested in marriage, and so on, but in this scene they are active agents, the means by which characters encounter the world and by which the plot is driven forward. Working within the limits of nineteenth-century censorship, Somma uses the hand in this scene as a sign of that 'openness to the outside world' which is an important part of carnival images.

At a court such as Versailles, which Verdi wanted to suggest as the kind of environment his 'King Gustav' character fitted, strict rules of precedence and protocol were maintained; no subject was allowed to 'lay a hand' on the King's person and he would only touch objects and people cleaned up and presented to him with due ceremony.<sup>26</sup> In entering the world of Ulrica, Riccardo no longer separates himself from the people and things which surround him. He uses his hands to push money into a sailor's pocket, and holds out his hand willingly to Ulrica and to those who crowd around to hear her prophecy. All are equal in the carnival sphere: the seafarer

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<sup>25</sup>Rosen., 43-5.

<sup>26</sup> See page 72 above.

and the King both place their hands in that of the fortuneteller; the aristocratic lady Amelia must go out and get her hands dirty by picking the curing herb herself; the King does not mind who will be the first person in the crowd to shake his hand.

### The grotesque body and the gallows

Ulrica's instruction to Amelia that she must go to the gallows and gather the love-curing herb with her own hand points to the grotesque presentation of love in this scene. Amelia comes to consult Ulrica about the forbidden love which she describes in 'upward' terms, emphasising that the man she loves is a figure of authority:

Pace - svellermi dal petto  
Chi si fatale e desirato impera!  
Lui - che su tutti il ciel arbitro pose.<sup>27</sup>

Ulrica's reply 'degrades' Amelia's emotional experience to a physical problem which can be cured by a physical remedy: a brew of herbs can be ingested to sort out a misplaced sexual attraction. Amelia must travel to a place of death and bend to pluck the plant herself, after which her heart will be renewed: the 'downward' zone is where death, sex and rebirth are always linked.

The gallows to which Ulrica sends Amelia is the visual representation onstage of this 'downward' zone, and was to Verdi an essential element of the drama. The censors at Naples and then at Rome refused permission for a gibbet in Act II, and Verdi commented angrily:

Si è resa qui la scena meno tetra e questa modificazione oltre che toglie allo scenografo l'opportunità di far lavoro di maggior importanza, ha reso a me impossibile di presentare un preludio od una specie di sinfonia a tinte forti e terribili, adattate al luogo. Negli spettacoli teatrali non bisogna trascurar nulla: ciò che letto potrebbe sembrare indifferente, visto sulla scena può produrre il più grande effetto.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> 'Peace – to tear from my breast/The one who so fatal and desired commands there!/ He whom Heaven has placed as judge above us all.' Libretto, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Marginal comment on the *Adelia degli Adimari* replacement libretto, February 1858, *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 254. ('This makes the scene less dark and this change, apart from taking away from the scene designer the opportunity to produce a really significant piece of work, makes it impossible for me to present a prelude or some kind of overture with strong and terrible colours, suitable for

He managed to have two columns on the set for the Rome première, but no crossbar. However, the audience were left in no doubt about what kind of structure this was as Amelia points it out in a sudden illumination of moonshine at the opening of the scene:

Un raggio di luna... attraversa la scena, e presta agio ad Amelia di additare le colonne, ove s'accoppia al delitto la morte.<sup>29</sup>

By the following year, a more recognisable gibbet was permitted when the opera was presented at Terni, and the ‘Descrizione delle scene’ attached to the *disposizione* specifies ‘due colonne attraversate da un asse di ferro, onde giustiziare i colpevoli.<sup>30</sup> Set designs for subsequent productions in Verdi’s lifetime always include the gallows for Act II.<sup>31</sup>

It was Scribe who first chose this setting for the encounter between Amelia and Gustave, and it was certainly a location which seemed to appeal to the Romantic taste. Years before Scribe wrote his libretto, the Italian poet Ugo Foscolo depicted in *Dei Sepolcri* a deserted spot, outside the city walls, where the bones of the poet Parini may lie, contaminated by the blood of some thief who has died on the gallows.<sup>32</sup> Victor Hugo’s *Le Dernier Jour d’un Condamné* was published in 1829 and was immensely influential, both on the climate of public opinion against the death penalty in France and more widely on the imagination of writers far beyond its borders.<sup>33</sup> As

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such a place. In theatrical shows nothing must be neglected: something which on the page might seem unimportant, when seen on the stage can produce a very great effect.’)

<sup>29</sup> *Disposizione scenica*, 18. (‘A moonbeam shines across the stage and allows Amelia to point out the columns at the line *Where are coupled crime and death*’)

<sup>30</sup> *Disposizione scenica: Descrizione delle scene*, 161. (‘two columns with an iron bar across them, where the guilty are executed’) The ‘Descrizione delle scene’ are larger-format pages attached to the copy of the *disposizione* in the collection of the Museo Teatrale della Scala; Rosen discusses their status and dating on p. 16 of his Introduction.

<sup>31</sup> Set designs for Act II are shown in Figs. 5, 6, 16, 23, 24, 29 in the 2002 *Disposizione scenica* edition.

<sup>32</sup> Ugo Foscolo, *Dei Sepolcri* (1807). Somma may be deliberately bringing this poem to the minds of a literate Italian audience in introducing the ‘úpupa’ into Ulrica’s Invocation, as this bird is associated in the poem with the lonely execution spot and burial ground: ‘e uscir del teschio, ove fuggia la luna/ l’úpupa, e svolazzar su per le croci/ sparse per la funerea campagna/ e l’immonda accusar col luttuoso/ singulto i rai di che son pie le stelle/ alle obbliate sepolture.’ Lines 82-87. (‘and see the hoopoe that issues from a skull where she had fled the moonbeams, flitting away above the crosses scattered over the funeral plain, and upbraiding with her mournful cry the rays that the merciful stars cast on long-forgotten tombs.’ Translation from ENO programme for *A Masked Ball*, 1989.) I am indebted to John Lindon for drawing this to my attention.

<sup>33</sup> Graham Robb, *Victor Hugo* (London: Picador, 1997) 136-138 and 192. Robb points out the influence of the book on Dostoevsky and Dickens. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1963)

Anselm Gerhard points out, disgust with public executions at Paris led to the moving of the place of execution in 1832 from the Hotel de Ville to a location on the outskirts of the city.<sup>34</sup> This occurred just as Scribe was writing the *Gustave* libretto and may have been in his mind as he penned Arvedson's lines:

Hors des murs de la ville il est un lieu terrible  
Sauvage, épouvantable, et du peuple abhorré;  
De la loi qui punit la rigueur inflexible  
Au châtiment l'a consacré!<sup>35</sup>

For the Paris première of *Gustave* the design for the gallows scene by Ciceri was gruesome, showing decaying corpses strung from gibbets amid a flock of feasting crows.<sup>36</sup>

The question remains: why did Verdi insist on keeping the gallows as essential to the scene against all the objections of the censors, even though it is not required for any stage action? (There is no suggestion, for instance, that the conspirators intend to hang Riccardo there, and no reason why Amelia's herb could not be found growing in any lonely spot outside the city where Riccardo might follow her for a secret meeting.) The Bakhtinian grotesque body underlies this perception that the gallows is somehow indispensable to the drama. This is a site of extreme physicality, where bodies can be seen in the process of disintegration, losing individual identity and being swallowed up by the earth or ingested by birds, flies and carnivorous animals. It is also a site of extreme degradation, where bodies are entirely subjected to outside forces; the condemned man can no longer call his body his own. Hanging is a form of execution which is especially 'downward'; unlike the guillotine or the executioner's axe, it kills by the body falling down ('the drop') and is often accompanied by the kind of death throes ('hanging tongue, popping eyes, suffocation, death rattle') described

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Bakhtin quotes at length Dostoevsky's acknowledgement of the influence of *Le Dernier Jour* and comments that Dostoevsky's carnivalization drew on the way the carnival tradition had been assimilated into literature by writers such as Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens; see p.55 and pp. 158-159 of University of Minnesota Press 1984 translation by Caryl Emerson.

<sup>34</sup> Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theatre in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 226.

<sup>35</sup> Scribe, *Gustave* libretto, 50. ('Outside the walls of the town there is a terrible place,/ Wild, appalling and by the people abhorred;/ The inflexible rigour of the law which punishes/ To punishment has consecrated it!')

<sup>36</sup> Fig. 11 in 2002 edition of *Disposizione scenica* shows Pierre-Luc-Charles Ciceri's design for Act III of *Gustave*.

by Bakhtin as gestures of the grotesque body.<sup>37</sup> It provokes defecation and other physical effects in the ‘lower bodily stratum’.<sup>38</sup>

Ulrica has already been characterised textually and musically as belonging to the ‘downward’ zone, and she now directs Amelia to the gallows to find a cure for a problem caused by her sexuality. In ‘Dalla città all’occaso’ she links sex and death, explaining that the herb is rooted amongst the stones of the gallows where the guilty gasp their last. The degradation of execution, with its exhalation of the ‘ultimo sospir’, is linked to the sighs of erotic passion, from which Amelia is seeking relief. Once again, Ulrica’s music delves ‘downward’ to *a* in describing the ‘campo abbominato’ and ending down there on the final ‘ultimo sospir’. (See **Musical Example 13.**) The magic herb which will renew Amelia’s heart is rooted in the earth, and in the grave.

In the trio which follows, Amelia begins in the ‘upward’ zone with a false *preghiera* start ‘Consentimi o Signore’, but the piece soon becomes physical. She refers to ‘l’infiammato palpito’ she feels, while Ulrica’s reassurance deals with bodily functions: trembling, weeping and drinking the potion. Riccardo, unseen, is erotically aroused: he sings of his ardour, and falls *dolcissimo* down an octave on ‘Amelia’ before expressing his longing to breathe in her sighs. The phrase ‘l’aura de’ tuoi sospir’ is repeated six times, and Amelia leads into her second ‘Consentimi’ with a prolonged and rising ‘Ah!’ like a long sigh, immediately taken up by Riccardo with ‘Ah, ardo’ under her prayer, moving into the same rhythm as Amelia for the first time. (See **Musical Example 14.**) Under strict censorship, an exchange of sighs is the only interpenetration of bodies between man and woman that can be sung about, but the sigh is also one of the physical gestures of the Bakhtinian grotesque which highlight the similarities between copulation and dying. Riccardo’s sexual drive impels him to follow Amelia ‘se fosse nell’abisso’: he is drawn to a site of death, where he will

<sup>37</sup> *Rabelais*, 353-4.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Clark, ‘Short drop hanging’ 5 May 2003 <[www.richard.clark32.btinternet.co.uk/hanging](http://www.richard.clark32.btinternet.co.uk/hanging)>. There still seems to be some argument about whether short-drop hanging provokes ejaculation, but though it may be a myth, it was first recorded in classical antiquity and is probably responsible for the long history of deaths through autoerotic asphyxia. I can think of no way of discovering what Verdi, Somma, Scribe or Bakhtin might have believed about the effect of hanging on the male genitals.

mingle his sighs with hers under the gallows, the spot at which Ulrica has just mentioned that dying men exhale their last sigh. This is the first time in the opera when Riccardo and Amelia sing together, and marks the point in the love plot which sets him on the path to his death. The gallows is the destination where they will meet and declare their love; it is made clear in this scene that death and sex are inextricably linked in the drama, and that his erotic passion will indeed take him down into the abyss.

Verdi succeeded at least partially with the Roman censors, and when the curtain rises on Act II the audience see the gallows as they hear his ‘preludio o ...sinfonia a tinte forti e terribili, adattate al luogo’.<sup>39</sup> As we have seen, Amelia’s first words draw attention to the gallows, and the text in which she does so is grotesque:

Ecco l’orrido campo ove s’accoppia  
Al delitto la morte!  
Ecco là le colonne...  
La pianta verdeggià al piè.<sup>40</sup>

The word ‘s’accoppia’, as well as the more general sense of ‘being joined’, can mean ‘copulate’, and is used particularly of mating animals. The degradation of death and the public exposure of disintegrating bodies is described in a way that hints at the degradation of the sexual act at its most basic. Somma’s lines go on immediately to describe how the healing herb flourishes at the base of the gallows. New life is nourished from the earth into which the dead fall, and Amelia’s sexual attraction to Riccardo is placed within this cycle of death and rebirth.

To Verdi, Amelia’s aria ‘Ma dall’arido stelo divulsa’ was intimately linked with the gallows site where it is delivered. He protested at Naples when the gallows was not to be permitted: ‘Chi non vede qui che quanto più la scena è tetra, altrettanto maggiore è l’effetto del soliloquio d’Amelia.’<sup>41</sup> Somma was urged to write and rewrite the verses until the maestro was satisfied, rejecting the second draft with the following comments:

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<sup>39</sup> See Note 28 above.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Here is the horrible field where are coupled/ Crime and death!/ There are the columns/ The plant shows green at their foot.’ Libretto, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Marginal comment to *Adelia degli Adimari*, February 1858, in *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 254. (‘Who does not see that the darker the scene is, the greater is the effect of Amelia’s soliloquy.’)

La situazione ... resta piccola. Non c'è fuoco, non c'è agitazione, non c'è disordine (e dovrebbe essere estremo in questo punto). Mi piacciono alcuni versi delle due prime strofe: bisognerebbe conservarne alcuni, poi trovare qualche cosa di diverso, cambiando metro a seconda delle idee: qualche cosa che avesse il diavolo adosso: la situazione lo vuole.<sup>42</sup>

As Peter Ross has pointed out, the final version portrays Amelia's emotional state through a kind of dialogue between herself and her heart.<sup>43</sup> The 'disordine' which Verdi required reaches the extreme point at which Amelia's consciousness of herself begins to disintegrate under the competing demands of her social role and her body. 'Chi piange?' she asks, as if unaware that the woman weeping is herself, 'Qual forza m'arretra? M'attraversa la squallida via?' as though someone outside herself were physically holding her back from acting, while disjointed quavers in the first violins suggest an unspoken emotion which is radically disconnected from the line she is singing. She addresses her heart as though it were separate from her self, commanding it to stop beating so that death and annihilation may end physical desire and suffering.

Perhaps the 'diavolo' whom somehow Verdi wanted to drive these lines forward holds the key to the situation. In Oscar's 'Volta la terrea' and Ulrica's Invocation, the God Below - Lucifer or Satan - holds sway in the 'downward zone' connected with female sexuality. It is not the simplistic 'love versus duty' dilemma that is expressed in Amelia's aria, but the struggle between two much wider concepts: the official 'upward' world which dictates fidelity within holy matrimony and obedience to husband and sovereign, and the carnival 'downward' world where the body and its appetites are all-powerful.

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<sup>42</sup> Letter to Somma, 26 November 1857, in *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma* ed. Alessandro Pascolato (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1913), 84. 'It's still on too small a scale. There's no fire, no agitation, no disorder (and it should be extreme at this point). I like some of the text in the first two verses: we should keep some of it, then find something different, changing the metre to match the idea: something which has the devil behind it: that's what the situation calls for.'

<sup>43</sup> Peter Ross, 'Amelias Auftrittsarie im Maskenball' in *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 40 (1983) translated in Harold Powers, "La dama velata": Act II of *Un ballo in maschera* in *Verdi's Middle Period* ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 292.

Significantly, the aria has a *cor anglais obbligato*, an instrumental colour Verdi used for Lady Macbeth in her sleepwalking scene in Act IV of *Macbeth*. Both Amelia and the Lady are married women torn apart by ‘dark desires’ to the point where they hallucinate a physical manifestation of their emotional state.<sup>44</sup> Lady Macbeth sees stains of blood on her hands; Amelia hears crying and feels a force pulling her back, then sees a terrifying vision of a head rising from the ground. Verdi said of this invention of Somma, which finally satisfied his demand for ‘disordine’ in the aria: ‘Questa specie di visione stava benissimo fra l’orrore d’un luogo di supplizio.’<sup>45</sup> The gallows is a site where bodies disintegrate into their component parts, and here is a head without a body, which springs uncannily from the earth at a level where heads should not be, and which is still breathing. It is not just breathing, but sighing, with that ambiguity already noted between the ‘sospiri’ of the death agony and that of sexual ecstasy. Amelia cries out ‘con spavento’ as she sees its eyes gleam and stare angrily at her - she is terrified by the accusing knowledge of her own physical desire, which has taken on a grotesque physicality of its own. Again, we may be reminded of *Macbeth*, in which the King is terrified by the sight of Banquo’s ghost shaking his head and staring : ‘Quel guardo a me volto trafiggemi il cor!’. Later in the same opera, the witches conjure spirits to foretell the future for Macbeth, one of which is a helmeted head which rises from the ground to utter a warning.

Amelia’s hallucination may be induced by her struggle with her sexuality, but the orchestra connects the head that she sees with death and the underworld through the anapaestic death figure which accompanies its appearance.<sup>46</sup> This *topos*, which Frits Noske traces in French and Italian opera of the eighteenth and nineteenth

<sup>44</sup> Powers draws attention to the inclusion of this aria in the genre of solo pieces for ‘isolated’ soprano with double-reed accompaniment defined by Hepokoski in his discussion of ‘Addio, del passato’; James A. Hepokoski, ‘Genre and Content in Mid-century Verdi: “Addio, del passato” (*La traviata*, Act III)’ in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1:3 (1989) 259-62). Hepokoski sees ‘isolation’ in a broad range of situations in which such arias are sung, but does not include Lady Macbeth’s aria in his group, although Verdi comments particularly on his use of the *cor anglais* in his correspondence (see Note 92 below). In each of the examples given by Hepokoski: the arias of Violetta, Abigaille, Gilda, both Amelias, Hélène, Elisabeth, Aida, Desdemona (as well as Lady Macbeth sleepwalking) the character is in the grip of death or guilt, and often both, the only possible exception being Amelia in *Simon Boccanegra* who is singing about a death in the distant past.

<sup>45</sup> ‘This sort of vision went very well with the horror of a place of execution.’ Marginal comment on *Adelia degli Adimari*, in *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol.1, 254. The hallucination of a head does not occur in Scribe, nor in the earlier drafts sent by Somma to Verdi in the autumn of 1857.

<sup>46</sup> Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992 revised edition) 397.

centuries, may be connected to the drum roll accompanying the condemned man to the scaffold, and, as Noske has shown, it permeates the music of the Ulrica scene and Act II which takes place at a place of execution.<sup>47</sup> As he points out, it is often combined with the tolling of a bell to intensify the connotation of death, and this is achieved here by the sounding of the midnight chime just before Amelia sees the head rise. Trombones are included in the orchestration of the death figure, bringing their traditional suggestion of funerals and the underworld.

In addition to the indications in text and music that the gallows is intimately linked with Amelia's struggle with her sexuality, the *disposizione scenica* gives a detailed choreography for her movement towards it and away from it during the Prelude and her aria:

Alzato il sipario incomincia il preludio, ed all'entrata del cantabile del flauto esce Amelia agitatissima dalla rampa n. 3, e discende lentamente sulla rampa n. 4, dove si prostra supplicando il cielo a darle coraggio per proseguire l'arduo cammino: ripreso animo, prosegue la via per la rampa n. 5, e giunge al piano un poco prima della fine del preludio, osservando spaurita il luogo selvaggio in cui si ritrova. In tal punto un raggio di luna dal n. 2 attraversa la scena, e presta agio ad Amelia di additare le colonne, *ove s'accoppia al delitto la morte*. Tremante essa si appressa presso il proscenio colpita dall'idea di poter morire nel compier l'impresa a cui si è accinta: ma rianimata dal pensiero d'eseguire il suo dovere, s'incammina verso le colonne n. 7, poi nuovamente indietreggia presso alla bocca d'opera, pensando all'effetto che in essa produrrà il filtro dell'Indovina. Quindi di nuovo s'incammina verso il luogo fatale; ma tosto retrocede, dicendo: *qual forza m'arretra?*; e termina presso il proscenio il cantabile. Al lontano suono della campana, che batte mezzanotte, riprende animo per eseguire ciò che si è proposto, quando una orribile visione le toglie la forza di proseguire il cammino, e cade sulle ginocchia nel mezzo della scena.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Frits R. Noske, 'The Musical Figure of Death' in *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). His discussion of *Ballo*, which points out ten different anapaestic figures which appear in this opera, is on pp. 197-201. He also notes the use of the 'death figure' at the appearance of the helmeted head in *Macbeth*, and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene, both akin to the 'hallucinations of the grotesque' Amelia experiences under the gallows.

<sup>48</sup> *Disposizione scenica*, 18. ('As the curtain rises the prelude begins, and at the flute *cantabile* Amelia enters in a state of great agitation on Ramp No. 3, and descends slowly on Ramp No. 4, where she prostrates herself begging heaven to give her courage to continue the arduous path: recovering her spirits, she continues down Ramp No. 5 and reaches the level of the stage a little before the end of the prelude, looking round in fear at the savage place in which she finds herself. At this point a ray of moonlight from No. 2 shines across the stage, and makes it possible for Amelia to point out the columns, *ove s'accoppia al delitto la morte* ('where crime couples with death'). She trembles and moves towards the proscenium, struck by the idea that she may die in fulfilling the enterprise which has brought her there: but revived by the thought of carrying out her duty, she makes her way towards Columns No. 7, then draws back again towards the front of the stage,

This lengthy quotation demonstrates how carefully Amelia's struggle with her desire is blocked on stage, and how the body of the singer, as well as what she sings, is required to convey the significance of the gallows as a magnet for her and an object of terror. From the moment she appears from the wings she is in constant vacillation between the 'upward' and the 'downward'. The flute cantabile on which she enters is the reprise of her 'Consentimi' preghiera phrase and at its close she falls to her knees and prays. However, her entrance down a series of ramps physically embodies her descent to the 'downward' zone of the gallows, death and desire. When she has reached the level of the stage it is specified that she turns towards the gallows, and then away from it, no less than four times, her movement upstage and then downstage tracing out physically the ambivalence expressed in the words she sings.<sup>49</sup>

At the point where she is so split between guilt and desire that she hallucinates the head rising from the ground, she ceases to move and falls down in a halfway position in mid-stage. The text that she sings is another prayer to God but the four repetitions of 'miserere' carry connotations of impending death (in Act IV of *Trovatore*, for example, the Miserere offstage signals to Leonora and the audience that the execution is about to take place). Her plea for heavenly aid is marked *morendo* and the closing cadenza begins with what is almost a shriek of pain on *a''* which then falls slowly down through her voice to the *c'* which has been earlier the territory of Ulrica and her downward zone. The timbre of the cor anglais was clearly important to Verdi's conception of Amelia's state of mind here, since he gives explicit instructions that the first three bars of the anticipatory phrase may be played on the oboe as it lies so high in the cor anglais range, but that the lower repeat must be on the cor anglais. If the darker instrumental colour once again signals a woman's desire

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thinking of the effect that will be produced in her by the Fortuneteller's potion. Again she makes her way towards the fatal spot; but soon she retreats, saying *qual forza m'arretra?* ('what force holds me back?'); and the *cantabile* finishes with her close to the proscenium. At the distant chimes sounding midnight, she is recovering her spirit to carry out what she has resolved to do, when a horrifying vision robs her of the strength to go further, and she falls on her knees mid-stage.'

<sup>49</sup> See Melina Esse, "'Chi piange, qual forza m'arretra?': Verdi's interior voices' in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 14:1&2 (2002), 59-78 for a discussion of the relationship of melodramatic gesture with the music of *melodramma* (pp.70-8). The gallows setting of Act II of *Ballo* places it within the Gothic horror genre which was a source for nineteenth-century melodrama.

and guilt, this makes clear that while Amelia's prayer goes upwards, her thoughts remain below.

It is now that the *disposizione* indicates that Riccardo rushes out from the gallows towards her, and Verdi's autograph is also marked 'Esce dalle colonne improvvisamente Riccardo'.<sup>50</sup> In no other version does the Gustave character emerge from the gallows, and it is entirely in keeping with the dramatic importance of the execution site to Verdi's creation of the scene. The gallows brings forth, not only the magic herb which has power to cure erotic desire, but also the object of that desire. While Amelia has been praying to heaven, the 'downward' zone of the gibbet has been concealing Riccardo 'in the flesh', waiting to step forward as a warm living body from the gibbet where male bodies hang in death. The connection in this opera between sexual desire and death extends to the very placing of the characters on stage.

### **The grotesque body and the Act II love duet**

The physical closeness of the two bodies is emphasised by their first words and actions. Riccardo approaches Amelia with a certainty that she will want him beside her: 'Teco io sto', and her first reaction to move away from him in what the *disposizione* describes as a 'subitaneo impulso di pudore'.<sup>51</sup> This is not a courtship at a distance, but the conjunction of a man and a woman in a lonely place away from all social constraints, and Amelia's movement suggests a panic at impending rape. In her exploration of the 'Hugolian Master' in the plays of Victor Hugo, Anne Ubersfeld has described the way in which female characters fear the power of a ruler or authority figure who may force them sexually.<sup>52</sup> Scribe copies this reaction in his

<sup>50</sup> *Disposizione scenica*, 18: 'Riccardo, che tenevasi celato dietro le colonne n. 7, si avanza rapidamente per soccorrere Amelia.' ('Riccardo, who has hidden himself behind the columns, comes forward rapidly to assist Amelia'). Autograph score quoted in Powers, 'La dama velata', 280: 'Riccardo suddenly comes out from between the columns'.

<sup>51</sup> *Disposizione*, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Anne Ubersfeld, *Le Roi et le Bouffon: Étude sur le théâtre de Hugo de 1830 à 1839* (Paris: J. Corti, 1974), 424-43. Ubersfeld's study uses Bakhtin's carnival theory to illuminate Hugo's dramas, including *Hernani* and *Le roi s'amuse*, and much of what she has to say is relevant to the operas Verdi based on them, as well as to other operas constructed on the Hugolian model, such as *Trovatore*, *Vépres*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *La forza del destino*. She also comments on the

verses for Amélie, but it is compressed and emphasised in Somma's lines. Amelia's description of herself as 'la vittima che geme' suggests that she has been reduced to the status of a sacrificial animal, or at the very least a human whose body is to be used against her will. She fears the degradation to which she believes Riccardo is about to subject her, and tells him that it will destroy her life, using the word 'abbatterà' which has connotations of the slaughter of animals. Verdi's music breaks up her words to give the impression of struggle, panic and panting, but of course this *suspiratio* effect may also hint at the last gasps of those who have died at this spot.<sup>53</sup> (See **Musical Example 15.**)

Julian Budden has drawn attention to the unusual status of this duet as the 'central climax of the opera' whereas in all earlier Verdi operas with the exception of *Giovanna d'Arco* the love interest has generated a surprisingly small share of the major musical numbers. Both he and Powers have explored the ways in which Verdi departs from the *solita forma* in expressing the characters' movement through wooing, struggle, confession and delight.<sup>54</sup> Most recently, Emanuele Senici has examined the duet in the context of other duets of seduction, commenting that:

In nineteenth-century Italian opera, seduction is a complex process, in which two stages are crucial: "yes, I love you" and "ok, let's do it". The first could be shown on the operatic stage, the second obviously could not.... Music, and especially voice, can act as the porous interface between language and body.... Operatic seduction emerges in all its scandalous potential, bringing inexorably to the fore the tension between language and body that lies at the core of literary and theatrical seduction, but which literature and spoken theatre may be more successful at suppressing.<sup>55</sup>

To Verdi this was emphatically a scene of passion, and he was pleased with Somma's text for it, commenting:

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'Hugolian master': 'Que fait le maître supreme... roi, empereur ou ministre? Sa caractéristique la plus générale, c'est de condamner à mort... Il ne se conçoit pas sans un échafaud.' ('What does the supreme master do, ... the king, the emperor or the minister? His most general characteristic is to condemn to death.... It is impossible to conceive of him without a scaffold.')

<sup>53</sup> Kircher in his 1650 *Musurgia universalis* included *suspiratio* amongst his rhetorical figures formed by silence, as the melody is broken up by rests to illustrate the sighing mentioned in the text. See *New Grove* (2001) 'Rhetoric and music'.

<sup>54</sup> Budden, Vol. 2, 398 - 404. Powers, 'La dama velata', 300-19.

<sup>55</sup> Emanuele Senici, "'Teco io sto": strategies of seduction in Act 2 of *Un ballo in maschera*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14:1&2 (2002), 79-92 (pp. 80-1).

Bello, bellissimo il duetto tra Gustavo ed Amelia. Havvi tutto il calore ed il disordine che ci vuole nella passione.<sup>56</sup>

‘Heat and disorder’ were essential to it, and when the Neapolitan censors tried to foist the *Adelia degli Adimari* libretto on him, he made clear in his marginal comment that Amelia’s admission of her love was central to his conception of the duet:

Misericordia! Se ad Amelia non isfugge la parola t’amo tutto il pezzo rimane senza vita, senza passione, senza calore, senza quell’entusiasmo e quell’abbandono che è necessario nelle scene di questo genere: tolta quella parola le strofe che seguono diventano senza senso e questo duetto non ha più ragion d’essere. Così vien colpito un pezzo principale detto dai due principali attori. Non valga opporre che le due scene s’incontrino qua e colà nel senso: mentre in cosifatta situazione l’impeto è tutto; e nella scena modificata manca completamente.<sup>57</sup>

Verdi clearly saw the duet as a dynamic one, moving the characters’ situation forward (‘l’impeto è tutto’) and that the hinge point of the interaction between Gustavo/Riccardo and Amelia is the moment when she gives in and tells him that she returns his love. This gives the whole piece its *raison d’être*, and the passion, heat, enthusiasm and abandonment he wants to portray flow from this moment.

In the first part of the duet Amelia sings of the restraints of the ‘official world’ which should dictate Riccardo’s behaviour. She makes no reference at all to her own feelings or desires, but rather to her status as the property of her husband (‘Io son di lui’) which should be respected by the ruler, as the guarantor of all property rights through the legal system. (In her Act I description of him to Ulrica, she pointed to his authority as ‘arbiter over all’.<sup>58</sup>) Under the code of honour, too, Riccardo must behave as a ‘nobile’, respecting her chastity as she is the wife of his most loyal friend, who is prepared to die for him. The King, however, has cast off these official

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Somma, November 1857 in Pascolato, 81. (‘The duet between Gustavo and Amelia is beautiful, really beautiful. There is all the heat and disorder of passion which is needed here.’)

<sup>57</sup> Marginal note to *Adelia degli Adimari* in Luzio, 255. (‘Heaven help us! If the words “I love you” do not pass Amelia’s lips the whole piece remains without life, without passion, without that enthusiasm and abandon which are necessary in scenes of this kind: with these words omitted the verses which follow become meaningless and the duet no longer has any *raison d’être*. Thus a major piece for the two principal characters is undermined. It’s no good arguing that the two versions coincide here and there; in such a situation impetus is all, and in the altered version it is completely lacking.’)

<sup>58</sup> See Note 27 above.

restraints to proclaim his ardent desire as a man. He sings freely of his feelings and of his desire for her, beginning ‘Non sai tu’ with repeated rising starts to each phrase, as though stroking or urging seductively before each phrase reaches its climax and falls again. (See **Musical Example 16.**) He moves *con espressione* to an upward-swelling phrase on ‘Quante volte dal cielo implorai’ in which the climactic *a*’ is held before falling and rising again in a similar swelling phrase, which is then expanded and extended to *b*’ in the succeeding phrase on ‘Ma per questo ho potuto un istante’. This mounting excitement (Budden describes it as ‘increasing passion and tenderness’) now provokes from Amelia the first admission that she is not just a chattel of Renato’s, as she once again turns her thoughts ‘upwards’ to Heaven to rescue her from the consequences of her physical desire:

Ah, deh soccorri tu, cielo, all’ambascia  
Di chi sta fra l’infamia e la morte:  
Tu pietoso rischiara le porte  
Di salvezza all’errante mio piè.<sup>59</sup>

Once again, death is never far from sex in Amelia’s utterances. There is no logical reason why she should believe herself poised ‘between infamy and death’, but it brings the word ‘morte’ once more into the audience’s mind when witnessing what is clearly a love duet. The expression ‘le porte di salvezza’ has connotations of the Last Judgement which go further than Amelia’s simply wanting to behave chastely in this life.

Riccardo does not even bother to respond to her second request for him to leave her, as he senses that she is on the point of falling into his arms, and he begs her *con entusiasmo* for just one word to tell him that he is loved. And she gives it: ‘Ebben, sì, t’amo’ - the simple phrase which to Verdi was the key to the whole duet. Amelia has abandoned the struggle with her desire, admitting it is more powerful than the restraints the ‘official world’ places on a dutiful wife. Opening her mouth to say the word ‘love’ is, as so often in opera, the sign that other orifices will be opened as willingly out of sight of the audience.

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<sup>59</sup> Libretto, 24 (‘Ah, help, Heaven, and assist/ One who stands between infamy and death!/ Have pity and light the way to the gates/ Of salvation for my straying feet.’)

Senici has made a detailed examination of the changes in rhythm and tonality which mark the strategies of Riccardo's seduction of Amelia in this duet, showing how the tenor moves close to the soprano musically ('Teco io sto') in order to invade her psychological space and subvert her utterances. He shows how the text of what she sings is gradually undermined musically until the critical admission ('Ebben, si, t'amo') at which point the cellos become the expression of her desire, their melody under her vocal line undermining the resistance she is still putting up in the libretto lines which follow. Amelia's body makes itself known through her vocal performance, which tells the audience of the progress Riccardo is making with his seduction, while her language continues to deny it. Looking at this moment in the light of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body, one might argue that not only is Amelia opening her mouth as a sign that she will be receptive to penetration elsewhere offstage, but by opening her mouth to sing in a duet with Riccardo, she is already engaging in that interpenetration of exhalations he has desired earlier ('Pur ch'io respiri, Amelia, l'aura de' tuoi sospir'). Whatever words she sings, the breath of her sung sighing mingles with that of Riccardo in full view and hearing of the audience. Their union is consummated by their open mouths in the physical act of singing together, which as Senici points out, can make an operatic seduction more 'scandalous' than one in literature or spoken theatre.

Riccardo's reaction to Amelia's confession of love is an unexpected minor-key outburst punctuated by fierce string chords in which he declares the destruction and extinction of everything except love. As Verdi indicated in his remarks on the bowdlerized version proffered by the Naples censors, everything after Amelia's confession of love in this duet flows from it, and he therefore gives the tenor flexibility to heighten the dramatic impact of this moment in the way he delivers this last part of the *tempo di mezzo*, marking it *a piacere* and indicating that Riccardo is 'fuori di sé'. Riccardo has been driven to the gallows site by his erotic desire - no other reason is given for his going there - and now his wooing has achieved a result, with sexual union likely to follow shortly. It would be conventional for the lovers to move immediately to tender mutual declarations, but instead Somma and Verdi have Riccardo shout out the victory of physical desire over all the constraints of morality,

friendship and his duties as ruler. The world of the ‘official feast’ has just ceased to exist for him, it is destroyed, extinguished by the carnival world of physical appetite.

This physical appetite is given bold expression in ‘Oh qual soave brivido’, which follows. Somma’s verse has been derided in the past by literal-minded critics who question what exactly is this oxymoronic ‘sweet shudder that bathes the burning breast’.<sup>60</sup> However, if one substitutes a part of the anatomy in Bakhtin’s ‘lower bodily stratum’ for the word ‘petto’, it becomes more understandable as a description of a man’s physical reaction to being told by the woman he loves that she feels the same about him. The repetitive regularity of the  $\frac{4}{4}$  rhythm in the first 8 bars seems to mimic the act of male penetration, while in the second part of the stanza the anacrusis on ‘Astro di queste tenebre’ serves to highlight the penetrative force with which the rest of the phrase drives forward, followed immediately by a ‘withdrawal’ to *pianissimo* on the succeeding phrase, then back to *forte*, before the music ‘loses control’ of the verse with the repeated fragments of the closing lines. (See **Musical Example 17.**) The harp arpeggios which accompany Riccardo also appear in Act III for the passage of ‘Eri tu’ in which Renato recalls the happier times when Amelia lay in his arms. Heavenly bliss is to be achieved on earth with this woman, but perhaps there may also be connotation of death too, since harps are very frequently used by Verdi to signal the approach of death. The coital ‘petite mort’ in which consciousness and separateness of the individual are lost parallels the final loss of individuality and consciousness in death.<sup>61</sup>

Amelia now follows Riccardo, singing *sottovoce*, and with flute and clarinet rather than the insistent sawing strings, but it is the same strongly marked in-and-out phrases that she sings, suggestive of the sexual act. As Powers has pointed out, the lovers do not sing *a due* in this duet until the cabaletta, and for this reason he terms it

<sup>60</sup> Libretto, 25. ‘Quale soave brivido/ L’acceso petto irorra!/ Ah ch’io t’ascolti ancora/ Rispondermi cosi!/ Astro di queste tenebre/ A cui consacro il core:/ Irradiami d’amore,/ E più non sorga il di!’ (‘What a sweet shudder/ Bathes my burning breast!/ Ah, may I hear you/ Respond to me again thus!/ Star of this darkness/ To whom I consecrate my heart:/ Shine on me with love/ And may the day never rise again!’)

<sup>61</sup> Senici sees the harp as suggesting ecstasy and transcendence in a similar way to the cabaletta *a due* of Donizetti’s *Poliuto*, a seduction duet where the text refers to ‘Il suon dell’arpa angeliche’. (“Teco io sto”, 92.) It is worth noting that love and death are also closely linked in *Poliuto*, in which this love duet immediately precedes the lovers dying together in the Roman arena.

‘cabaletta-driven’.<sup>62</sup> In this he recognises the ‘impeto’ or dramatic movement of the piece, which works towards the climax of union between the lovers at the end. The *ritornello* has Riccardo repeating his request for Amelia to tell him she loves him, with rising excitement, and when she does with an ecstatic *fortissimo a''* on ‘T’amo’ he echoes her phrase. They sing a brief phrase in unison before he breaks out into a prolonged gasp: ‘Ah! ah!’ and launches again into ‘O qual soave brivido’. (See **Musical Example 18.**) Amelia’s part is at first more disjointed and hesitant, but they reach the same rhythm as she sings of ‘l’amor che mi feri’ at bar 7 of the cabaletta repeat, and by bar 14 they are singing together *con entusiasmo*. Soon alternating phrases seem to express the pleasure they are mutually stimulating in one another, until Amelia reaches a climactic solo *b''* on the word ‘morte’. They then join *a due* for the final rising phrase of the cabaletta, a triumphant union in C major. There has certainly been the ‘vita, passione, calore, entusiasmo’ - and especially ‘abbandono’ - that Verdi defended in this piece from the tinkerings of the censors.

While the *disposizione scenica* devotes about 200 words of text to block movement for Amelia in the first 205 bars of Act II, once Riccardo appears just 50 words of text give directions to cover 217 bars of music to the arrival of Renato. There is no blocking at all for the duet itself. Rosen considers and dismisses the argument that directions would be superfluous since the sexual tension is already transmitted adequately through the music and text.<sup>63</sup> He believes that somehow, at what he describes as ‘uno dei momenti eccelsi dell’opera verdiana’, the printed *disposizione* is incomplete; he recommends directors to take their blocking of the scene from Scribe’s indications in the *Gustave* libretto. It is very hard to believe that Verdi, who took a keen interest in details of stage action and regularly pointed out inconsistencies and improbabilities resulting from censorship changes, would have overlooked the omission of blocking directions for a duet about which he gave exacting instructions regarding the text. Some other explanation for this puzzling silence must be sought.

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<sup>62</sup> Powers, ‘La dama velata’, 306.

<sup>63</sup> *Disposizione* introduction, 76.

As Senici has pointed out, citing Elizabeth Hudson's work on *Rigoletto*, 'Verdi felt the gap' where a bedroom duet is called for in the drama, but must be replaced by a seduction duet.<sup>64</sup> Hudson traces the way in which the King's pursuit of Blanche into the bedroom in *Le Roi s'amuse*, suppressed by the Venetian censor, reappears elsewhere in the Duke's priapic cabaletta 'Possente amor' which precedes the omitted episode and in Gilda's shift to a more 'mature' vocal style in 'Tutte le feste' which follows it.<sup>65</sup> What cannot be enacted on stage finds its way into the vocal performance of the lovers. Senici argues that in *Ballo* a similar displacement of the physical act into the vocal performance takes place: in the cabaletta *a due* of this duet 'music, and specifically voice, seem to suggest that Amelia and Riccardo have found a space in which to perform together the fantasy that has overcome them both'.<sup>66</sup> This seems to be a point at which there is a fissure in the 'three systems': dramatic action, verbal organization and music.<sup>67</sup> The rhythms and interchanges of the duet are so explicitly sexual that any *disposizione* directions would have to 'choose' between the musical performance and the dramatic action. Either physical action must be choreographed to the vocal union in such a way as to outrage the censor, or the singers must make conventional gestures, perhaps modelled on Scribe, which would undercut the sexual meaning of the musical performance. To take just one example, Amélie tells Gustave to leave her 'cherchant à se dégager de ses bras' just before she admits her love for him. This gesture would align her physically with the words she sings, but not with Verdi's music which, as Senici shows, is already telling the audience that Riccardo's seduction is about to succeed. By omitting all gestures from the *disposizione*, Verdi creates a blank in the dramatic action on stage, bringing the

<sup>64</sup> Senici, "Teco io sto" (80) citing Hudson, 'Gilda Seduced' (see below).

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Hudson, 'Gilda Seduced: A Tale Untold', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4 (1992), 229-51. She cites Verdi's exasperated letter to Piave of 25 November 1850 about the censorship of any sexual pursuit in this scene: 'Oh Dio! son cose semplici, naturali ma il patriarca non può più gustare quest'idea!!' which suggests an opposition in Verdi's mind between the 'downward' bodily function and the 'upward' control of the official world which cannot tolerate the straightforward physicality of sex.

<sup>66</sup> Senici, "Teco io sto", 91.

<sup>67</sup> Pierluigi Petrobelli, *Music in the Theater* trans. Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 127: 'In musical theater, three "systems" of communication act simultaneously, each operating in accordance with its own nature and laws. Their combination, however, is something more than their sum total or simple juxtaposition. These "systems" are: 1. *the dramatic action*, in which the events on stage unfold; 2. *the verbal organization* of the dialogue, which embodies the interaction between characters onstage and is in most cases structured in lines and verses; and 3. *the music*, by which I mean not merely the singing of the poetic text but also the instrumental parts that move with it.'

audience focus narrowly on to the vocal union which is taking place between man and woman.

### **The moon and Amelia's body**

The only indication in the *disposizione* which relates to the duet is for the moon which should shine out as it nears its close. From the first scene a connection has been established between Amelia and night. Even before she appears on stage Riccardo sings in 'La rivedrà nell'estasi' of his longing for nightfall when he will see her again, calling her 'la mia stella'. Amelia is first seen entering through a little door in an obscure corner of Ulrica's space, which the *disposizione* describes as 'lugubre e misterioso', and Ulrica directs her to an even darker place, to which she must go 'nel fitto delle notti'. It is 'all'occaso' - towards the setting sun - and is 'dove al tetro lato batte la luna pallida'. Amelia agrees and repeats Ulrica's 'Stanotte?' at the end of the trio to confirm the connection between herself and the darkness associated with Ulrica. She arrives at the gallows just before midnight, and it is the moon, as we have seen in the *disposizione* direction, which allows her to see and point out the 'downward' site of death. Her meeting with Riccardo is heralded by the striking of the midnight hour. The mythical and cultural association between Eros and night is clear here.

In the duet, Riccardo associates his erotic desire for Amelia with night, singing: 'Quante notti ho vegliato anelante', and when Amelia finally responds to his wooing, he compares her again to a star in the darkness: 'Astro di queste tenebre... Irradiami d'amore'.<sup>68</sup> In the cabaletta Amelia sings of bed, sexual desire and sleep. Once again, as in Riccardo's lines, if one substitutes for 'petto' a word for a part of the female anatomy in Bakhtin's 'lower bodily stratum', the night-time experience she describes is unmistakably sexual:

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<sup>68</sup> 'How many nights have I lain awake panting' and 'Star of this darkness... Shine on me with love'. (Libretto, 24.)

Ah, sul funereo letto  
Ov'io sognavo spegnerlo,  
Gigante torna in petto  
L'amor che mi ferì!<sup>69</sup>

Riccardo expresses the wish that night may never end so that he may continue to enjoy their shared love (anyone who knows *Romeo and Juliet* Act III will recognise the code for a night of vigorous sex). As he does so, Amelia sings lines connecting her sexual desire with death and sleep, describing her bed as 'funereo' and asking:

Chè non m'è dato in seno  
A lui versar quest'anima?  
O nella morte almeno  
Addormentarmi qui?<sup>70</sup>

As the duet reaches its climax, Amelia's 'morte' and Riccardo's 'amore' alternate, then lie on top of one another *a due*, Amelia rising solo to *b*'' on 'morte' in the closing bars.

Riccardo has plunged into the 'downward' sphere of darkness and desire, and Amelia's lines continually link desire and death. Where he longs for an endless night of sexual interchange, she longs for the sleep of the grave. Neither of them looks forward to a lasting and happy future as a loving couple, or makes the frequent operatic claim that their commitment to each other will be eternal. As they unite in their longings, the *disposizione* gives its only direction for the duet: 'la luna, ch'erasi di nuovo celata nelle nubi, torna a mostrarsi'. The moon, then, shines on the moment in the opera when their sexual desire is given its fullest expression, but it is desire which is always connected with darkness and death. Their love duet is 'grotesque' in that it makes their longing for one another a part of the cycle of bodily satisfaction and bodily disintegration which is celebrated through the grotesque imagery of carnival. Just as the moon shines brightly for a moment but can never be halted in its constant cycle of waxing and waning, the sexual love between Riccardo and Amelia flares up intensely during this duet but can never escape from physical mortality.

<sup>69</sup> Libretto, 25. 'Alas, on the funereal bed/ Where I dreamed of extinguishing it,/ Gigantic there comes back inside my breast/ The love which wounded me!'

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* 'Why is it not given in the breast/ To pour out to him this soul?/ O in death at least/ To fall asleep here?' Somma's verse does not make clear in whose breast the pouring is being done.

Night and the moon continue to play a part in the text and the drama. As Powers has pointed out, it is the moon which reveals Amelia at the moment of her unveiling, a stage effect which he traces to Cammarano's adaptation of the *Gustave* libretto for Mercadante.<sup>71</sup> He notes that the earlier libretto carried the Act title 'La dama velata' and remarks that this may be taken as a reference to the clouded-over moon in this scene as well as to the lady whom it illuminates. When Renato first arrives, the *disposizione* for *Ballo* indicates that she moves close to Riccardo, 'protetta dall'ombre'[sic].<sup>72</sup> The lovers who have sung of their longing for union in the middle of the night are still placed close together in the darkness. As the conspirators arrive to kill Riccardo, their verse emphasises that his death will take place during the night: 'Il saluto dell'aurora sull'esanime cadrà'.<sup>73</sup> Whereas Scribe has the conspirators' torches light up Amelia at the moment her identity is revealed to her husband, the *disposizione* takes Cammarano's direction from *Il reggente* that it is the moon which shines out at the precise moment that her veil falls.<sup>74</sup> The conspirators' mocking chorus makes once more the connection between night and sexual pleasure, teasing Renato that he has been enjoying honeymoon lovemaking with his wife in the dark of night:

Ve' se di notte qui colla sposa  
L'innamorato campion si posa,  
E come al raggio lunar del miele  
Sulle rugiade corcar si sa!<sup>75</sup>

The closing scene takes place at night. Oscar brings the invitation from Riccardo to Amelia 'alle danze questa notte', and the opening chorus of the masked guests celebrates the night and its erotic pleasures:

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<sup>71</sup> Powers, 'La dama velata', 333-6.

<sup>72</sup> *Disposizione*, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Libretto, 28. 'The salutation of the dawn shall fall on his corpse.' The 'downward' movement of death is also made explicit in their threat 'Si precipiti dal cielo all'inferno' ('May he fall from heaven to hell.'), with the 'heaven' in question being one of sexual fulfilment as they surprise him with 'la sua dea'. The printed Rome libretto replaced 'inferno' with 'Averno' to satisfy Papal censorship, but both destinations imply a descent.

<sup>74</sup> Rosen traces the mentions of the moon and Scribe's torches through the various drafts of Somma's libretto and notes that the torches, now redundant to illuminate Amelia, still appear in the published libretto but not in the *disposizione*; Introduction to *Disposizione*, 57-60.

<sup>75</sup> Libretto, 30. 'See! at night here with his wife/ The champion in love lays himself down/ And as in the honeymoon beams/ He knows how to lie in the dew!'

Fervono amori e danze  
Nelle felici stanze,  
Onde la vita è solo  
Un sogno lusinghier.  
Notte dei cari istanti,  
De' palpiti e de' canti,  
Perchè non fermi 'l volo  
Sull'onda del piacer?<sup>76</sup>

Like Riccardo, the chorus at his ball wish for night to be everlasting so that their pleasure may continue. The carnival masquerade is recognised as fleeting, a series of moments of delight in which the transitoriness of human life is obvious, but while it lasts the participants want to remain in it always. The Masked Ball from which the opera takes its name is emphatically a night-time event at which sexual encounters take place. It is this event that Riccardo looked forward to in Act I when he longed for night to descend so that he might see Amelia again, and her appearance at the masquerade precipitates his death. The last words of the opera point to this conjunction of sex, death and darkness: 'Notte d'orror!'.

As well as the way night and the moon are connected in the opera with the 'downward' zone of death and desire, I believe the Bakhtinian grotesque body may also explain why the moon is particularly associated with Amelia. The 'lower bodily stratum' through which the body opens itself to the world outside includes the womb, which empties itself to a monthly rhythm similar to the monthly waxing and waning of the moon. Since time immemorial the moon has been connected with female deities and with fertility, and it is interesting to note that in Act II Tom's words when going to unveil the 'unknown lady' refer to Isis, the goddess of the underworld and of fertility ('Vo' a quest'Iside mirar').<sup>77</sup> Before reliable contraceptives disconnected sexual action from fertility, a woman's monthly flow of blood could tell a very direct tale about her past and about her future. If she was engaging in illicit sex, every month could bring a time of fear that her secret would be betrayed by a pregnancy, and any pregnancy could mean the approach of death in childbirth.

<sup>76</sup> Libretto, 40-1. 'Love affairs and dances seethe/In the happy halls,/Where life is only/A flattering dream./ Night of cherished moments/ Of throbbing and songs/ Why do you not halt your flight/ On the wave of pleasure?'

<sup>77</sup> Libretto, 29.

In Act I the Judge wishes to ban Ulrica as an evil influence ‘d’ogni reo consiglio sospetta’ and Oscar in his defence of her tells the ruler that all the beauties go to this woman to know whether the outcome of their love affairs will be sad or happy. As we have seen, she is surrounded by female followers and has the instruments and ingredients to concoct powerful drugs. Amelia goes to consult her for a cure for an illicit sexual attraction and is prescribed a potion which will renew her ‘heart’ to its former chaste state - a potion brewed from a herb gathered under the ‘luna pallida’. Within the limits of censorship, is Somma telling us that Ulrica’s trade includes procuring abortions for women whose bodies are betraying them by ceasing to echo the moon’s cycle?

It is not indicated in any way that Amelia is pregnant, but she is one of the very few Verdi lovers who is married and has a child, making it clear that she is sexually experienced and fertile. In Act II the moon comes and goes, its disappearance behind the clouds mimicking its monthly waxing and waning, and Powers has noted a kind of equivalence between it and Amelia in his adaptation of the phrase ‘la dama velata’ from Cammarano’s libretto. The three points in Act II when the *disposizione* mentions the moon shining out brightly are three points when the existence of Amelia’s sexual desire is particularly highlighted. She arrives on stage at the beginning of the scene with the intention of purging herself of it by ingesting the magic herb, and her first words refer to the gallows where the magic, renewing herb, must be plucked. At this point the moon illuminates the gallows, as we have seen. The second point at which the moon is mentioned is, notably, as the only stage direction the *disposizione* gives for the love duet. As Amelia finally joins Riccardo in the ecstatic cabaletta *a due* in which their voices enact their sexual desire, the printed libretto says ‘la luna illumina sempre più’ and the *disposizione* indicates that the moon shines out again after being obscured by clouds. The last occasion on which the moon illuminates Amelia is when her apparent infidelity is revealed to her husband as she is unveiled as the woman who has been making love with Riccardo.

The connection between Amelia’s ‘lower bodily stratum’ and the moon may extend further in the next scene, which follows Renato’s realisation that her womb

may have been surrendered to another man. In the only moments of physical contact between them, Renato drags his wife offstage at the close of Act II and then onstage at the opening of Act III. He calls her ‘adultera’ and tells her that she must die in a repeated phrase ‘Sangue vuolsi’. This was a part of the libretto that Verdi insisted that Somma redraft until he was satisfied, and once the phrase was proposed, he used it five times with great emphasis to punctuate this exchange between Renato and Amelia.<sup>78</sup> ‘Sangue vuolsi’ makes blood the subject of the sentence, but does not particularise what blood or how it is to be shed, allowing the full wealth of connotations that blood has in European culture to adhere to the phrase.

In the previous chapter I have drawn attention to Renato’s characterization as belonging entirely to the ‘official world’ of binding contracts, including that of holy matrimony. His wife should be under his control, and any threat to this ‘top-down’ order must be dealt with by an assertion of authority, hence the *salto d’ottava* he uses to address his wife. In the carnival world, promiscuous sexual activity is celebrated because it renews the world through fertility and new birth. By contrast, the official world of patriarchal authority which Renato inhabits sees female promiscuity as a threat to the entire social fabric. Property rights and the privileges of rank depend on legitimacy, so a man of high social position cannot allow his wife to bear a child fathered by someone else.<sup>79</sup> Any possibility that she might be pregnant by another man has to be dealt with by the shedding of blood: through abortion, through a menstrual flow which demonstrates that she is not pregnant, or by killing her so that she cannot bear a child that is not his.<sup>80</sup> However, blood also carries connotations of

<sup>78</sup> The Roman censorship insisted that a number of references to blood in the opera be changed, with the result that the printed libretto gives ‘Rea ti festi’ as a substitute. However, this seems to be another example of the bitextuality Rosen describes in this opera, with the printed libretto at odds with the words sung on stage.

<sup>79</sup> Hudson has drawn attention to the way the honour code in traditional societies views a woman’s chastity as the legal property of her male relatives; ‘Gilda seduced’, 247.

<sup>80</sup> The Spanish honour plays of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries make very clear the link between maintaining aristocratic *limpieza de sangre* (‘clean blood’) and the putting to death of an unchaste wife. Calderón wrote a number of dramas in which husbands murder innocent but apparently unfaithful wives, including *El médico de su honra* (1635) in which Gutierre hires a surgeon to bleed his wife to death when he wrongly suspects her of infidelity. That Victor Hugo knew such plays is very obvious from his dramas with Spanish settings, *Hernani* and *Ruy Blas*. Verdi admired both dramas, and the figure of the old man who keeps the code of honour appears in his operas on Hugolian subjects. It is not clear that he knew the bloodthirsty originals which influenced Hugo, but his familiarity with García Gutiérrez’ dramas and his choice of *Don Alvaro (La fuerza del destino)* hint that he may have known the earlier Spanish plays. It was a García Gutiérrez

the continuity of the paternal line, and is used in speaking of the relationships which structure society and create obligations ('consanguineità', 'di sangue reale', 'fratello di sangue', 'buon sangue non mente' and so on). There is also of course the religious significance of blood in Christianity with its mass in which God requires a symbolic sacrifice of blood to be offered up at the altar. This whole nexus of meanings accounts for some of the power Verdi detected in the phrase 'Sangue vuolsi' finally provided by Somma to structure this scene of struggle between husband and wife.

Amelia's response to Renato's threat to her body, made because she is a fertile and sexually active woman, draws further attention to her body and its fertility. Even if he will not pardon her as his wife, she knows that he will grant a favour to her as the mother of his child. She even refers to her 'viscere', and describes the close physical contact between the son and the mother who has borne him:

Morrò - ma prima in grazia  
 Deh! mi consenti almeno  
 L'unico figlio mio  
 Avvincere al mio seno.  
 E se alla moglie nieghi  
 Quest'ultimo favor,  
 Non rifiutarlo ai preghi  
 Del mio materno cor.  
 Morrò - ma queste viscere  
 Consolino i suoi baci,  
 Or che l'estrema è giunta  
 Dell'ore mie fugaci.  
 Spenta per man del padre,  
 La man ei stenderà  
 Sugli occhi d'una madre  
 Che mai più non vedrà!<sup>81</sup>

Once again, Verdi chooses a dark instrumental colour to accompany Amelia, with a cello obbligato accompanying this aria. As Massimo Mila has shown, in Act II at the point when she confesses her love to Riccardo it is the cellos that express the erotic

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play (*El tesorero del rey Don Pedro*) with a setting and some of the same characters as Calderón's play that Verdi first considered for the Naples commission before rejecting it in favour of the *Gustave* plot.

<sup>81</sup> Libretto, 33. 'I shall die - but first in mercy/ At least permit me/ My only son/To hold to my breast./ And if to your wife you will refuse/ This last request,/ Do not refuse it to the prayers/ Of my maternal heart./ I shall die - but these entrails/ His kisses console,/ Now that the end is near/ Of my fleeting hours./ Killed [feminine] by the hand of his father/ His hand he will stretch out/ Over the eyes of a mother/ Whom he will never see again!'

desire she cannot control.<sup>82</sup> The deep sounds of the cor anglais and the cello seem to be linked to the ‘downward’ zone of Amelia’s sexual desire, but also to her fertility. It is hard to think of a virgin heroine in any Verdi opera before 1859 who is characterized musically in this way.

Powers comments on the connection between Amelia, the moonlight and the music:

Although Verdi’s autograph shows that he himself was not concerned with moonlight during the composition of the music, moonlight was clearly a basic structural feature for both the poet and the first stage director. It coupled Amelia with her environment at the beginning, as Verdi’s music does musically.<sup>83</sup>

The underlying connection between Amelia, the moon and Verdi’s music seems to lie in her womanly body, the body which experiences sexual desire and childbirth, and which therefore belongs to the ‘downward’ zone. The poet expressed this association through words of night, darkness and death; the stage director by illuminating her with the moon; and Verdi by using dark instrumental colour in her musical characterization.

### What leads to Riccardo’s death?

At first sight *Un ballo in maschera* is a ‘conspiracy opera’. This type of opera plot has a long history, examples of which before Verdi include Metastasio’s frequently-set libretti *Artaserse* and *La clemenza di Tito*, Rossini’s *Semiramide* and Meyerbeer’s *Il crociato in Egitto*. The political tensions and anxieties of the decades which followed the French Revolution and regicide created a climate in which dramas of uprising and assassination were presented in Paris, then adapted for the Italian operatic stage. Verdi himself was regularly drawn to plots which featured subjects planning the killing of their ‘king’: *Ermanni*, *Alzira*, *Attila*, *Rigoletto*, *Les Vêpres siciliennes* and *Simon Boccanegra* all present attempts on the life of a ruler, and were often subject to the attentions of censors for this reason. As the curtain rises at the start of *Ballo* the chorus is divided between loyal courtiers and conspirators who sing

<sup>82</sup> Massimo Mila, *L’arte di Verdi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 138: ‘Ciò ch’ella non osa dire, lo dice l’orchestra con l’appassionata melodia dei violoncelli’.

<sup>83</sup> Powers, ‘La dama velata’, 336.

of their hatred for Riccardo and determination to avenge deaths he has caused. Later in the scene Renato comes to warn the ruler of the threat to his life, and tries to persuade him to arrest the conspirators before they have the chance to strike. Commentators on the opera often remark on Riccardo's foolhardiness in refusing to do so, missing the point that his eventual death does not result from the conspiracy at all.<sup>84</sup> Riccardo the courageous ruler, who seeks military glory and wishes to earn the affection of his subjects, does indeed have nothing to fear from the conspirators led by Samuel and Tom. As long as he remains within his role as Governor, dispensing justice, granting petitions and upholding the sanctity of the marriage bond, he is safe. It is when he casts aside his status and seeks sexual fulfilment as an ordinary man of flesh and blood that he steps on to the path which leads to his murder at the hands of a jealous husband. Although Renato reveals his intention to kill Riccardo to Samuel and Tom, the conspirators play no part at all in bringing about the ruler's death at the ball.<sup>85</sup>

Riccardo has no fear of death when he decides to go in disguise to see Ulrica for himself. It is a prank, an amusement, an escape from the duties of government, and he mocks Renato's warning that this idea is not prudent. He invites his courtiers to go with him and the first scene closes on a chorus of lively anticipation of the masquerade. However, an atmosphere of death and gloom is created right from the start of the scene in which Ulrica is presented. The Invocation opens with diminished sevenths, much used in opera to indicate a connection with death and the uncanny,

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth Hudson comments: 'Both Riccardo and Renato... are blind, if in different ways. In the beginning of the opera, Riccardo is willing to accept the appearance of love (his people's overt adulation), and does not want to hear about the conspiracy... [his blindness] leads to the final tragedy of Riccardo's death,'; 'Light and Shade in *'Un ballo in maschera'* in Verdi's Middle Period, 257-72, (p.267). Benedict Sarnaker writes: 'Riccardo [is] more than a shade reckless as he dismisses Renato's warning of a conspiracy against his life,; 'A King Restored: Structure and music in "A Masked Ball"' in *English National Opera Guide 40: A Masked Ball/Un ballo in maschera* ed. Nicholas John (London: John Calder, 1989), 18. Gerhard refers to Riccardo's 'suicidal ignorance' which he psychologises thus: 'Anyone who constantly wears a mask to disguise his own feelings from himself and to prevent the words of others touching him, is no longer capable of recognizing threats against his own life,'; *The Urbanization of Opera*, 427.

<sup>85</sup> Samuel and Tom do no more than turn up at the ball with their followers wearing the costume agreed with Renato at the end of the first scene of Act III. Samuel exchanges the password with Renato, then they disappear into the crowd. Both the libretto and the *disposizione* make clear that it is Renato alone who identifies Riccardo and stabs him, and that no-one tries to protect him or help him escape after the attack. Samuel and Tom join in the final hymn of praise to the ruler: 'Cor sì grande e generoso'.

most notably for the arrival of the Statue at Don Giovanni's supper. The multiple anapaests noted by Noske signal to the audience the beginning of the plot trail which leads from this scene to Riccardo's death at the end of the opera.<sup>86</sup> Whereas in other contexts Verdi indicates a 'good death' by the conventions of harp, flute and a soaring line which suggest 'upward' (for example, Gilda's 'Lassù in ciel' at the close of *Rigoletto* or the Voice of Heaven in *Don Carlos*), the more menacing aspects of death and the underworld are often conveyed through the brass section (for example when the wicked Francesco begs for absolution at the point of death in Act IV of *I masnadieri*). In the opening of Ulrica's Invocation the monotone offbeats of trumpets which spread and rise through French horns and then to full orchestra are almost a sketch for the introduction to the 'Tuba mirum' in the *Requiem* fifteen years later, and in the second section Ulrica's declaration that nothing can now remain hidden from her - 'nulla, più nulla, più nulla ascondersi al guardo mio potrà' - is accompanied by a pianissimo yet insistent trumpet death rhythm.<sup>87</sup> Long before Ulrica looks at Riccardo's hand, her link with death is established musically.

### Death and carnival laughter

It is Riccardo's refusal to be intimidated by Ulrica and her prophecy of death which makes him a carnival figure in this scene. Bakhtin sees carnival laughter as a victory over death, an overturning of its terrifying finality and the threat of punishment in Hell. He traces it back to the ritual parodies of the ancient world:

<sup>86</sup> Noske, 198. Beghelli criticises Noske for ignoring the importance of dramatic context when hunting for death figures ('Atti Performativi', 36). However, the Ulrica scene is unmistakably concerned with the foretelling of Riccardo's death and setting up the love plot which leads to it, so the proliferation of anapaestic rhythms noted by Noske are credibly termed 'figures of death'. They suggest a funeral march which is moving forward inexorably towards the murder in the final scene of the opera.

<sup>87</sup> Verdi's use of brass orchestration to suggest death may be modelled on that of Mozart in *Don Giovanni*, where the entrance of the Statue is heralded by trombones (before Mozart their funereal connotations had been used by Gluck in *Alceste* to punctuate 'Divinités du Styx'). Verdi's teacher in Milan, Vincenzo Lavigna, was *maestro al cembalo* for the first performance at La Scala of *Don Giovanni* in 1814, and at the beginning of his career Verdi gave concerts at the house of Teresa Saporiti who had created the role of Donna Anna in Prague in 1787; see Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 46 and 110. In later life Verdi said that Lavigna had insisted that he study *Don Giovanni* and there are a number of indications in his work that he knew the opera well: Chapter 2.3 will discuss the Act I finale of Mozart's opera in connection with the Masked Ball in *Ballo* and other carnival scenes. It is interesting to note that both Verdi and Mozart used brass to suggest death in operatic scenes before they did so in a *Requiem*.

It is linked with the most ancient forms of ritual laughter. Ritual laughter was always directed toward something higher: the sun (the highest god), other gods, the highest earthly authority were put to shame and ridiculed to force them to *renew themselves*. All forms of ritual laughter were linked with death and rebirth, with the reproductive act, with symbols of the reproductive force.... Carnivalistic laughter likewise is directed toward something higher - toward a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders. Laughter embraces both poles of change, it deals with the very process of change, with *crisis* itself. Combined in the act of carnival laughter are death and rebirth, negation (a smirk) and affirmation (rejoicing laughter). This is a profoundly universal laughter, a laughter that contains a whole outlook on the world.<sup>88</sup>

As soon as Ulrica is mentioned in the first scene, she is presented as a menacing figure with a power of prophecy given by Lucifer. Riccardo's immediate reaction is to play a trick on her - to set up a carnival uncrowning, in which her pretension to prophetic authority will be exposed to ridicule.

The parodic prophecy, incorporated by Rabelais into *Gargantua*, is one of the popular festive forms explored by Bakhtin. Prophecies of death, plague and war might sound authoritative and frightening, but their power could be challenged by a mocking parody, especially one which dealt with something everyday and physical rather than the fate of a King or the Apocalypse.<sup>89</sup> As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Ulrica's Invocation presents her as a prophetess of frightening power, but when Silvano comes to consult her about his future, Riccardo mocks her prophecy by reducing it something very everyday and physical: a bag of money and a scribbled note. He believes that it is only his intervention which has prevented her from being exposed as a liar: 'Mentire non de', he comments as he stuffs the items into Silvano's pocket by sleight of hand.

Riccardo's first carnival trick on Ulrica is his disguise, his second the instant fulfilment of her prophecy. His third is the mariner's song he sings to her to persuade

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<sup>88</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 126-7; italics are in the translated text. Bakhtin traces a continuity from the Saturnalia and funeral parody traditions of Ancient Rome and from the comic art of Southern Italy, to the popular festive forms of medieval and Renaissance Europe which he groups under the term 'carnival'. Verdi insisted on the 'Northern' character of his opera commission for Naples, which was finally given a première in Rome, so any conscious continuation of a tradition of laughter from the ancient world seems to be ruled out.

<sup>89</sup> Rabelais, 232-4.

her that he has come to consult her about what will happen while he is at sea. ‘Di’ tu se fedele’ will be examined in more detail in the next chapter, which deals with masking and disguise, but it is mentioned here as the most flamboyant example of Riccardo making a mockery of Ulrica’s clairvoyance by telling her untruths about himself and his status which she fails to detect.

He challenges her face to face, and in this scene it is the self-uncrowned ruler who embodies the carnival challenge to Ulrica, the figure of Satanic power. I have shown in the previous chapter how the *salto d’ottava* is used to stake out their competing claims to authority. When she pronounces ‘Presto morrai’, the death foretold is given full weight by a *fortissimo* brass chord.<sup>90</sup> Riccardo responds to this with a carefree E major phrase that he has no fear of dying on the field of honour. Ulrica continues *con più forza* with her gloomy prophecy and tells him on a final *salto d’ottava* that he is to die by the hand of a friend. The seriousness of this pronouncement is driven home by the full orchestra *fortissimo*, and all the bystanders cry out with shock. Trombones add menace to Ulrica’s monotone declaration that this fate is already written, which is followed by a silence only punctuated by the anapaestic beats of drums which suggest the funeral march to come. (See **Musical Example 5.**)

Now Riccardo’s carnival laughter in the face of death sounds out. The mood changes in a moment as little woodwind figures turn the *salto d’ottava* upside down as a mocking challenge in the introductory bars of ‘È scherzo od è follia’. (See **Musical Example 6.**) Bakhtin’s words on parodic prophecy describe very accurately what happens here as Riccardo makes fun of Ulrica’s words, in a passage marked by Verdi *con eleganza* for the singer and *leggerissimo* for the orchestra:

The sad and terrifying, the serious and important are transposed into a gay and light key, from the minor key to the major. Everything leads to a merry solution. Instead of being gloomy and terrifying, the world’s mystery and the future finally appear as something gay and carefree.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Roger Parker has drawn attention to the way the sudden tonal swerves from ‘Presto morrai’ into ‘È scherzo od è follia’ set a distinctive pattern which is reproduced when the murder takes place at the end of Act III; ‘Motivic and Tonal Interaction in Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera*’, Journal of the American Musicological Society, 36:2 (1983), 243-65 (p.258).

<sup>91</sup> *Rabelais*, 233.

The physical action of laughter is mimicked in the broken rhythm of Riccardo's line, so obviously that within a few years of the première Verdi had become exasperated by tenors who would perform the piece with real laughter punctuating the line. In his letter to Léon Escudier of March 1865, he is dealing with another problem of 'the grotesque body' - the dying Lady Macbeth in her sleepwalking scene - and he also refers to another woman *in extremis* - the dying Violetta. In this context he calls to mind Riccardo's laughter in the face of death, which also mimics musically the interruption of breath by an uncontrollable physical activity:

Eccoci al *Sonnambulismo* che è sempre la Scena capitale dell'opera *[Macbeth]*.... Gli occhi fissi, la figura cadaverica; è in agonia e muore subito dopo. La Ristori faceva un rantolo; il rantolo della morte. In musica non si deve, nè si può fare; come non si deve tossire nell'ultim'atto della *Traviata*; nè ridere nello *scherzo od è follia* del *Ballo in Maschera*. Qui vi è un lamento del corno inglese che supplisce benissimo al rantolo, e più poeticamente.<sup>92</sup>

Earlier in this chapter I have drawn attention to the significance of 'sospiri' which may denote either the ecstatic sighs of lovers or the gasps of the dying, both frequently enacted as grotesque gestures in carnival, and have remarked on the physical panting suggested by the broken line of Amelia's 'Son la vittima che geme'. (See **Musical Example 15.**) Riccardo's response to Ulrica's prophecy is also broken by gasps: carnival laughter erupts from the gaping mouth and disrupts coherent utterance. After Riccardo's laughter Ulrica, Samuel, Tom and Oscar join in with their own reactions, none of which is lighthearted. As the quintet develops, Riccardo's laughter stands out in staccato quavers at points where the other voices are silent or singing legato, making the contrast musically between those who believe in the gloomy prophecy and the character who exposes it to carnival mockery.<sup>93</sup> In this scene the conspirators do not laugh, but are terrified that Ulrica will disclose their plotting.

<sup>92</sup> 'And so we reach the sleepwalking scene, which is always the high point of the opera.... The eyes fixed, the appearance corpse-like; she is in her death agony, and dies soon after. Ristori employed a rattle in her throat - the death-rattle. In music, that must not and cannot be done; just as one shouldn't cough in the last act of *La traviata*; or laugh in the "scherzo od è follia" of *Ballo in maschera*. Here there is an English-horn lament that takes the place of the death-rattle perfectly well, and more poetically.' Verdi to Léon Escudier, 11 March 1865, in Verdi's *Macbeth: A Sourcebook*, 110. (Tenors went on laughing nevertheless - Beniamino Gigli was still inserting chuckles in 1943 on his recording with Tullio Serafin.)

<sup>93</sup> Beghelli in his exploration of Verdi's laughter music comments on this scene: 'Nessuno ha voglia di ridere: non gli astanti, che alla profezia credono ciecamente; non Riccardo, al quale concediamo di rimanere turbato dall'annuncio della morte imminente e che si limita a canticchiare "con eleganza" fingendo una *nonchalance* non troppo convincente' ('Atti performativi', 90). ('No-one wants to

## Sex and carnival laughter

At the close of the next Act, it is the conspirators who laugh while Riccardo has returned to seriousness. The escapade which begins when the ruler decides to abandon his responsibilities and go in disguise to Ulrica, and leads him on to seeking sexual satisfaction heedless of moral or social restrictions, ends abruptly when Amelia's husband appears at the close of the love duet in Act II. Riccardo is confronted with his loyal minister who has risked his own safety to come and warn him of approaching danger, and immediately he is filled with guilt and a full sense of the harm he has done to Amelia and her marriage. There is no laughter or light-heartedness in Riccardo's role after this moment, and his words from now on deal with the obligations he must fulfil or impose on others. He exacts a solemn promise from Renato that he will protect the 'unknown beauty' and escort her back to the city without a word or a glance.<sup>94</sup> In 'Odi tu come fremono cupi', Riccardo is the last to join the trio, after Amelia and Renato have begged him to flee, and his lines express remorse at the betrayal of his friend and call on God to protect Amelia. Whereas in earlier scenes Amelia has done the praying, while Riccardo has been carried away by his erotic longings, now it is Riccardo who is turning 'upward' to Heaven, his repeated phrase 'la pietà del Signore' punctuating the close of the trio before he leaves the stage. The ruler has been forced back into the world of moral restrictions and responsibilities.

The conspirators arrive intent on murder, their first words threatening immediate death to Riccardo, but as soon as they find Renato in his place, their mood turns to mockery, trills in the violins expressing the teasing tone in which they

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laugh: not the bystanders, who believe blindly in the prophecy; not Riccardo, who is surely disturbed by the announcement of his imminent death and who limits himself to humming away 'elegantly', feigning a non-too-convincing nonchalance.') I cannot see any evidence why Riccardo's laughter should not be taken at face value, and it would test most tenors to perform a character's *nonchalance* with exactly the right degree of unconvincingness. The *disposizione scenica* requires all present to show terror or horror 'meno che in Riccardo, che si fa beffe della predizione di Ulrica' ('except Riccardo, who scoffs at Ulrica's prediction'); *Disposizione*, 14.

<sup>94</sup> The solemnity of this oath is enhanced by its dramatic similarity to the Orpheus myth in which Eurydice may be led back from the Underworld provided her husband does not look back at her. The gallows site has many connotations of death and the Underworld, and Amelia may be rescued unscathed to return to her ordinary life in the city just as long as her husband does not look at her on the journey.

compliment him on his amorous conquest. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, Renato never laughs and his solemn oath requires him to defend the lady from their curiosity, even at the expense of his life, so his aggressive response with his sword turns the situation back to one of impending death. The situation is a tragic one, in which Renato is about to die on a point of honour when Amelia's veil falls and he is faced with the appalling truth that his wife has deceived him with the man he trusted most. The orchestra sounds *tutta forza* at the *salto d'ottava* in which he realises this double betrayal by his spouse and his master. There is then a quiet passage as the shock of the revelation sinks in with Amelia and the conspirators, just as Ulrica's prophecy of Riccardo's death is followed by near-silence. In both situations the 'pause for reflection' enhances the effect of the laughter which comes next.

The conspirators have not laughed at death, but they do now laugh at sex. Renato and his wife are mocked for their moonlit lovemaking in a lonely place, which seems comically inappropriate for a married couple. Instead of the privacy of the matrimonial bed, they seem to have chosen the wet grass and the open air more usually associated with young lovers carried away by their amorous impulses. The sober and prudent minister Renato is teasingly called 'l'innamorato campion' and his sexual activity is to be the subject of public gossip. Again, the challenge of carnival laughter to every kind of seriousness and authority is made musically by turning the *salto d'ottava* upside down, with octave leaps in mid-phrase. (See **Musical Example 19**.) As in Riccardo's 'È scherzo od è follia' (**Musical Example 6**) the physical eruption of laughter is suggested by the broken rhythm of the 'Ve' se di notte' line, and by the staccato 'Ah! ah! ah!' phrases which follow it. Verdi chooses the key of B $\flat$  major for all three outbursts of carnival mockery in opposition to gloomy seriousness: in Act I scene 1 for Oscar's 'Volta la terrea', in Act I scene 2 for Riccardo's 'È scherzo od è follia' and in Act II for Samuel and Tom's 'Ve' se di notte'.<sup>95</sup> The tonal connection between these numbers underlines the sudden swerve between genre expectations at each of these points in the drama. In each scene the move to B $\flat$  major seems to mark a deliberate avoidance of a single tone or meaning

for the work – the ‘corda sola’ he told Somma he wanted to avoid.<sup>96</sup> This is another example of carnivalization at work in the opera, disrupting expectations and finalised meanings.

The mockery of a married couple by a group of men suggests the old tradition of *charivari* which Bakhtin saw as a popular festive form closely related to carnival.<sup>97</sup> As Natalie Zemon Davis has pointed out, the bands of young men who acted out the noisy serenades called *charivari* took as their targets newlyweds, unfaithful couples, and especially couples in which there was a disparity in age between husband and wife.<sup>98</sup> Instead of remaining decently tucked away behind the social and religious contract of holy matrimony, the sexual activity of married people was exposed to public comment and ridicule by a clamour of pots, pans, raucous songs and discordant instruments under their bedroom windows. When Renato and Amelia are discovered apparently behaving like newlyweds on the moonlit grass outside the city, Samuel, Tom and their followers feel free to mock them and make them the target of gossip when the story of their amorous assignation is passed round the town.

*Un ballo in maschera* is not the only Verdi opera in which sex is laughed at. In Act III of *Rigoletto* the Duke in disguise begins to woo Maddalena most seductively in ‘Bella figlia dell’amore’, urging her to open her mouth to say the word (as Riccardo does in his wooing of Amelia in *Ballo*) but Maddalena’s response is laughter. She mocks his protestations of love, calling them ‘il vostro gioco’ and telling him she is familiar with this kind of ‘scherzar’. It is not that she does not find him attractive (her later pleading for his life shows that) but she exposes his high-flown language of love to carnival degradation: to her it is perfectly clear that what he wants is sex. Her staccato quavers of laughter stand out in the quartet against the tragic keening and sobs of Gilda, who has taken the Duke’s oaths of love seriously, and the rumbling of oaths of revenge from Rigoletto, in a similar way to Riccardo’s laughter in ‘È scherzo

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<sup>95</sup> The longstanding debate about the significance of tonality in this opera is discussed in my Introduction, pages 17-18.

<sup>96</sup> Letter to Somma, April 1853 (full text and translation in Chapter 2.3, Note 98). ‘È una corda sola, elevata se volete, ma pur sempre la stessa’.

<sup>97</sup> *Rabelais*, 219.

<sup>98</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 105.

od è follia', which stands out against the horrified reactions of the others in the ensemble.

### Tragedy or comedy?

At the close of Act II of *Ballo* the conspirators sing 'Ve', la tragedia mutò in commedia', a line which draws attention to the opera's refusal to fall neatly into either the tragic or the comic genre. Renato and Amelia do not laugh at their situation, and are treated musically as figures of tragic desperation. However, they are not allowed to hold the audience's undivided attention as the curtain falls; the 'alternative view' of their encounter is given by the laughter of the male chorus, which continues to mock them from offstage - indeed, the conspirators literally 'have the last laugh' in the final bars. Comparisons are occasionally made between the Act II love duet of *Ballo* and another love duet written by a contemporary of Verdi's in 1858-59: Act II of Wagner's *Tristan*. Both pairs of adulterous lovers sing of their love in terms of night and death, and both are surprised by the wronged husband and a group of courtiers. However, in Wagner's opera the elevated tone of the love duet continues through the confrontation which follows, and the curtain falls on Tristan's rush to die on Melot's sword; it is impossible to conceive of an irruption of laughter into the uniformly tragic tone of *Tristan und Isolde*. In *Ballo*, however, the lovers may take themselves seriously, but Verdi does not allow this view to go unchallenged. Just as the crude gestures and bawdy songs of carnival degrade all love to the sexual coupling which perpetuates the human race, the teasing *charivari* of the conspirators allows Verdi to break the tragic mood of the act as it closes and place an ironic distance between the audience and the love triangle. Once again, carnivalization operates within the opera to disrupt expectations and to avoid one-sided interpretations. The chorus sing that it is a comedy, but the audience watch Renato and Amelia and remain unsure what to expect when the curtain rises again on the final act.

## CHAPTER 2.3

### MASKING, DISGUISE AND TRAVESTI IN *UN BALLO IN MASCHERA*

#### The practices of carnival and masquerade

Maskers on foot (the drollest generally) in fantastic exaggerations of court-dresses, surveying the throng through enormous eye-glasses, and always transported with an ecstasy of love, on the discovery of any particularly old lady at a window; long strings of Policinelli, laying about them with blown bladders at the ends of sticks; a waggonful of madmen, screaming and tearing to the life; a coachful of grave Mamelukes, with their horse-tail standard set up in the midst; a party of gipsy-women engaged in a terrific conflict with a shipful of sailors; a man-monkey on a pole, surrounded by strange animals with pigs' faces, and lions' tails, carried under their arms, or worn gracefully over their shoulders; carriages on carriages, dresses on dresses, colours on colours, crowds upon crowds, without end. Not many actual characters sustained, or represented, perhaps, considering the number dressed, but the main pleasure of the scene consisting in its perfect good temper; in its bright, and infinite, and flashing variety; and in its entire abandonment to the mad humour of the time - an abandonment so perfect, so contagious, so irresistible, that the steadiest foreigner fights up to his middle in flowers and sugar-plums, like the wildest Roman of them all.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Charles Dickens described his experience on the streets of Rome during a Carnival season of the early 1840s. The dignity of the Papal City was disrupted by masked and disguised revellers, shouting, laughing and pelting one another with flowers and sweets. In pre-Unification Italy Carnival was still a public event, celebrated on the streets each year, and foreign visitors in the 1840s and 1850s often commented on the good-humoured way in which all classes joined in the fun.<sup>2</sup>

As well as the fancy-dress merrymaking on the streets, the Carnival season was celebrated with masked balls, generally held in the opera house. The usual

<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy* [1846] in *American Notes and Pictures from Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) 373-4.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Fuller, 'Dispatch 20' [1847] and 'Dispatch 23' [1848] in *These Sad But Glorious Days: Dispatches from Europe 1846-1850* ed. Larry J. Reynolds & Susan Belasco Smith (New Haven: Yale

conventions of dress and deportment were relaxed so that strangers danced with one another, distinctions of rank were lost and married people might use a disguise or mask in order to carry on a flirtation which would not be allowed elsewhere. The socially disruptive possibilities worried those in authority, who occasionally issued edicts to restrict participation in masquerade.<sup>3</sup> Masked balls reached their peak of popularity during the eighteenth century, and spread to centres outside Italy where the practices of masking and disguise were often treated with great suspicion by legislators and moralists. Terry Castle has shown how the masquerades introduced by Heidegger to London in the 1720s were both immensely popular and regularly denounced from the pulpit and in the press as morally degenerate.<sup>4</sup> In the late eighteenth century it was indeed at a masked ball at the opera house in Stockholm that King Gustav III of Sweden was assassinated while mingling with the crowd on the dance floor.<sup>5</sup> In Paris during the early 1830s masked balls were criticised and increasingly regulated to prevent disorderly behaviour, which was attributed to 'lower-class' participants.<sup>6</sup> Alfred de Musset used his review of the première of *Gustave* in 1833 to respond to the moralist critics of masquerade, claiming that the masked balls of the Carnival season were preferable to seeing young men getting drunk in *cabarets*:

Vous repoussez les femmes dans leurs ménages, et vous entourez d'une grille de fer le berceau de leurs filles. Cela est très sage, très juste, très décent. Mais un jeune homme ne se marie pas à vingt ans, et tous les ans le mardi gras vient à son heure, qu'on veuille ou non de lui. Accorderez-vous à la

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University Press, 1991) 180, 210-11. See also the comment by the Prince of Wales on the 1859 Rome Carnival, quoted in Chapter 2.1.

<sup>3</sup> The Museo Teatrale alla Scala holds a number of Austrian Imperial Proclamations regulating the days and circumstances in which masks may be worn during the Milan Carnival, forbidding their use by 'Facchini a chi non è descritto nel Ruolo della Badia'. A similar prohibition on working-class participation is shown by the poster listing the operas and balls of the Modena Carnival of 1791, reproduced in Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (eds.), *Opera Production and Its Resources* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Illustration 8.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), Chapter 1. At the same period that masking and disguise were denounced in London as subversive to morality and good order, the blacking of faces by rural gangs to disguise their identity while committing crimes led to the passing of the fiercely draconian Black Acts. In Hampshire the 'Waltham Blacks' were led by a 'King John' and blacked up or masked their faces to poach deer and intimidate informers. The Prime Minister Robert Walpole believed they were linked to a Jacobite plot against King George I, and the first Waltham Black Act was rushed through parliament in 1723, imposing the death penalty for poachers or other petty criminals who disguised their faces. See Barbara Biddell, *Bishop's Waltham: A History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2002) 34-5.

<sup>5</sup> R. Nisbet Bain, *Gustavus III and his Contemporaries 1746-1792* (London: Kegan Paul, 1894), Vol. 2, 191-5.

<sup>6</sup> Maribeth Clark, 'The Role of *Gustave, ou le bal masqué* in Restraining the Bourgeois Body of the July Monarchy' in *Musical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

jeunesse qu'elle ait des sens, des besoins de plaisir, parfois même des jours de folie? Où voulez-vous qu'elle les passe? ... Il faut aux Français des voitures pleines de masques, des torches, des théâtres ouverts, des gendarmes et du vin chaud. ... Tant que vous voulez vivre dans un pays libre, où chacun peut faire ce qu'il entend, où l'or est en cours, où le plaisir est à bon marché, ne vous étonnez pas que les jeunes gens aillent en masque.<sup>7</sup>

In his survey of the history of carnival in Europe, Bakhtin noted that the 'popular-festive forms' of the medieval and early modern period began to die out in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but that what he described as the 'clearest, classic carnival forms' continued in Italy into the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Before Unification, the freedom of Carnival was one of the few freedoms most subjects of the Italian principalities could enjoy. As Margaret Fuller commented in a letter from Rome in 1847:

Festivities in Italy have been of great importance, since for a century or two back, the thought, the feeling, the genius of the people have had more chance to expand, to express themselves, there than anywhere else.<sup>9</sup>

The opera house was the central location for the literate classes of Italy to spend much of their time during the Carnival season. It was of course the most important period of the year for new operas to be premiered, but as John Rosselli has shown, gambling and masked balls were also important attractions which drew in the affluent public who might spend four or five nights a week in the opera house in Carnival.<sup>10</sup> When La Fenice in Venice burned down in 1836, plans were immediately drawn up for the rebuilding which included an elaborately decorated

<sup>7</sup> Alfred de Musset, unsigned 'Compte rendu de *Gustave III*' for *Revue des deux mondes*, 14 March 1833; *Oeuvres complètes* ed. Philippe Van Tieghem (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963) 855-6. 'You push women back into their homes, and you put an iron grille round their daughters' cradles. All that is very wise, very well-judged, very decent. But a young man does not marry at twenty, and every year Mardi Gras comes round, whether you like it or not. Would you allow that youth has its senses, its needs for pleasure, perhaps even for days of folly? Where would you like them to be spent?... What the French need are carriageloads of maskers, torches, theatres with the doors open, gendarmes and mulled wine... If you want to live in a free country, where everyone can do what he thinks fit, where gold circulates, where pleasure is cheap, don't be surprised that young people put on masks.'

<sup>8</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 218-220.

<sup>9</sup> Fuller, Dispatch 20, 30 December 1847, *These Sad But Glorious Days*, 180.

<sup>10</sup> John Rosselli, 'Italy: the Centrality of Opera' in Alexander Ringer (ed.) *The Early Romantic Era: Between Revolutions: 1789 and 1848* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 164. In *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) Rosselli gives details of the way in which an impresario often began his career by running the gambling concession before moving into opera production (see 28-33).

false ceiling and wall panels to turn the stage into a ballroom for special occasions.<sup>11</sup> A lithograph by Giovanni Pividor of a masked ball at the new opera house shows the way in which the stage and auditorium were made into a single large space in which people could move about freely, while others watched and chatted in the boxes and galleries.<sup>12</sup> (See **Illustration 4**.) At this ball of the late 1830s only a minority of participants are in full costume and mask, and many of the gentlemen are simply wearing standard evening clothes. Note the way that the disguised men are wearing hats while many of those in evening dress are carrying their top hats, indicating a confusion about whether this is an extension of the carnival in the street, where hats would be usual, or an 'indoor' event at which the etiquette of removing one's hat in the presence of ladies or social superiors should be observed.

As the century went on, the younger generation began to desert the opera house. In 1850 the owners of the Florence opera house La Pergola attributed this to 'politics', probably less in the sense of active participation - which was risky outside Piedmont at this period - than in a growing interest in the political and scientific ideas disseminated through newspapers, journals, scientific clubs and reading rooms.<sup>13</sup> The tension between the old masquerade customs and a new seriousness modelled on the cities of Northern Europe is demonstrated in an account of two balls held in 1847 during the Ninth Italian Scientific Congress. Both took place at Venice's leading opera house, La Fenice, but at the first it was laid down that gentlemen must wear black tailcoats and no colour of any kind, that masks were not permitted and no-one might appear in tights. A few days later a less formal ball was held in the same theatre at which masks were permitted and the atmosphere was reported to be more 'tumultuous' and carnival-like.<sup>14</sup> After Unification, the push to make Italy into a modern state contributed to the dying away of carnival and masquerade participation. In Venice, formerly renowned for the exuberance and extravagance of its Carnival, more formal ceremonies began to take its place: the

<sup>11</sup> Design drawings by Giuseppe Borsato in Giandomenico Romanelli, 'The Teatro La Fenice: Architecture and Ornamentation', *Gran Teatro La Fenice* (Cologne: Taschen Evergreen, 1997), 166-7.

<sup>12</sup> Lithograph by Giovanni Pividor from the collection of the Museo Correr, Venice, reproduced in *Gran Teatro La Fenice*, 174-5.

<sup>13</sup> Rosselli, 'The Opera Industry', 169.

<sup>14</sup> Fiora Gandolfi, 'Les fêtes du XIXe siècle' in *Venise en fêtes* ed. Georges Herscher (Paris: Chêne, 1992), 169-70.

welcoming of Vittorio Emanuele to the city in 1866, the inauguration of a monument to Daniele Manin in 1875, the opening of the Museo Correr in 1880. Fiora Gandolfi has shown how such festivities, while drawing on the colourful visual heritage of Venice, were organised to give precedence to the ruling class through seating arrangements, speeches and secular ceremonial, and to exclude the possibility of social mixing.<sup>15</sup>

At the time of the première of *Un ballo in maschera*, however, the masked ball still remained a key feature of the Carnival season, which itself was part of an annual rhythm marked out by Christian feasts and fasts. Although the ban on opera performances during Lent had gradually lifted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, masked balls were held on the closing days of Carnival, culminating on Shrove Tuesday.<sup>16</sup> Even in Milan, one of the most sophisticated centres of pre-Unification Italy, a publisher in 1858 would find a market for a calendar showing a masked ball at La Scala, in which the calendar element gives the saints' days for every day and shows Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, against 9 March.<sup>17</sup> (See **Illustration 5**.) The subject depicted on the calendar is not religious, but the publisher Morezzi finds no incongruity in the juxtaposition of information for an observant Catholic audience with the colourful masquerade scene. The masked ball illustrated has more 'carnival' feeling than that shown in the Venice ball illustrated earlier. More figures are in disguise, and those men who are not in costume keep their top hats on their heads, signalling that they regard the event as akin to the public, outdoor celebration of carnival at which deference is not required. A gallery runs along the back of the stage area, and a ramp connects the stage with the auditorium, so that the division between participation and observation has been redefined; at floor level in both areas men and women mingle and dance, while at the upper level others watch and comment. Note the couple in the foreground who are wearing eighteenth-century dress. It may be that the illustrator placed them prominently to evoke in the viewer a nostalgia for the heyday of masquerade in the previous century, but it is also possible that it is a conscious reference to the 1858

<sup>15</sup> Gandolfi, 171-80.

<sup>16</sup> Rosselli, 'Carnival' and 'Season' in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1994 corrected edition)

<sup>17</sup> Published by Morezzi, Milan, and reproduced in *Museo Teatrale alla Scala: An Illustrated Guide* (Milan, 1997), 11.

litigation at Naples over Verdi's new opera, which had become well-known as a censorship *cause célèbre*.<sup>18</sup> The Gustav assassination plot was familiar to many of the educated classes, and had featured in a stage play at Rome that year and a ballet at La Scala itself in 1846.<sup>19</sup> A masked gentleman in eighteenth-century dress might be 'read' as a reference to the King who was assassinated at a masked ball in an opera house, the subject banned by the censors, even when proposed by the leading Italian composer. It may even be that the publisher chose the masked ball subject for his calendar just because of public interest in the forthcoming production at Rome of Verdi's new opera *Un ballo in maschera*.

### Bakhtin's 'footlights' and the opera house ball

The way in which an opera house was used for masked balls demonstrates in a very vivid way the breaking down of 'footlights', the term Bakhtin used for the barrier between art and life, between actors and spectators, which he perceived as inimical to carnival:

[Carnival] belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play. In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators.<sup>20</sup>

While it is true that the opera house masked ball was not open to everyone - it was limited by regulation and pricing to the literate classes - once inside the opera house space, the usual distinctions between performers and audience were no longer valid. The stage area was taken over by members of the opera-going public, who themselves danced to music and wore costumes and masks to pretend to be someone else, just as the professional performers did in the same space when opera or ballet was presented. The auditorium was also turned into a performing space in which the participants danced and enacted their false identities. The abolition of the 'footlights' is shown on the calendar in Illustration 5 by the ramp connecting the two

<sup>18</sup> It seems possible that eighteenth-century costume was a visual marker for Carnival in the mid-nineteenth century. Note that Dickens describes maskers on the street in the 1840s wearing 'fantastic exaggerations of court-dresses', and the Matalelli illustration to Giusti's 'Lo stivale' shows the three carnival figures in Northern Italy wearing knee breeches, pigtails and tricorn hats; see Illustration 3.

<sup>19</sup> The spoken drama by Tommaso Gherardi del Testa, *Gustavo III Re di Svezia o genio e passioni*, was put on at Rome in Carnival 1858; see David Rosen's introduction to the *Disposizione scenica per 'Un ballo in maschera'* (Milan: Ricordi, 2003), 28-29. The *azione coreografica* for the ballet *Gustavo III Re di Svezia* presented at La Scala during Carnival 1846 is reproduced in *Bollettino Quadrimestrale dell'Istituto di Studi Verdiani* 1:3 (1960), facing page cxxviii.

<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 7.

areas, but also by the symbolic carnival figure who has seated himself on the edge of the stage, transgressing the boundary which was rigorously maintained during performances. The boxes and galleries, around the auditorium and across the back of the stage area, were occupied by those who preferred to observe rather than to dance themselves, but at any moment an observer could descend to the dance floor and become a participant. Illustration 4 of the masked ball at La Fenice shows costumed figures standing or seated in the boxes, indicating that 'the borderline between art and life' described by Bakhtin ran throughout the event, including those who might not participate in the dancing but who entered into the spirit of the masquerade by adopting a disguise.

While participation in the masked balls inside the opera house was restricted, these events were 'free and familiar' when considered in relation to the hierarchical distinctions enforced at other times. The layout of the opera house gave a central position to the ruler of the state, whose presence at a performance restricted the freedom of the audience to applaud and who frequently intervened to regulate behaviour by both performers and spectators. Uniformed soldiers were present during performances as well as officers and court officials admitted free by arrangement between the local ruler and the impresario.<sup>21</sup> Boxes were allocated in accordance with social position, and the social rankings signalled by the different tiers were jealously guarded.<sup>22</sup> Ladies were not seen on the *platea*, remaining in their boxes to receive calls from gentlemen to whom they had been formally introduced; illustrations of the auditorium at opera performances at this period show all the gentlemen in the boxes bare-headed.<sup>23</sup> (See Illustrations 6 and 7.) During masked

<sup>21</sup> Rosselli, *Music and Musicians in Nineteenth-century Italy* (London: Batsford, 1991) 63-4. Rosselli, 'Opera Production 1780-1880' in Bianconi & Pestelli (eds.) *Opera Production and its Resources*, 86-7. Pividor's lithographs of La Fenice performances in 1837 show uniformed soldiers policing the *platea*; see Illustration 7.

<sup>22</sup> Rosselli, 'Opera Production 1780-1880', 85-88.

<sup>23</sup> An 1844 engraving after A. Focosi shows the interior of a box at La Scala; see Illustration 6. The five gentlemen present are all bare-headed and one bows to the two ladies who are seated with their backs to the auditorium; the scene could be taken for the interior of a drawing room, were it not for the view out to the theatre in the background. Lithographs by Giovanni Pividor of the newly rebuilt La Fenice in 1837 show all the gentlemen in the boxes bare-headed; see Illustration 7. There are men wearing hats to promenade and socialise in the *platea*, the open flat space at ground floor level of the auditorium, but this was a part of the theatre in which no ladies were present. This distinction demonstrates that opera boxes were conceived of at the time as private spaces, the property of their subscribers; gentlemen invited to accompany ladies inside the box were expected to remove their hats, but the presence of ladies in them was not 'recognised' by gentlemen walking about below on the *platea*.

balls, these rules were suspended, allowing the dance floor to become the equivalent of Bakhtin's 'town square' in which the social rank of participants was levelled through the adoption of masks and disguises, and on which ladies might mingle freely with gentlemen, making physical contact as they danced together. Some men in the boxes at the masked balls at La Scala and La Fenice are shown wearing hats in the presence of ladies, and there are no figures in uniform. This contrast between the customs at performances and those at masked balls also demonstrates the equality and absence of deference which Bakhtin saw as characteristic of carnival, echoing the friendly jostling on the street which was remarked upon by foreign visitors from societies where social differences were maintained throughout the year.<sup>24</sup> The presence of women wearing skirts well above the ankle at the masked ball at La Fenice in the late 1830s may indicate that professional dancers mingled with the crowd and danced with the gentlemen, or it may show that ladies participating were permitted to adopt a dress more revealing than would be allowed outside carnival. In either case, it demonstrates that physical contact between the sexes at the masked ball was less strictly regulated than was usual at other events attended by upper-class women in the nineteenth century.

Just as the 'footlights' were crossed at masked balls by the physical joining of the stage and the auditorium to allow the public to perform, the distinction between performer and spectator was also blurred musically by the migration of the music of opera and ballet into the dances played by the band. Verdi's own work did not remain a closed and complete opus, solely to be performed in its entirety by professional musicians and listened to in attentive silence by an audience. Every successful opera immediately spawned a host of arrangements for the public to enjoy outside the opera house, whether in the home in piano and vocal scores, or in all kinds of public settings through arrangements for *banda* or adaptations for barrel organs and other disseminators of 'current hits' for a popular audience. Susanna Pasticci has unearthed 434 publications based on *La traviata* alone in the nineteenth century, and this list does not include arrangements for *banda* which remained unpublished.<sup>25</sup> That Verdi's music was turned into popular dance numbers is shown

<sup>24</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 10. (See quotation on page 35 above.)

<sup>25</sup> Susanna Pasticci, 'La traviata en travesti: Rivisitazioni del testo verdiano nella musica strumentale ottocentesca' in *Studi verdiani* 14 (1999) 162-87.

by the quantity of *Traviata* sheet music with titles such as ‘Waltz’, ‘Polka’ and ‘Mazurka’ drawn from an opera with no ballet interlude. These arrangements were not made by Verdi, but on one occasion he did agree to produce a *Polka-Mazurka* for ballroom performance, which was published by Ricordi in 1850.<sup>26</sup> In his youth at Busseto Verdi turned out pieces for the Busseto *banda* which would have included dance music, and Jürgensen suggests that this experience gave him a familiarity with dance rhythms which underlies not only the ballet music he composed for Paris but also many other strophic vocal melodies which Jürgensen terms ‘dance arias’.<sup>27</sup> He enumerates no fewer than thirteen such numbers in *La traviata*, of which he characterises eight as waltzes, which would account for the widespread reworking of the highlights of the opera as music for dancing. When Verdi actually composed ballet music himself for the Paris Opéra in order to comply with the French custom of ballet interludes in opera, this music was rapidly recycled for dancing elsewhere. Immediately after the première of *Le Trouvère* in January 1857, Escudier published quadrilles based on the ballet music which had been arranged by Philippe Mussard, conductor of the band at the Opéra balls that season. A quadrille based on the *Galop général* created by Verdi for Act III of *Le Trouvère* was performed by the professional dancers of the Opéra at a masked ball held within weeks of the première, and a report in *La France musicale* suggests that dance music drawn from *Trovatore* had already become popular in Paris before the French version arrived in the city:

Le quadrille qui a produit le plus d’effet au paisible bal de dominos qui a eu lieu à l’Opéra est, sans contredit, le grand quadrille polka sur les motifs du galop du *Trouvère*, dansé par les plus charmants sujets et coryphées de l’Opéra.... Ce quadrille aura le même succès dans les salons que la belle valse de Strauss sur *le Trovatore*, dont la vogue est hors de toute comparaison.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Knud-Arne Jürgensen believes this was based on the ballet music, now lost, which he wrote for a Brussels production of *Nabucco* in 1848. He also notes an unpublished waltz with Verdi’s signature, believed to date from 1859. See *The Verdi Ballets* (Parma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 1995), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Jürgensen, *Verdi Ballets*, 9 and Appendix V, 347-70.

<sup>28</sup> Jürgensen, *Verdi Ballets*, 66, quoting *La France musicale* of 22 February 1857. The waltz from *Trovatore* was by J. B. Strauss, published about 1855 by Escudier at Paris. (The report in *La France musicale* may be no more than a shameless plug by Escudier for his own sheet music.) ‘The quadrille which produced the greatest effect at the peaceful domino ball which took place at the Opéra was, without doubt, the Grand Quadrille Polka on themes from the Galop of *Le trouvère*, danced by the most charming persons and leading dancers of the Opéra.... This quadrille will be as successful in the drawing rooms as the lovely waltz by Strauss from *Il trovatore*, for which the vogue has been without equal.’ The way in which Jürgensen describes Verdi’s *Galop général* is interesting: ‘It opens with a typical Offenbachian up-and-down sweeping gallop tune.... There follows a repeated, brassy scored

In 1869 Filippo Filippi remarked in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* on the number of pieces from Verdi's Italian operas which had become popular as dance music, showing the composer's ability to write in a lively and festive style, despite his austere reputation at this period:

In molti è invalso il pregiudizio che il carattere austero dell'ingegno Verdiano male si presti alla composizione della musica da ballo: tale postulato è erroneo.... Ogni volta ch'ebbe da inventare musica di danza lo fece con brio, originalità, vera e schietta festività. - Mi basti citare l'introduzione, *minuetto, Rigodino* [sic] del *Rigoletto*, il valzer della *Traviata*, il *galop* dell'*Ernani* in *mi bemolle*, la *Tarantella*, la *Seguidilla* della *Forza del Destino*, la *mazurka* del *Ballo in maschera* ed altri ballabili divenuti popolarissimi dappertutto; in tutti questi pezzi che cito c'è non solo fantasia, vena di motivi, ma il carattere peculiare di ciascheduna danza, cosicché taluni gli stessi Strauss non li rinnegherebbero.<sup>29</sup>

Verdi's music, then, regularly 'crossed the footlights', and members of the audience who heard it sung or played for the first time as part of a professional performance quickly appropriated it themselves when they took to the dance floor. Indeed, Maribeth Clark, writing of the popularity of quadrilles in Paris, suggests that they

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cancan-like theme.' The adjective 'Offenbachian' is also regularly applied to parts of *Un ballo in maschera*, which implies that Verdi knew the Offenbach works with which we are familiar, such as *Orphée aux enfers* with its cancan in Hades. However, until 1858 Offenbach's licence for performances at the Bouffes-Parisiens did not permit musical works for a cast larger than four, and his first *opérette à grande mise en scène* with a chorus was not premiered until March 1858, when Verdi had already written both the *galop* for *Le Trouvère* and the first version of *Ballo (Una vendetta in dominò)* for Naples. Philip Gossett and Ilaria Narici confirm from their work on the critical edition that Verdi arrived in Naples in January 1858 with a complete skeleton score for *Una vendetta in dominò*. They nevertheless describe the closing number of Act I scene 1 as a 'can-can alla Offenbach'; Liner notes to *Giuseppe Verdi: Gustavo III. A reconstruction by Philip Gossett and Ilaria Narici*: Dynamic recording CDS 426/1-2, 2003. Offenbach's *Orphée* was premiered in October 1858, and Verdi certainly did not see it before the première of *Ballo* in Rome that winter. It is possible that the success in Parisian ballrooms of Verdi's 1857 *galop* and cancan from *Le trouvère* gave Offenbach a model when he began to write larger-scale pieces the following year. Works such as *La belle Hélène* (1864), *La vie parisienne* (1866), *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (1867) and *La Périchole* (1869) postdate the Paris première of *Un ballo in maschera* in January 1861. Perhaps it is the adjective 'Verdian' which might be more aptly applied to some of Offenbach's dance numbers?

<sup>29</sup> Filippo Filippi, *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, 8 August 1869, quoted in Jürgensen, *Verdi Ballets*, 347-8. 'The prejudice is widespread that the austere character of Verdi's genius is poorly suited to the composition of dance music: this is wrong.... Whenever he has had to invent dance music he has done it with liveliness, with originality, with a real and straightforward festive spirit. I need only to cite the opening scene, minuet and rigadoon of *Rigoletto*, the waltz of *Traviata*, the *galop* in E♭ from *Ernani*, the *Tarantella* and *Seguidilla* of *Forza del destino*, the *mazurka* of *Ballo in maschera* and other dance numbers which have become extremely popular everywhere; in all these pieces which I cite there is not only imagination and a source of musical themes, but the particular character of each dance type, such that even one of the Strauss might not disown them.' In 1869 Johann Strauss II was at the peak of his popularity, with the Blue Danube, Thunder and Lightning and Wiener Blut Waltzes composed at this period; his father Johann Strauss I, who preceded him as conductor of the Vienna orchestra for

were the means by which new operas first reached the public there, being danced before any performance had been seen.<sup>30</sup> It seems important for an understanding of the pre-Unification period to regain the sense of the opera house as a space in which the public were accustomed to performing themselves, and in which the most popular opera music rapidly became ‘theirs’ through active participation. The opera house ball was of course just the first stop in the migration of Verdi’s music out into the wider community where, in an era before mechanical recording, every ‘performer’ adapted it to his or her musical resources and abilities. In the year of the *Ballo* première the dissemination of Verdi’s melodies was described in celebratory terms by a writer in the *Gazzetta piemontese*:

Canticchiate, strimpellate, zufolate... dal salone del gran signore alla retrobottega del merciaiolo, rallegrano i suoi momenti d’ozio, lo confortano al lavoro, lo consolano nei privati affanni, ne accompagnano l’espansione delle domestiche gioie.<sup>31</sup>

### On-stage masquerades

The invisible barrier between performers and spectators was therefore much more porous than it has become since the nineteenth century, and was regularly broken down both physically and musically. Even during opera performances, the illusion might be created that what was happening on stage was a reflection of the dancing and celebration of the carnival masked ball enacted on other occasions by its audience. Don Giovanni’s party, with its socially promiscuous invitations, masking, heteroglossic dance languages and offstage sexual shenanigans, shows its librettist’s and composer’s familiarity with the *libertà* of carnival. The opera was revived in Paris in February 1833, and was running at the Italiens at the same time that Auber’s

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court balls, had died in 1849, but his brothers Eduard and Josef also composed large numbers of dance pieces.

<sup>30</sup> Maribeth Clark, ‘The Quadrille as Embodied Musical Experience in 19th-Century Paris’, *Journal of Musicology* 19:3 (2002), 503-26. Clark comments on the mobility of dance music derived from opera: ‘In quadrille arrangements, borrowed melodies moved between theater and salon, ballroom and bar, articulating a relationship between opera’s status as art and its success as popular culture’ (p.506). Her exploration of the imagery of dance in Flaubert’s *L’Education Sentimentale* points to carnivalization at work in that novel.

<sup>31</sup> Article by V. Bersezio in *Gazzetta piemontese*, 22 September 1859, quoted in Michael Sawall, ‘“Viva V.E.R.D.I.”: Origine e ricezione di un simbolo nazionale nell’anno 1859’ in *Verdi 2001: Atti del Convegno internazionale* (Florence: Olschki, 2003) I, 123-31 (p.129). ‘Hummed, plonked out on the piano, whistled ... from the drawing room of the aristocrat to the back of the haberdasher’s shop, they [Verdi’s melodies] delight his moments of leisure, encourage him while he works, console him in

*Gustave ou le bal masqué* opened at the Opéra, with a masked ball scene which stunned audiences by the splendour of its recreation of carnival masquerade. Jules Janin's review for the *Journal des débats* described its effect:

Je ne crois pas que jamais, même à l'Opéra, on ait vu un spectacle plus grand, plus riche, plus curieux, plus magnifique que le *Bal masqué*.... Quand la belle toile est levée vous vous trouvez tout à coup dans une immense salle de bal qui tient tout le théâtre de l'Opéra, une des scènes les plus vastes de l'Europe. Toute cette salle de bal est entourée de loges, ces loges sont remplies de masques qui regardent, à leurs pieds, c'est une foule immense de déguisements de tout genre, dominos de toutes couleurs, arlequins de toutes les façons, paillasses, marchands, que sais-je?<sup>32</sup>

The Director of the Opéra, Louis Véron, had encouraged his designer Edmond Duponchel to spare no expense in creating the glittering illusion that the auditorium of the theatre during a masked ball was reflected behind the footlights, including the mirror image of the opera-going public watching the spectacle from the on-stage boxes.<sup>33</sup> The illusion was so seductive that members of the public occasionally invaded the stage to join in the *galop* in Act V.<sup>34</sup>

In the same Carnival season at Paris in 1833 a third dramatic work was presented in which masquerade festivity was enacted on stage: the première of Victor Hugo's *Lucrèce Borgia* at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin took place on 2 February that year. Jules Janin reviewed it for the *Journal des débats* just two days

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private anxieties, accompany the expansion of his domestic joys.' The last phrase probably means that the music was played at weddings and baptisms.

<sup>32</sup> Review signed 'J.J.' in *Journal des débats*, 1 March 1833. 'I do not believe there has ever been seen, even at the Opéra, a spectacle more grand, more rich, more curious, more magnificent than the fifth Act of the *Bal masqué*.... When the fine curtain goes up you find yourself suddenly in an immense ballroom which takes up the whole theatre space of the Opéra, one of the largest stages in Europe. The whole of this ballroom is surrounded with boxes, each filled with masked figures who are watching, and at their feet there is a huge crowd of people in every kind of disguise, in dominos of all colours, harlequins, clowns, pedlars, I know not what.'

<sup>33</sup> Louis Véron, *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris* (Paris: Gabriel de Gonet, 1854), 249.

<sup>34</sup> Marian Smith, 'Drawing the Audience in: The Theatre and the Ballroom' in *Verdi in Performance* ed. Alison Latham and Roger Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 113-19. Smith draws attention to the closeness of social and theatrical dance at this period: 'There is no better testimony to the direct kinetic appeal of the nineteenth-century opera-ballet than the fact that audience members at the Opéra actually rushed the stage from time to time to join in the dancing during the ball scene of *Gustave III*. If the choreography had been based on century-old, long-forgotten social dances, no such magnetic pull would have been felt' (114). Yet another 'carnival' work was performed in Paris in early 1833: a ballet-pantomime, *Le Carnaval de Venise*, and this was also subject to a 'pitch invasion' when performed by professional dancers at an Opéra ball on 5 January 1833. Members of the public in masquerade costume leapt on to the stage and added a wild *chahut* to the choreographed performance; see Maribeth Clark, 'The Role of *Gustave ou le bal masqué* in Restraining the Bourgeois Body of the July Monarchy'.

before the première of *Gustave*, and drew attention to the resemblance between the Hugo play, which opens with a Venetian carnival masquerade, and the Mozart opera currently playing in Paris:

Vous vous rappelez sans doute la dernière scène du premier acte, qui ressemble tout à fait au beau finale du premier acte de *Don Juan* de Mozart, même verve, feu même, mêmes imprécations, même colère, même raillerie.<sup>35</sup>

Within a matter of months the Hugo play had been adapted by Felice Romani for Donizetti, and the new opera *Lucrezia Borgia* was premièred at La Scala on 26 December 1833 as the opening opera of the next Carnival season. Romani followed Hugo in setting the first scene at the Venetian carnival, during which masked figures declare their intention to take revenge and a wrongdoer is unmasked and accused, thus bringing back into the opera house the dramatic situation which closes Act I of *Don Giovanni*, the similar scene noted by Janin in his review.

The young Verdi was studying in Milan at the time, a pupil of Vincenzo Lavigna, who had himself been *maestro al cembalo* at La Scala for the first performance of *Don Giovanni* there in 1814.<sup>36</sup> Lavigna encouraged Verdi to attend performances at La Scala, so it is almost certain that he would have seen *Lucrezia* there during the 1833-34 Carnival season. In the same season the ballet *Una festa da ballo in maschera*, choreographed by Louis Henry, was also revived at La Scala. This work of 1830 bore such a strong resemblance to the Ballroom Act of *Gustave ou le bal masqué* that Henry publicly accused the choreographer Taglioni of plagiarism.<sup>37</sup> Verdi would thus have had the opportunity to see two performed masquerades at the opera house in that season, as well as to take part in a huge masked ball at the close of the 1834 Carnival. This took place in the Galleria de Cristoforis, rather than inside a theatre, and 6,000 people were reported to have attended. Although the event was held in a public place, admission was controlled by the requirement that gentlemen must wear evening dress and ladies a historical or theatrical costume, thus excluding the working-class. (Men were also required to

<sup>35</sup> Review of *Lucrèce Borgia*, signed 'J.J.', in *Journal des débats*, 25 February 1833. 'You no doubt recall the last scene of the first Act, which is very like the beautiful finale of Act I of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, the same verve, the same fire, the same curses, the same anger, the same mockery.' Janin used his review to mount an attack on Scribe, both as a dramatist and as a supporter of the reactionary Royalist party ousted by the July Revolution of 1830.

<sup>36</sup> Mary-Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 46.

<sup>37</sup> Clark, 'The Role of *Gustave ou le bal masqué*'.

wear a hat and a coloured mask.) The Galleria was brilliantly lit and dancing went on all night, with crowds strolling at ground floor level while others watched from shops and cafés as though from the boxes at the opera house balls.<sup>38</sup> In Verdi's formative years, then, carnival masquerade was still very much a part of Italian city life, and Bakhtin's description could still be applied to it: 'Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people: they live in it.'<sup>39</sup>

### Verdi's Venetian carnivals

Ten years later, Verdi's first commission for an opera outside Milan was to be at Venice, the city renowned above all others for the splendour of its Carnival, and after some unsatisfactory negotiations on other subjects, Verdi seized with great enthusiasm on the idea of making an opera from Hugo's *Hernani*. It is clear from his correspondence that Verdi already knew the play well, so he could see the similarity with Hugo's *Lucrèce Borgia*, which had become a great success for Donizetti. Both plays have a night-time masquerade, at which the festivities are interrupted by a masked figure threatening revenge. Verdi allowed his new librettist, Piave, to reshape the earlier part of the drama, but kept the masked wedding celebration, with the title 'La maschera' given to the final Act, rather than Hugo's title 'La Noce'. When the curtain rises on this scene, *banda* music is heard offstage as masked ladies and gentlemen, pages and maids of honour, pass to and fro across the stage, 'chatting gaily with one another'.<sup>40</sup> The audience at La Fenice, recently rebuilt with special features for masked balls on stage during Carnival, was watching a masked ball enacted on stage. The opera was a huge success, a crowd paraded Verdi through the streets with a *banda* and shouts of 'Viva!', and managements all over Italy were so keen to put on the latest hit that no fewer than eleven different theatres chose *Ernani* as the opening opera for the next Carnival season on 26 December 1844.<sup>41</sup> Within weeks of the première it was agreed that the opera would be put on at Vienna, and Donizetti himself supervised the production there, to Verdi's great gratification.

<sup>38</sup> Phillips-Matz, *Verdi*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Verdi, *Ernani: Dramma lirico in quattro atti* di Francesco Maria Piave ed. Claudio Gallico (Milan and Chicago: Ricordi and University of Chicago Press, 1985) Act IV, page 373. 'Gentiluomini, Dame e Maschere, (Paggi ed Ancelle) vanno e vengono (gaiamente) discorrendo fra loro.'

<sup>41</sup> Marcello Conati, *La bottega della musica: Verdi e La Fenice* (Milan: Saggiatore, 1983), 131-2.

Both knew how well Hugo's subjects suited the opera houses of cities where Carnival remained a living tradition.

In 1851 Verdi was commissioned again by La Fenice, and again chose an Hugo play, *Le Roi s'amuse*, to be adapted by Piave.<sup>42</sup> Although there is no masquerade scene, the opening is a *festa da ballo* with a *banda* playing dance music beyond the stage space, where people can be seen dancing. As in Act IV of *Ernani* gentlemen and ladies stroll across the stage informally, while pages come and go. The similarity between the scene and the Act I finale of *Don Giovanni* has often been noted.<sup>43</sup> As Pierluigi Petrobelli points out, it was essential to Verdi's conception of the opera that 'the duke must absolutely be a rake' and the opening scene had to set out his licentiousness in the most obvious way.<sup>44</sup> *Banda* music and the informal mingling of men and women as they dance and change partners might carry connotations of *Don Giovanni*'s party to the musical cognoscenti, but it would be likely to remind Italian audiences - especially Venetians - of the sexual possibilities offered by the balls they themselves attended during the Carnival season. The Duke's first aria 'Questa o quella' declares the kind of undiscriminating and guilt-free sexual drive which Bakhtin believed was celebrated in the grotesque gestures and obscenities of carnival. I shall explore later in relation to *Ballo* the way in which the *banda* music contributes to the carnivalization of the masked ball scene as a work of art, but note here Petrobelli's observation that this is the first opera in which Verdi makes use of an offstage *banda* which is 'indifferent' to the foreground action.<sup>45</sup>

Revellers in fancy dress appear in the fourth opera commissioned for Venice, *La traviata*. Flora's party in Act II begins with guests dressed as gypsies and

<sup>42</sup> The Hugo-Verdi-Bakhtin links are at their strongest in *Rigoletto*, an opera which takes as its protagonist the Hugo character Triboulet, a historical character of the time of Rabelais, who appears in Book III of *Gargantua*. Triboulet was the Court Fool of Louis XII and François I, and Bakhtin discusses the two hundred epithets Pantagruel and Panurge apply to describe him completely as a fool, mingling praise and abuse and pointing out that 'the fool or clown is the king of the upside-down world.' (Rabelais, 426) There is no evidence that Verdi had read Rabelais (although Giuseppina Verdi was familiar with his work), but in adapting the Hugo play he elevates the Fool to impersonate his master 'con caricatura' in humiliating Monterone in Act I.

<sup>43</sup> Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1992), Vol. 1, 488-9. Pierluigi Petrobelli, *Music in the Theater: Essays on Verdi and other composers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), Chapter 2 'Verdi and *Don Giovanni*: On the Opening Scene of *Rigoletto*', 34-7.

<sup>44</sup> Petrobelli, 35.

<sup>45</sup> Petrobelli, 37.

matadors who, to use Dickens' phrase, 'sustain a character' by performing a little entertainment in their Spanish disguises. We know from Dickens' account, quoted earlier, that 'a party of gipsy-women' was one of the groups he saw taking part in a confetti battle with a 'shipful of sailors' on the streets of Rome, so it is likely that this group of *mascherate da Zingare* on stage would have raised a smile of recognition in the audience at seeing a popular disguise.<sup>46</sup> These revellers are on the 'borderline between art and life' which Bakhtin saw as the territory of carnival.<sup>47</sup> Within the plot of the opera they are not professional performers but are friends of Flora who have dressed up for amusement. Under their false identities as fortunetellers the women take the opportunity to tell Flora frankly about the Marchese's infidelity; the men under their identities as bullfighters tell a tale of a man winning a woman through physical strength and courage, then strip off their masks and sit down at the gaming table.<sup>48</sup> As Rosselli has shown, gambling was an important part of opera house activity, so an on-stage party at which participants dress up, sing a stage song, then take off their masks, have a drink and sit round a table to win money at cards has many of the elements of a night in the opera house during Carnival. The fake matadors explain their presence at the party by saying they have come to Paris for the 'Bue grasso', which was still a feature of the Carnival in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> In the final Act of *Traviata* the crowd following the Fat Ox sings offstage on its way to the *abattoir* as the pleasure-loving Violetta dies. The words they sing are usually unintelligible in performance, but they call on 'Allegre maschere' to sing and play noisy instruments like 'corni e pifferi'.<sup>50</sup> This is surely another example of

<sup>46</sup> Dickens, 'Pictures from Italy', 374.

<sup>47</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Verdi, *La traviata* orchestral score (Milan: Ricordi, 1999 edition), 231-76.

<sup>49</sup> 'Di Madride noi siam mattadori,/ Siamo i prodi del circo de' tori;/ Testé giunti a godere del chiasso/ Che a Parigi si fa pel Bue grasso.' *Traviata*, 250-3. ('From Madrid we are matadors,/ We are the heroes of the bullring;/ We have come to enjoy the uproar/ Which in Paris they make for the *Boeuf gras*.' *The Journal des débats* for 17 February 1833 sets out on its front page the route to be taken by the *boeuf gras* through the streets of Paris on *Mardi Gras*, leaving the *abattoir* at 10 am, passing the *préfecture de police*, the smartest streets of the Right Bank and the courtyard of the Tuileries Palace itself (where the Royal Family went out on to the balcony to watch it), before returning to the *abattoir*. (For Bakhtin's discussion of the Fatted Ox in French carnivals, see *Rabelais*, 202.) In the closing days of the Paris Carnival that year the Opéra put on the *Carnaval de Venise*, while the Théâtre Français had a play entitled *La Suite d'un bal masqué*. Several masked balls were reported or announced at the Tuileries Palace, the Opéra and the Théâtre du Palais-Royal.

<sup>50</sup> *La traviata*, Act III 'Coro baccanale' (360-5): 'Make way for the quadruped/ Lord of the feast/ With flowers and vineleaves/ Crowned is his head./ Make way for the most docile/ Of anything which bears horns./ With horns and pipes/ Give him a salute./ Parisians, give way/ To the triumph of the Fat Ox./ Neither Asia nor Africa/ Saw any finer,/ The boast and the pride/ Of every butcher./ Happy

the ‘indifferent’ offstage music noted by Petrobelli in Act I of *Rigoletto*, and its specifically carnival connotations make it a forerunner of the *banda* at the masked ball which closes *Ballo*, as I shall discuss at length later in this chapter.

### Verdi’s Parisian masquerade

While the full opera *Gustave ou le bal masqué* had fallen out of the Paris repertory by 1836, its closing masked ball scene had become very successful as a ballet in its own right and was performed regularly at the Opéra and even for a royal entertainment at Versailles during the late 1830s.<sup>51</sup> By the time Verdi was commissioned to write an opera for the 1855 season in Paris the *Gustave* ballet was no longer given there, but Scribe was not one to forget a successful theatrical formula. Not only did he resurrect his unperformed 1836 libretto for Donizetti and rework it as *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, but he incorporated a masked ball into Act III as the pretext for the obligatory ballet.<sup>52</sup> The scene begins formally with Montfort presiding over the stage *divertissement*, but after the ballet interlude is concluded the ‘Seigneurs [et] Dames siciliennes, les uns masqués, les autres sans masques’ stroll informally offstage then reappear in the distance as dance music plays behind the stage, just as happens in *Ernani* and *Rigoletto*. The *Don Giovanni* scenario shows itself again as the three maskers, Hélène, Henri and Procida, emerge from the crowd of revellers to discuss the revenge they have plotted against Montfort. They do so against the dance music and between stanzas of the carnival song ‘O fête brillante!’, once again creating the contrast between foregrounded dramatic action and ‘indifferent’ stage music noted by Petrobelli.<sup>53</sup> The ballet music Verdi wrote for the scene was immediately arranged by Mussard and published by Escudier as dance

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masqueraders,/ Crazy lads,/ All of you applaud him/ With songs and music,/ Parisians, make way/ For the triumph of the Fat Ox.’

<sup>51</sup> Clark, ‘The Role of *Gustave ou le bal masqué*’.

<sup>52</sup> Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 2, 172-5.

<sup>53</sup> Chorus: ‘O fête brillante!/ Où beauté piquante/ Et danse enivrante/ Charment tour à tour!/ Volupté nouvelle!/ Que la nuit est belle!/ Et séduits par elle/ Dansons jusqu’au jour!’ Hélène: ‘Dans le bal répandus, observant en silence...’ Procida: ‘Tous nos amis cachés sous des déguisements..’ Hélène: ‘Et se reconnaissant à ce noeud de rubans...’ Procida: ‘Dans le sein du plaisir attendant la vengeance!’ Hélène: ‘Et dans quelques instants, des nôtres entouré...’ Procida: Montfort par la danse enivré, Sous nos poignards....’ Henri: ‘Grand Dieu!’ Procida: ‘Tomberai’ See Eugène Scribe, *Les Vêpres siciliennes* libretto in *Giuseppe Verdi: Tutti i libretti d’opera* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1996), Vol. 2, 53. (Chorus: ‘O brilliant party!/ Where exciting beauty/ And intoxicating dance/ Charm us turn by turn!/ New desire!/ How lovely is the night!/ And seduced by it/ Let us dance till day!’ Hélène: ‘Spread through the ball, watching in silence...’ Procida: ‘All our friends hidden under disguises...’ Hélène: ‘And recognising one another by this knot of ribbons...’ Procida: In the bosom of pleasure

music, which became very popular at the masked balls of the following winter at Paris.<sup>54</sup> No doubt this encouraged Escudier to do the same with the quadrilles on *Le Trouvère* two years later, whose success in ‘crossing the footlights’ I noted earlier.

### Masking and *Un ballo in maschera*

The collaboration with Scribe at Paris proved to be a long-drawn-out and unsatisfactory process for Verdi, and when *Vêpres* was finally premiered it could only be put on in Italy in a radically-reworked translation, *Giovanna de Guzman*, which moved the locale to Portugal, or in Naples as *Batilde di Turennna*, set in Touraine with a plot from which all nationalist conflict had been removed.<sup>55</sup> It was this version that Verdi attended on the night of his arrival in Naples in January 1858, so he could have had no doubt about the propensity of the Neapolitan censors to make drastic alterations to libretti they did not like.<sup>56</sup> This makes it all the more surprising that Verdi chose as his opera subject for the San Carlo a Scribe libretto which presented the assassination of a recent European monarch. In the outline submitted in advance, Somma and Verdi were prepared to compromise on the setting by moving the *Gustave* plot away from the Sweden of history, but the masked ball of the closing Act remained and was initially approved by the censor. The title chosen for the opera, *Una vendetta in dominò*, pointed to its similarity with the earlier operas we have noted - *Ernani* and *Vêpres* - in which a masquerade scene was haunted by a masker or maskers bent on revenge, as well as with those other suggested models with a similar scenario, *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Don Giovanni*. The masquerade was essential to Verdi’s conception of the work and he refused to compromise over it when the Naples censor pressed him to accept an alternative libretto. As soon as he looked at the first page of the *Adelia degli Adimari* version, he noticed that ‘maschere’ had been omitted from the chorus and commented in the margin:

La mancanza di queste maschere distrugge completamente molte scene importanti, come si vedrà a suo luogo.<sup>57</sup>

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awaiting revenge!’ Hélène: ‘And in a few moments, by our people surrounded...’ Procida: Montfort, intoxicated by the dance, Beneath our daggers...’ Henri: ‘Great God!’ Procida: ‘Will fall!’)

<sup>54</sup> Jürgensen, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Chusid, ‘Verdi and censorship’: paper given at Nineteenth-Century Music Conference, Bristol, 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Frank Walker, ‘Unpublished Letters: A Contribution to the History of *Un ballo in maschera*’ in *Bollettino ISV*, 1:1, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Marginal comment in ‘Il libretto del *Ballo in maschera* massacrato dalla censura borbonica’ in *Carteggi verdiani* ed. Alessandro Luzio (Rome: Reale Accademia d’Italia, 1935) Vol. 1, 244. ‘The lack of these maskers completely destroys many important scenes, as will be seen in due course.’

Later I shall examine ‘a suo luogo’ the more detailed comments he made about the masked ball scene, but it is worth noting here that he refers to ‘molte scene’ which will be spoiled by the lack of masking. This is of course an overstatement, as masqueraders only appear in the final scene of the opera, but it hints at the central role of masks in Verdi’s idea of the work.

The metaphor of masking has been taken up by a number of critics in recent years in their explorations of *Un ballo in maschera*: indeed, it risks becoming a cliché in discussion of the opera. Anselm Gerhard sees the whole opera as a masquerade in which genuine emotions must be hidden in a society where characters are too sophisticated and blasé to communicate real feelings to one another.<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Hudson reinterprets the interplay of contrasts frequently noted in the opera as a constant ‘masking and unmasking’, seeing the profusion of major/minor shifts throughout the opera as expressive of the difficulty of seeing behind appearances, which is a major theme of the work.<sup>59</sup> Harold Powers has explored in detail the moment at which Amelia’s veil falls in Act II, seeing a parallel between the ‘veiled lady’ and the moon which shines out from behind the clouds to unmask her.<sup>60</sup> More recently, Melina Esse has made a critique of the notion that the masking of *Ballo* stages the conflict between exterior appearances and subjective interiors, seeing Amelia’s Act II aria as displaying rather than hiding her inner turmoil.<sup>61</sup> Ralph Hexter has produced a reading of the opera, ‘Masked balls’, which seeks to show how the homosexuality of the historic Gustav III of Sweden has been obscured in the opera yet still reveals itself behind the mask for those who know where to see it.<sup>62</sup> Such a variety of interpretations of the opera as masquerade indicates the richness of the metaphor, even for musicologists for whom carnival masking is probably not a lived experience.

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<sup>58</sup> Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* trans. Mary Whittall (University of Chicago Press, 1998), Chapter 11 ‘Verdi and Interior Space’, 428-31.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Hudson: ‘Masking Music: A Reconsideration of Light and Shade in *Un ballo in maschera*’ in *Verdi’s Middle Period 1849-1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice* ed. Martin Chusid (University of Chicago Press, 1997) 257-72.

<sup>60</sup> Harold Powers, “‘La dama velata’: Act II of *Un ballo in maschera*” in *Verdi’s Middle Period*, 273-336 (pp.333-6).

<sup>61</sup> Melina Esse, “‘Chi piange, qual forza m’arretra?’: Verdi’s interior voices” in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14:1&2 (2002) 59-78 (pp.70-4).

<sup>62</sup> Ralph Hexter, ‘Masked balls’ in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14:1&2 (2002), 93-108.

The final title agreed for Rome, *Un ballo in maschera*, points to the significance of masking in the opera even more clearly than the earlier choice, *Una vendetta in dominò*. The title moves the focus away from a single character, plot theme or situation, suggesting that the entire opera is to be considered as a masquerade, an event at which masking and disguise are expected, and at which those who attend will need to exercise their minds and memories to identify who is present. This was an activity with which Italian audiences were very familiar, both at the masked balls held in the opera house and at the operas themselves, in which censored plots and situations were regularly encountered. The Naples audience at *Batilde de Turenna* would have known perfectly well that behind the Loire Valley setting and the changed names they were watching Verdi's new opera *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, and the huge publicity surrounding the battle with the censors over the *Gustave* plot would have alerted even the dullest member of the Rome audience at the première of *Ballo* to the fact that the Boston setting was a cover-up for a different story. (Many of the audience may even have seen the stage play *Gustavo III*, which was put on at Rome the year before.) The change of names and setting demanded by the censor acted like a domino to conceal the identity of the Gustav character, but a well-informed audience would easily have been able to identify him. Paradoxically, however, the censorship 'masking' of the King in the original story allowed the audience freedom to guess at a different King, as I have suggested in my earlier chapter on Carnival Kings. The 'Governor of Boston' disguise was so bizarre that its very artificiality drew attention to the fact that another ruler must be 'hiding behind' it, but by insisting that this ruler was 'Not-Gustav' the censor was perversely encouraging the audience to think about other rulers, perhaps closer to home, who might be sympathetic, just and courageous. Just as the 'gypsy fortunetellers' in *Traviata* take advantage of their false identities to tell Flora the truth about her Marchese, the 'Conte di Warwick' in his American disguise may be telling Italians something about their political situation.

### Riccardo disguises himself as a fisherman

As I have discussed in an earlier chapter, the key moment of carnival uncrowning in the opera is when Riccardo decides to go in disguise to visit the fortuneteller. This is a carnival act in the Bakhtinian sense because it is to be done as

part of a crowd, and is announced by Riccardo as an escapade to provoke laughter. Bakhtin sees collective activity as essential to carnival:

Carnival laughter ... is a festive laughter, therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people.... It is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity.<sup>63</sup>

In 'Ogni cura si doni al diletto' Riccardo invites his courtiers to mingle with the crowd in a shared experience of carefree abandonment and folly. This joint enterprise seems to undermine Gerhard's interpretation of Riccardo's disguise as an act of desperation at the 'alienated personal communication' which prevails at his court.<sup>64</sup> Far from 'displaying the feigned indifference of blasé characters with a cutting irony' (Gerhard's description), Verdi's music and Somma's words for this episode show the characters as anything but indifferent: Riccardo and Oscar are enthusiastic promoters of this revel, Renato urges caution, the conspirators are cheered by the opportunity it offers for their revenge, and the loyal courtiers respond with excited anticipation to the proposed escapade. Gerhard's interpretation of the work as the tragedy of an individual who seeks for yet can never attain interior space asserts motivations and psychological complexities which posit a 'real person' behind the words, music and plotline of the opera, and he creates his drama of interiority by novelistic descriptions of what Riccardo 'believes', 'ignores' or 'fears'. Esse's approach seems more solidly based in the artistic context of the nineteenth-century theatre, which drew on the physical gestures and signs used in melodrama to stage the conflicts experienced by its characters.<sup>65</sup> She rejects the possibility of uncovering an 'ineffable psychological depth' within them, focussing instead on the external signs of Amelia's distress in her Act II aria. This emphasis on gesture, both musical and postural, recognises the nature of opera in a society where solitary novel-reading was a recent trend while performance genres such as opera, ballet, commedia dell'arte and religious ritual were long established. Bakhtin viewed gesture as essential to carnival, and saw how it might be incorporated into art by the process of carnivalization.<sup>66</sup> I am arguing that the action of Riccardo and his

<sup>63</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera*, 429.

<sup>65</sup> Esse, 'Chi piange?', 64, 76-77.

<sup>66</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 122. See quotation on page 33 above.

courtiers in disguising themselves to visit Ulrica is a carnival gesture rather than an expression of social *ennui* or individual self-deception. It may easily be read by an audience who know the language of carnival forms as an overturning of the established order which may result in any kind of folly and upset, preparing the way for the strange juxtapositions of the comic and the tragic which follow in the rest of the opera.

The disguised visit to the fortuneteller was an important point for Verdi in his conception of the opera and he would not yield to the Naples censor's requirement that only the Gustavo character should be disguised, not those accompanying him. He was determined to preserve 'quella cert'aura di gaiezza che correva per tutta l'azione' and commented in the margin of the substitute libretto:

Perchè egli deve essere travestito e gli altri no? Tutti devono esserlo: ciò è necessario all'azione che va a succedere nell'abituro dell'Indovina.<sup>67</sup>

Qui è soppresso il travestimento: ma allora Ulrica può facilmente conoscerli; inoltre diviene assurdo fra questi gravi personaggi lasciare uno solo travestito da cacciatore.<sup>68</sup>

Verdi saw that 'grave personages' would be quite out of place on this carnival escapade. The description of the courtiers' disguises in the libretto and score - 'travestiti bizzarramente' - indicates that they are not intended as a serious deception but should suggest a carnival playfulness.<sup>69</sup> There is no musical disguise for the courtiers: they are first heard shouting orders to Ulrica offstage, peremptorily telling her to open the door and let them in on the *salto d'ottava* which signals authority throughout the opera. Whereas Riccardo slips onstage alone and mingles with the crowd gathering in awe at Ulrica's power, his courtiers stride in through the main door to a brisk C major march, and although they are in lower-class disguise, they issue orders to Ulrica in her own domain using literary language at odds with their appearance: 'figlia d'averno', 'Su, profetessa, monta il treppiè'.<sup>70</sup> The fortuneteller

<sup>67</sup> Marginal comment on *Adelia degli Ademari* libretto in *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 249. 'Why must he be in disguise and the others not? All of them must be: that is necessary to the action which is going to take place at the Fortuneteller's.'

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, 252 'Here the disguise has been suppressed: but then Ulrica will easily recognise him; besides, it becomes absurd that amongst all these grave personages there should just be one dressed up as a hunter.'

<sup>69</sup> Libretto, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Libretto, 16. The *disposizione scenica* costume list indicates that Tom and Oscar are in 'Abito da Cacciatore' for this scene, Samuel is in 'Abito d'Artigiano' and the male chorus are also 'Artigiani e

may not know who her visitors are, but their presentation makes it clear that this is some kind of prank rather than a genuine consultation.

Riccardo has not only donned a costume disguise to deceive Ulrica; he also sets out to mislead her by singing what purports to be a fisherman's song. 'Di' tu se fedele' is marked out by its introduction and structure as stage music, and is therefore a performance rather than a sincere request by Riccardo to have his fortune told.

(See **Musical Example 20.**) James Hepokoski has noted a number of connotations of strophic song on which Verdi draws in his mid-century works, pointing out that their roots in *opéra comique* make them both suitable for inset songs and to denote a character as lower-class or lacking in authority.<sup>71</sup> It is therefore a format suitable for a ruler who is disguising himself as a plebeian character, but making that disguise 'obvious' by making a performance of it. Just as the 'gypsy women' and 'matadors' at Flora's party in *Traviata* perform their strophic songs of fortunetelling and bullfighting to entertain the party, Riccardo sings a song of the sea to complement his fisherman's disguise, turning to the chorus of courtiers who play along with his performance. In *Traviata* the Parisians borrow extravagantly 'Spanish' music for their disguise (presumably cast-offs from the gypsies of *Trovatore*), and for Riccardo's musical disguise Verdi insisted that the music had a strongly marked 'seafaring' character that could not be applied to a hunter, as the Naples censor suggested:

Questo cambiamento di pescatore in cacciatore ruina un pezzo che forse era dei più importanti nell'opera.<sup>72</sup>

Ho già notato come questo cangiamento faccia il più gran male al pezzo musicale. Chiunque abbia anche pochissima abitudine di teatro sa che la musica marinaresca ha un carattere particolare, la musica da caccia ne ha un altro ben differente (e questa si esprime precisamente coi *corni* così detti da *caccia*). Tutti i maestri anche i più mediocri hanno distinto questi diversi generi, e queste idee sono così impresse nella mente dello spettatore che se io

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Cacciatori' ('Nota del Vestiario', *Disposizione* 2002 edition, 140-1) Peroni's costume drawings to accompany the *disposizione* give no designs for these, simply noting for Samuel and Tom: 'Per l'abito in casa d'Ulrica sarà o da marinaio o da popolano dedotto da quello dei coristi'. (*Disposizione* 2002 edition, 250) None of this seems to fulfil the requirement that they should be 'travestiti bizzarramente' - but then Renato's costume for Act II is shown as a kilt, plaid and Scotch bonnet, which is truly bizarre for a 'Creole'.

<sup>71</sup> James A. Hepokoski, 'Genre and content in mid-century Verdi: 'Addio, del passato' (*La traviata*, Act III)' in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, 3 (1989), 249-76 (p.266). Hepokoski in 'Ottocento Opera as Cultural Drama: Generic Mixtures in *Il trovatore*' in *Verdi's Middle Period*, 147-96, examines in detail the structure of the expanded strophic song, citing 'Di' tu se fedele' as an example (160-66).

<sup>72</sup> Marginal comment on *Adelia degli Adimari* in *Carteggi verdiani*, 1, 250. 'This change from a fisherman to a hunter ruins a number which was perhaps one of the most important in the opera.'

avessi presentato la mia musica marinesca ed ondeggiante in bocca d'un cacciatore, il pubblico si sarebbe smascellato dalle risa ed avrebbe avuto ragione!<sup>73</sup>

Verdi was capable of subtle marine onomatopoeia, as in the Prelude to Amelia's opening aria in Act I of *Simon Boccanegra*, but here he is operating at a much more basic level, employing a range of musical gestures which were well understood by the opera-going public as signalling 'seafarer'. Julian Budden has pointed out that this is one of those rare and precious moments 'that break the vicious circle of musicology, whereby we wish to know what people took for granted at a certain period, but precisely because they took it for granted they do not bother to tell us.'<sup>74</sup> The maritime musical gestures are performed by Riccardo to 'sustain a character', just as the waggonful of madmen observed by Dickens at the Roman carnival used the gestures of 'screaming and tearing' to perform their madness in a way that observers would recognise.

A particular maritime gesture which Budden pointed out as having a fixed significance in Italian opera at the period was 'the nucleus of notes with an acciaccatura on the offbeat which regularly signifies navigation'.<sup>75</sup> He traces this back to the arrival of Tancredi by boat in Act I of Rossini's opera, and points out that Verdi had used the gesture to signify the rowing which also brings Procida to the shore in Act II of *Vêpres*.<sup>76</sup> This 'rowing acciaccatura' is repeatedly used in Riccardo's song to give it a maritime flavour. However, as well as grasping the maritime connotations of the gesture itself, it is possible that the audience in 1859 would be reminded of the dramatic situations in which they had heard it before. In *Tancredi* the 'rowing acciaccature' immediately precede the opening words of the hero's first aria:

Oh patria! dolce, e ingrata patria!  
Alfine a te ritorno!

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 252. 'I have already noted how this change does the greatest damage to the musical number. Whoever has even the slightest acquaintance with the theatre knows that seafaring music has a particular character, hunting music a quite different one (and this is specifically expressed with what are called *hunting horns*). All composers, even the most mediocre, can distinguish between these two genres, and these concepts are so well embedded in the minds of the audience that if I had presented my seafaring, billowing music in the mouth of a hunter the public would have cracked their jaws laughing and they would have been right!'

<sup>74</sup> Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 2, 51.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, 201, 390.

Io ti saluto, o cara terra  
degli avi miei: ti bacio.<sup>77</sup>

Scribe begins Act II of *Vêpres* with a similar return of the patriot, as Procida salutes Sicily as he steps ashore:

O mon pays! pays tant regretté  
L'exilé te salute après trois ans d'absence!  
Sur tes bords, autrefois, j'ai reçu la naissance  
Je m'acquitte aujourd'hui... Voici la liberté!  
Et toi, Palerme, ô beauté qu'on outrage,  
Et toujours chère à mes yeux enchantés!...  
Lève ton front courbé sous l'esclavage,  
Et redeviens la reine des cités.<sup>78</sup>

Such patriotic sentiments were anathema to Italian censors in the political climate of the late 1850s, and Naples audiences could only have heard the *Batilde de Turenne* version from which all patriotic sentiment had been carefully filleted. However, the Sicilian Vespers was a powerful legend in the patriotic discourse of the time, invoked by Mazzini himself, so the arrival of the patriot Procida might have been understood by audiences as the boat rowed in, no matter how bowdlerized the verse he sang on the shore. In any case, the figure of the exile was such an important one in the years after 1848 that any return to the homeland might have political connotations.<sup>79</sup>

Another maritime signifier is the  $\frac{6}{8}$  barcarolle rhythm. The choice of a fisherman's disguise for Riccardo was not perhaps a haphazard one, and Verdi's insistence on keeping his maritime character not simply a reluctance to rewrite a piece he was pleased with. The most famous fisherman in nineteenth-century opera before 1859 was another character Scribe had created for Auber: Masaniello, the Neapolitan fisherman and patriot in *La Muette de Portici*. The best-known song of the most famous fisherman in mid-nineteenth century opera houses was a barcarolle 'Amis la matinée est belle', which encourages his fellow fishermen to keep quiet and

<sup>77</sup> Rossini, *Tancredi: Melodramma eroico in due atti di Gaetano Rossi* ed. Philip Gossett (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini, 1984) Vol. 1, Act I, 112-3. 'Oh Fatherland! dear and ungrateful Fatherland!/ At last I return to you!/ I salute you, O dear land/ Of my ancestors: I kiss you.'

<sup>78</sup> Scribe, *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, Act II, *op.cit.* 'O my country! Country so much missed/ The exile salutes you after three years' absence! On your shores, once, I had my birth/ Now I pay my dues to you... Here is liberty! And you, Palermo, O beauty so ravaged,/ And still so dear to my spellbound eye!... Lift your head so bent beneath slavery/ And become once again the queen of cities.'

<sup>79</sup> Twenty years before, in 1839, Verdi wrote a song 'L'esule' to a text by Temistocle Solera.

work to ensnare ‘le roi des mers’, coded language for patriotic resistance to their Spanish overlords.<sup>80</sup> While the claims for *La Muette* as the opera which started the patriotic revolution in Belgium have been overstated, it was undoubtedly an opera which had a resonance for Italian patriots at the time of *Ballo*.<sup>81</sup> Sawall reports that following Vittorio Emanuele’s *grido di dolore* in January 1859, the supporters of war with Austria gave a rousing response to a performance of *La Muette* in Florence.<sup>82</sup> Somma grumbled to Verdi that they would have had no difficulty in putting on a *Gustavo III* in Florence or one of the other Northern Italian cities where *La Muette* was regularly played, arguing that if the censors there could allow an opera about a patriotic uprising, then they would allow the Gustav opera.<sup>83</sup>

Verdi had already combined masquerade and a light-hearted barcarolle in *I due Foscari* of 1844. This would have been the first of his Venetian carnivals for La Fenice but the authorities in Venice would not allow the subject as descendants of the characters in the city might have taken offence (*Ernani* with its carnival scene took its place).<sup>84</sup> Act III of *Foscari* is set in the Piazza San Marco, where maskers stroll about informally, greeting one another in a festive atmosphere: ‘Tutto è gioia’.<sup>85</sup> As so often in Verdi’s operas, among the crowd are maskers plotting revenge - in this case, Loredano and Barbarigo, the enemies of the Foscari family. The gondoliers’ regatta is about to begin, and the chorus sing the barcarolle ‘Tace il vento, è queta l’onda’ to encourage them. The mood is lighthearted, but as soon as the song is finished the tragic plot interrupts the festivity, as Jacopo Foscari comes out of the Doge’s Palace to say farewell to his wife and leave for lifelong political exile. The barcarolle has sung of the the gondoliers’ sweethearts waiting for them to return; now Jacopo sings of his parting from Lucrezia, referring to the sea which will divide them for ever:

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<sup>80</sup> Auber, *La Muette de Portici: Opéra en 5 actes, Paroles de MM. Scribe et Germain Delavigne* facsimile of orchestral score published by Troupenas, ed. Charles Rosen (New York: Garland, 1980), 266-90.

<sup>81</sup> Jane Fulcher analyzes its French political context and discourse in *The Nation’s Image* (Cambridge University Press, 1987) Chapter 1: ‘*La Muette de Portici* and the New Politics of Opera’.

<sup>82</sup> Sawall, ‘Viva V.E.R.D.I.’, 127.

<sup>83</sup> Somma to Verdi, 26 May 1858, in *Carteggi verdiani*, I, 238.

<sup>84</sup> Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, Vol. 1, 140. Verdi’s letters promoting the subject as one of great interest to a Venetian audience are reproduced in Conati, *La bottega della musica*, 58-9.

<sup>85</sup> Verdi, *I due Foscari: Tragedia lirica in 3 Atti di Francesco Maria Piave* vocal score (Milan: Ricordi, 1950 edition), 143.

Addio... fra poco un mare  
Fra noi s'agiterà e per sempre! Almeno  
Tutte schiudesse ad ingoiarmi, tutte  
Le sirti del suo seno.<sup>86</sup>

A similar sentiment is of course expressed in *Ballo* by Riccardo when he signs the order in Act III which will send Amelia away from his court: 'l'immenso Oceàn ne separi... e taccia il core'.<sup>87</sup> Is it too much to argue that for Italian audiences of the mid-nineteenth century references to the sea regularly carried connotations of exile, and that by invoking them in 1859 Verdi and Somma were reminding audiences of political figures such as Garibaldi who had gone into exile but were now returning to liberate the Fatherland?<sup>88</sup> The barcarolle, the fisherman's costume in the style of Masaniello, the 'rowing acciaccatura' that elsewhere precedes an expression of love for the Fatherland: all these apparently innocuous elements might have added up to a specific political message to a contemporary audience. Once again, the adoption of carnival fancy dress permits a truth to be revealed which is too risky to speak of otherwise.

The reception of this barcarolle was caught up in the patriotic debate of the time. I have quoted earlier the fiercely nationalistic review of the première by Nicola Cecchi in which he suggests that 'Di' tu se fedele' resembles the sea shanties of Bari.<sup>89</sup> Budden has remarked that this folk origin for the song should be followed up, but the observation needs to be taken in the context of the review, which considers every number in the opera from a nationalistic standpoint. The point to note is that Cecchi describes the number as a barcarolle - backing up Verdi's point about the

<sup>86</sup> *I due Foscari*, 158-9. 'Farewell... before long a sea/ Between us will roll for ever! If only/ It would open up to swallow me/ In the quicksands of its bosom.'

<sup>87</sup> Libretto for *Ballo*, 39.

<sup>88</sup> The Introduction to Amelia's aria which opens Act I of *Simon Boccanegra* is rich in sea rhythms. Amelia has been set up as the representative of the Grimaldi family to safeguard their assets while they have been sent into political exile by Boccanegra; in this scene the Doge brings the pardon which will permit them to return to Genoa. As Riccardo pardons Ulrica and cancels the order that will exile her, so Simon is shown on his first appearance as ruler in the opera pardoning exiles and allowing them to return to their homeland.

<sup>89</sup> Nicola Cecchi, review of *Ballo* in *Filodrammatico* 36, 10 March 1859, quoted in *Bollettino ISV*, (1960)1:1, 125. 'How could the barcarolle "Di' tu se fedele", sung by Riccardo, possibly be a tune from beyond the Alps? On the contrary, this seems to be very much of our people since it bears a certain likeness to the songs of the seamen of Bari.' A report in the same paper of the reception of the opera at its première indicates that 'la barcarola del tenore' was one of only two numbers to receive spontaneous applause at the first two performances; *Filodrammatico* 34, 23 February 1859, cited in *Bollettino ISV* 1:1, 129.

unmistakeable *marinaresca* style - and that it sits comfortably in his patriotic argument as something perceived as rooted in Italian tradition.

The artificiality of the song has been noted in the past. Budden describes Riccardo as 'a parody of a fisherman', and Gerhard discusses the musical means by which the mismatch between Riccardo's self and his disguise is signalled.<sup>90</sup> This artificiality is thrown into relief by the earlier episode in which the genuine seafarer Silvano consults Ulrica. The real sailor approaches the fortuneteller with an A major  $\frac{4}{4}$  march in which Somma's regular *doppi senari* are chopped at the caesura and set syllabically into terse, self-contained phrases. This seems highly suitable for a bluff seafarer making a straightforward request for information. By contrast, Riccardo's approach to the fortuneteller is anything but straightforward. As a stage song 'Di' tu se fedele' already steps aside from directness, and the 'vamp till ready' rhythm on the strings before he begins to sing emphasises that this is a conscious performance. In earlier chapters I have drawn attention to the way the *salto d'ottava* which signals authority is reversed into an octave leap upwards in situations where authority is challenged. Before he begins his song, the courtiers have been giving their orders to Ulrica on an E♭ octave. In the introduction to Riccardo's song the oboe marks out this E♭ octave space, and he begins his masquerade trick on Ulrica's authority with a leap up it - his song in disguise is a carnival challenge to the solemn and supernatural prophetic powers she claims. Budden has pointed out the similarity of this opening, with its  $\frac{6}{8}$  rhythm and E♭ leap, to that of 'Questa o quella', which I linked earlier to masquerade and Bakhtin's 'carnival sense of the world'.<sup>91</sup>

Verdi mimics the strophic regularity of folksong, but he elides Somma's six-syllable lines or repeats them to create spacious phrases, with the stressed syllable at the end of each phrase stretched over an undulating melody - a long way from the 'four-square' characterisation of the genuine sailor Silvano. It is even possible that by setting 'flutto' over a descending Neapolitan chord the composer was intending a

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<sup>90</sup> Budden, Vol. 2, 390; Gerhard, 431-3.

<sup>91</sup> Budden, Vol. 2, 390.

musical joke for the *cognoscenti* in the Naples audience.<sup>92</sup> The word-painting of the phrases ‘Con lacere vele... onda funesta’ and ‘sollecita, esplora... la rabbia de’ venti’ to suggest the struggle of a small boat against the waves and the whistling of the wind overhead take the performance toward art song, deliberately striking a false note to signal that this is the artifice of a sophisticated King pretending to be a seafarer. The performance style also steps outside the bounds of a simple fisherman’s song with its octave and a half drops on ‘irati’ and ‘forze’, and the sustained top B♭ on the repeat of ‘nell’anime nostre’, demonstrating a vocal virtuosity which would be out of place in a lower-class supplicant to Ulrica. The phrase ‘travestiti bizzarramente’ describes the kind of musical disguise Riccardo is putting on.

In the second strophe the words ‘Le dolci canzoni’ close the first section and open the second so that they are repeated three times. As I noted in an earlier chapter, Verdi took words from the first section of ‘Alla vita che t’arride’ into the second section in order to emphasise the phrase ‘Te perduto, ov’è la patria’ by repeating it and closing with it. Here the fisherman in disguise repeatedly sings about the sweet songs of home, while singing what is supposed to be one of them. The self-referential device draws attention to the song itself, rather than allowing the audience to engage with any authentic emotional content it might be thought to contain.

It is made clear by these means that Riccardo’s song is a performance, but it is a performance which gives him the opportunity to declare his courage and leadership. While ostensibly seeking to know what the future holds, he boldly asserts that no matter what lies ahead, nothing will keep him from the dangers of the sea, and he rouses his ‘followers’ in the chorus to agree with him that their hearts feel no terror about what they may face.<sup>93</sup> In all the future storms and perils he will recall

<sup>92</sup> The *sesta napoletana* was a chord particularly associated with composers of opera in eighteenth-century Naples (Alessandro Scarlatti, Pergolesi, Cimarosa), although the term was used earlier. (See Grove ‘Neapolitan sixth chord’ and *La Musica: Dizionario* (Turin: Unione Tipografica-Editrice Torinese, 1971) ‘Sesta Napoletana’).

<sup>93</sup> The printed libretto for Rome gives the ‘Sollecita, esplora’ verse to the chorus only, but in the score it is first sung by Riccardo as the second part of his first stanza. The chorus omit the first two lines addressed to Ulrica, but agree with his declaration that neither lightning, raging winds, death or love will turn him away from the sea. Riccardo’s second stanza also incorporates the printed libretto’s

the last farewell of his beloved and the sweet songs of home; once again mention of the sea seems to be intimately connected with the themes of patriotism and exile.

Sollecita, esplora,  
Divina gli eventi,  
Non possono i fulmin,  
La rabbia de' venti,  
La morte, l'amore  
Sviarmi dal mar.  
No, no, no, no,  
La morte, l'amor  
Sviarmi dal mar.<sup>94</sup>

Just as I suggested earlier that Silvano's words to Ulrica, and Riccardo's response to them, carried a message to Italians on the brink of war, here I would propose that the barcarolle deals with the very real possibility that its hearers will be facing dangers in the near future. Riccardo gives a performance of courage, supported by thoughts of loved ones and home but unafraid to leave them, and this is presented as winning the admiration and support of his followers. In the encounter with Ulrica that follows, her first remark on his hand relates to his military leadership - 'la destra d'un grande, vissuto sotto gli astri di Marte' - and his first reaction on hearing that he is to die is to declare that he will welcome a death on the battlefield - 'sul campo d'onor'. Under the fisherman's fancy dress and the carnival prank a ruler is speaking about the impending war and the military courage that will be required in it.

### Oscar and the grotesque *voix criarde*

Oscar is the only significant *travesti* part in Verdi's *oeuvre*, and in general the composer resisted any suggestion of casting male roles with female singers. The management at Venice in 1843 wished him to write a principal part for the popular contralto Carolina Vietti, but it was a stumbling block in negotiations that he was found to be 'a sworn enemy' of *travesti* casting.<sup>95</sup> In his keenness to have Hugo's

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verse for the chorus, who only get to repeat the declaration of courage, which this time is theirs as well as his: 'Nell'animo nostre non entra terror'.

<sup>94</sup> 'Quickly explore/ Divine what is to happen:/ Lightning cannot/ Nor the rage of the winds,/ Nor death, nor love/ Turn me from the sea./ No, no, no, no,/ Nor death, nor love/ Turn me from the sea.'

<sup>95</sup> Letter from De Val to Brenna at La Fenice, 24 August 1843, in Conati, *La bottega della musica*, 70: 'Questa mattina soltanto mi fù dato di vedere il M. Verdi, al quale feci una forte raccomandazione per la Vietti: lo assicurai che essa ha una bella voce, che canta benissimo, e che farà cosa grata al Pubblico ed alla Presidenza, se le scriverà una bella parte; ed egli mi ha promesso, che per quanto lo permetterà il libretto non ommetterà mezzo alcuno onde trattarla bene. Egli è nemico giurato di far cantare una

*Hernani* accepted as a subject for Venice, he initially agreed to cast her as the hero, but once the management had agreed to put on Piave's adaptation, Verdi managed to wriggle out of this commitment and had a tenor cast as Ernani, with no role at all in the opera for a principal contralto.

However, when he accepted the Naples commission in 1857 the first subject he proposed to the San Carlo was *Lear*, a project he had been considering for several years, and in which the Fool was to be sung by a contralto. In his first negotiations on the libretto with Cammarano in 1850, his outline included the *Buffone* as one of the five principal roles and he indicated that the character should tease and joke, using the word 'bizzarra' twice to describe the effect he wished to achieve in the Fool's scenes. The *Buffone* appears alongside the King, accompanying him when he has uncrowned himself and wanders through the world, and Verdi indicated to Cammarano some of the phrases from Shakespeare he wanted to include that show the Fool as the voice of carnival mockery raised against regal, religious and paternal authority:

Voi sapete che non bisogna fare del *Re Lear* un dramma colle forme presso a poco fin qui usate, ma trattarlo in una maniera del tutto nuova, vasta, senza riguardo a convenienze di sorta. Le parti, parmi possano ridursi a cinque principali: *Lear*, *Cordelia*, *Buffone*, *Edmondo*, *Edgardo*....

Atto I - Scena III: *Atrio (oppare vicinanze) del castello di Gonerilla*.  
*Lear* manda a prevenire *Gonerilla* del suo arrivo. Intanto il *Buffone* colle sue bizzarre canzoni va pungendo *Lear* perchè si è fidato delle figlie....

Atto II - Scena I: *Landa. La tempesta continua*.  
Il *Buffone* (scherzando sempre): *Zio, dell'acqua santa in una casa, meglio saria che quest'acqua di cielo*....  
Magnifico quartetto [*Lear*, *Buffone*, *Kent*, *Edgardo*]

Atto II - Scena IV: *Povera stanza in una cascina*.  
Il *Buffone* chiede a *Lear*, *se un pazzo è nobile o plebeo?* *Lear* risponde: *È un re; è un re!!* - Canzone. - *Lear* in delirio, sempre fisso nell'idea dell'ingratitudine delle figlie, vuol formare un giudizio. Dice ad *Edgardo* che

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donna vestita da uomo.' 'Only this morning was I able to see Maestro Verdi, to whom I made a strong recommendation in favour of Miss Vietti: I assured him that she has a fine voice, that she sings very well, and that he will please the audience and the management if he will write a good part for her; and he promised me that, insofar as the libretto permits, he will use every effort to treat her well. He is a sworn enemy of having a lady sing dressed up as a man.'

è *il gran Giudice*; al Buffone: *il sapiente Sire* ecc. ecc. Scena estremamente bizzarra e commovente.<sup>96</sup>

The influence of Hugo's theorising of the grotesque in the *Préface de Cromwell* seems to inform Verdi's musical imagination here. The French dramatist found in Shakespeare's work his ideal juxtaposition of the grotesque and the sublime

C'est donc une des suprêmes beautés du drame que le grotesque.... Grace à lui, point d'impressions monotones. Tantôt il jette du rire, tantôt de l'horreur dans la tragédie. Il fera recontrer l'apothicaire à Roméo, les trois sorcières à Macbeth, les fossoyeurs à Hamlet. Parfois enfin il peut sans discordance, comme dans la scène du roi Lear et de son fou, mêler sa voix criarde aux plus sublimes, aux plus lugubres, aux plus rêveuses musiques de l'âme.<sup>97</sup>

Hugo himself uses a musical metaphor to describe the kind of effect he admires in Shakespeare's drama, employing the plural 'musiques' to suggest that detectably different styles are operating alongside one another yet 'sans discordance'. This is indeed the effect of many of Verdi's own operatic scenes, where different emotions and situations play against one another in contrasting musical rhythms, *tessiture* and styles. The 'voix criarde' which Hugo sees as the voice of the grotesque in the scene between Lear and his Fool becomes, in Verdi's musical imagination, the voice of the *travesti* contralto whose body is grotesquely at odds with her male character, and

<sup>96</sup> Outline sent to Cammarano, 28 February 1850, in *Copialettere*, 478-80. 'You know that it isn't a question of turning *King Lear* into a drama along the usual lines, but of handling it in a way that is completely new, on a vast scale, without bothering about any kind of convention. It seems to me that we can cut down the main parts to five principals: Lear, Cordelia, The Fool, Edmund, Edgar....// Act I scene 3: Hall (or else the neighbourhood of) Goneril's castle. Lear sends a message to Goneril to announce his arrival. Meanwhile the Fool with his bizarre songs taunts Lear because he has put his trust in his daughters....// Act II scene 1: Heath. Continual storm. The Fool (always jesting): 'O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o'door.' ... Magnificent quartet [Lear, Kent, Fool, Edgar] // Act II scene 4: Bare room in a farmhouse. The Fool asks Lear: 'Tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?' Lear replies: 'A king, a king!' - Song. - Lear, in a delirious state, always fixed on the idea of his daughters' ingratitude, wants to hold a trial. He says to Edgar that he 'is the great Judge; and to the Fool that he is 'the wise Lord', etc., etc. Extremely bizarre and moving scene.'

<sup>97</sup> Victor Hugo, 'Préface de *Cromwell*' [1827] in *Oeuvres complètes* ed. Jean Massin (Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1967) Vol. 3:1, 62-3. 'The grotesque is therefore one of the supreme beauties of drama... Thanks to it, there is no sense of monotony. Sometimes it throws laughter, sometimes horror into tragedy. It will bring together the apothecary and Romeo, the three witches and Macbeth, the gravediggers and Hamlet. And sometimes it may even, without jarring, as in the scene of King Lear and his Fool, mix its shrill voice to the most sublime, the most gloomy, the most dreamy musics of the soul.' Hugo was one of the many young artists who found the 1827 visit to Paris of an English theatre company led by Kemble, Kean and Macready an eye-opening experience, offering the opportunity to see *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, which were not only very different in their dramatic aesthetic from the tragedies performed at the Comédie-Française, but were played by the English actors in a very different vocal and physical style. (The young Hector Berlioz was of course as struck by the performances as his contemporary Victor Hugo, to the point of marrying the actress who played Ophelia.)

who is the embodiment of carnival teasing and frank talking. The incongruity of the female voice stands out in the all-male scenes, making the effect 'bizarre' and preventing any 'impression monotone' of the kind both Hugo and Verdi wanted to avoid. After Cammarano's death, Verdi turned to Somma for a *Lear* libretto, writing to him in 1853 with some guidance on what he was aiming at:

Trovo che la nostra opera pecca di soverchia monotonia, e tanto che io rifiuterai oggi di scrivere soggetti sul genere del *Nabucco*, *Foscari* ecc. ecc. Presentano punti di scena interessantissimi, ma senza varietà. È una corda sola, elevata se volete, ma pur sempre la stessa.<sup>98</sup>

Vi raccomando la parte del Matto che io amo assai; è così originale e così profonda.<sup>99</sup>

The casting of this part was so important to him that in 1857 he insisted to Vincenzo Torelli, Secretary to the San Carlo, that it was impossible to put on *Lear* at Naples unless he could rely on a contralto with first-rate acting ability to take the part of the Fool. He had a high opinion of Carolina Ganducci (as we know from his wish to cast her as Ulrica at Rome) but believed that *Lear* would fail if she were cast as the Fool.<sup>100</sup> It was at this point that he started to look round for other subjects, and picked out the *Gustave* plot. He saw that it could have a part for a principal contralto - the Fortuneteller - but it also had a *travesti* role in the page Oscar, the laughing,

<sup>98</sup> Letter to Somma, April 1853, in *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma* ed. Alessandro Pascolato (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1913), 46. 'I find that our operas are falling into overwhelming monotony, so much so that nowadays I would refuse to compose subjects like *Nabucco*, *Foscari*, etc., etc. They offer very interesting highpoints in the drama, but without variety. It's all on one string, elevated if you like, but always the same.'

<sup>99</sup> Letter to Somma, May 1853, *ibid.*, 50. 'I recommend to your attention the part of the Fool which I really like; it is very original and very profound.'

<sup>100</sup> Verdi wrote to Torelli on 14 May 1857: 'Per fare il matto nel *Lear* ci vuole un'attrice. Certo non bisogna scrivere esclusivamente pel tale o tale altro cantante, ma pure è necesario che il cantante abbia capacità e mezzi atti a rendere la parte che gli si destina; un'opera male eseguita, o fiaccamente eseguita, è come un quadro visto al buio: non si capisce.' and again on 17 June 1857: 'Per fare il matto nel *Re Lear* è d'uopo di un contralto che sappia stare molto, ma molto bene in scena.... Credeitemi ch'è grande errore arrischiare il *Re Lear* con un complesso di cantanti che, quantunque buonissimi, non sono per così dire stampati per quelle parti. Io rovinerei forse un'opera, e voi in parte la vostra Impresa. Lasciatevi scartabellare altri drammi, e converrà bene che io finisca per trovare un soggetto.' *Copialettere*, 484.

('To do the Fool in *Lear* you need an actress. Certainly it isn't a question of writing exclusively for this or that singer, but it is necessary that the singer has the capacity and aptitude to deliver the part assigned to her; an opera which is badly performed, or weakly performed, is like a picture seen in the dark: you can't make it out.' 'To do the Fool in *Lear* it is essential to have a contralto who is very, very good on stage... Believe me, it would be a big mistake to risk putting on *King Lear* with a cast of singers who, however good they are, are not cut out, so to speak, for the roles. I would perhaps ruin an opera, and you your management. Let me look through some other dramas and I shall end up finding a subject.')

challenging sidekick to a King. Verdi was going to incorporate the *voix criarde* of the grotesque into an opera very different from Shakespeare's *Lear*.

I have remarked earlier in this chapter on the fact that *Gustave* and *Lucrezia Borgia* were both premièred in 1833, and have masquerade scenes in which masked figures are determined to exact revenge. There is a further similarity in that both operas contain breeches parts. Auber cast a light soprano as Oscar in *Gustave* at Paris, while a few months later in Milan Donizetti cast a mezzo in the role of Maffio Orsini, a young companion of Gennaro in *Lucrezia*. In the Venetian carnival scene which opens *Lucrezia* all characters on stage are male, but Orsini's voice stands out as female, just as Oscar's voice stands out in the all-male opening scene of *Gustave*. This effect is followed by Verdi in the opening scene of *Ballo*, where Oscar is the only female voice but all the characters at the court are male. In the final Act of *Lucrezia*, when a planned murder is about to interrupt a scene of festivity, Orsini sings a memorable expression of Bakhtin's 'carnival sense of the world' in the strophic *brindisi* 'Il segreto per esser felici':

Ogni tempo, sia caldo, sia gelo,  
Scherzo e bevo, e derido gl'insani  
Che si dan del futuro pensier.  
Non curiamo l'incerto domani,  
Se quest'oggi n'è dato goder.  
Profittiamo degl'anni fiorenti,  
Il piacer li fa correr più lenti,  
Se vecchiezza con livida faccia  
Stammi a tergo e mia vita minaccia,  
Scherzo e bevo, e derido gl'insani  
Che si dan del futuro pensier.<sup>101</sup>

Bakhtin saw the laughter and drunkenness of carnival as expressing a recognition that human life is transitory, and its practices and gestures as symbolic of relativity and change in all things. Orsini is cross-dressed, demonstrating that even the gender categories of ordinary life are not eternally fixed. Interrupting his song about the pleasures of the moment which are to be enjoyed, a deathknell sounds and offstage

<sup>101</sup>Donizetti, *Lucrezia Borgia* vocal score, libretto by Felice Romani (London: Boosey, n.d.), Act II, scene 2, 202-7. 'Whatever the weather, be it hot, be it cold,/ I joke and drink, and laugh at the madmen/ Who give a thought to the future./ Let's not have a care about the uncertain tomorrow,/ If we can enjoy today./ Let's make the most of our years in bloom,/ Pleasure will make them run more slowly/ If old age with its livid face/ Stands behind me and threatens my life,/ I joke and drink, and laugh at the madmen/ Who give a thought to the future.'

voices intone the service for the dead, emphasising that human life is indeed fleeting. The very drinking he is celebrating in his *brindisi* is taking him down to the grave, poisoned by Lucrezia, so that he embodies the grotesque cycle of birth, physical pleasure and death explored in the previous chapter on the Grotesque Body. The final Acts of *Gustave* and *Ballo* also present a scene of festivity overshadowed by the threat of approaching murder, at which the only main character who remains light-hearted is the page Oscar, the *travesti* character. Scribe wrote for him teasing *couplets* about the masquerade, with the nonsense syllables ‘Tra la la’ used to baffle the enquiries of Ankastrom about the King’s disguise. Verdi and Somma followed this model in Oscar’s ‘Saper vorreste’ in which the soprano voice expresses the laughter of carnival in the face of approaching death.

The Italian tradition was to cast a contralto or mezzo for *travesti* roles. The prima donna contralto had been gradually eased out of male heroic roles since the days of Rossini, who had created *Tancredi* and Arsace in *Semiramide* for leading female singers. While Rossini’s pupil Marietta Alboni continued to sing such roles all over Europe into the 1850s, new *travesti* parts in the 1830s and 1840s were generally youths and light-hearted characters. When the Venice management was trying to persuade Verdi to cast Carolina Vietti in *Ernani*, a suggestion that she might play Don Carlos rather than the protagonist was firmly rejected by Count Mocenigo on the grounds that *travesti* casting would undermine the dignity of a royal character who is no longer a youth. Brenna writes that to have a woman sing such a role would cast a parodic light over the character, a comment that indicates how far such cross-gender casting had become an indicator of carnival playfulness and mockery by the early 1840s:<sup>102</sup>

Non far cantare la Vietti nell’opera della stagione sarebbe andar contro al voto dell’intiera città. - Affidare ad essa la parte di Carlo sarebbe porre il personaggio in parodia, laddove è indispensabile di sostenerlo con tutta la possibile dignità, ed elevatezza.

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<sup>102</sup> Heather Hadlock has explored the decline of the *travesti* part in French opera during the mid-nineteenth century in ‘The Career of Cherubino, or the Trouser Role Grows Up’ in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 67-92. No equivalent study of Italian *travesti* casting in the nineteenth century has yet been published, but in his article ‘Breeches part’ for *New Grove Opera* (1994 edition) Budden reports no adult male role cast *en travesti* after 1850. There are many interesting insights on gender and casting in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* ed. Corinne A. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) but not much information about Italy.

D'altronde la Vietti può rappresentare un giovinetto di 20 anni come dev'essere Hernani, dappoiché à un fisico e forme di maschia robustezza, ed è insomma attissima a tutta la vibrazione d'anima che deve distinguere quel personaggio; ma non può vestire la dignità di Carlo, che non deve esser più nell'aprile dell'età.<sup>103</sup>

When he finally wrote a *travesti* role, Verdi went against the Italian tradition by making Oscar a soprano. In doing so, it is unlikely that he was following Auber directly, as the full version of *Gustave* had fallen out of the Paris repertory by the time of his first visit to the city and there is no evidence that he ever saw it.<sup>104</sup> (Mercadante had used a contralto for the equivalent character in his adaptation of the Scribe plot, *Il Reggente*.<sup>105</sup>) However, in 1836 Scribe created another light-hearted page, Urbain in *Les Huguenots*, a character cast as a soprano by Meyerbeer in an opera that found lasting success; as Budden has noted, this is the most likely musical model for Oscar.<sup>106</sup> When Verdi was at Paris in 1854 to prepare *Vêpres*, the Meyerbeer opera was revived and he went along to hear his proposed Hélène, Sophie Cruvelli, sing Valentine.<sup>107</sup> As in *Lucrezia* and *Gustave*, the *travesti* character first appears in an all-male scene in Act I as the page arrives with a message for Raoul; the soprano sings a teasing *brillante* number to the surrounding noblemen. Act II opens as an all-female scene (as does the second scene of *Ballo*) and here Urbain is strongly characterised as a heterosexual male adolescent, spying on the ladies-in-waiting as they strip off to bathe in the river and expressing envy of Raoul for enjoying an audience alone with the Queen. He entertains the ladies with a strophic song narrating the approach of the lover Raoul which has a teasing 'Non, non, non' refrain similar to the number he has sung to the men in Act I. The *travesti* character clearly plays with the gender mismatch between the stage character and the singer, and it is possible that Meyerbeer was imitating the effect of Cherubino's 'Voi che sapete'. Heather Hadlock draws attention to the dual voyeurism implicit in the

<sup>103</sup> Letter from Brenna to Verdi, 26 October 1843, reporting Mocenigo's response to Piave's request to cast a tenor in the role of Ernani, in Conati, *La bottega della musica*, 98. 'Not to have Miss Vietti singing in the new season's opera would be to run counter to the wishes of the entire city. To cast her in the part of Carlo would be to make that character a parody, when it is indispensable to uphold him with all possible dignity and elevated status. Besides, Miss Vietti is able to represent a young man of twenty such as Hernani, as she has a physique and shape of masculine robustness [!], and is most suitable for all the vibrancy of spirit which must distinguish that character; but she cannot put on the dignity of Carlo, who must no longer be in the Spring of his life.'

<sup>104</sup> Clark, 'The Role of *Gustave*'.

<sup>105</sup> Budden, Vol. 2, 54.

<sup>106</sup> Budden, Vol. 2, 376.

<sup>107</sup> Phillips-Matz, *Verdi*, 339-40.

‘boudoir’ scenes where Urbain and Cherubino operate, in which the page is simultaneously a woman on whom the male gaze may rest, and a boy through whose gaze the male spectator may look at women in their private space.<sup>108</sup>

### Oscar between genders

In her examination of cross-dressed pages at the Opéra, Clark sees a similarity between the Oscar of *Gustave* and Urbain in *Huguenots* in their performance of adolescent sexuality, and in their Cupid-like role of bringing the lovers together.<sup>109</sup> However, the Italian adaptation removes the sexual knowingness of Scribe’s Oscar; in Somma’s version he does not remark on Riccardo’s excitement at seeing Amelia’s name on the list of guests for the ball, nor tell Amelia that he wishes he could partner her there, nor banter with Ankastrom at the masquerade about his ‘belle compagne’. However, he is connected with the erotic element of the plot. Somma’s Oscar presents the invitation list to Riccardo, triggering the amorous daydream ‘La rivedrà nell’estasi’ in Act I, and he delivers the invitation to Amelia in Act III, marking her special place in the ruler’s affections by promising ‘Reina della festa sarete’. When he steps forward to defend Ulrica in Act I, it is the fortuneteller’s advice to women in love that he mentions in the first verse of his song. Somma’s words for Oscar in this all-male scene have female connotations - he refers specifically to Ulrica’s ‘gonna’ and describes Riccardo’s plan to visit her as ‘feconda di piacer’.

Commentators have often remarked on the way Oscar seems to echo and enhance the bright, laughing aspects of Riccardo’s character, especially in his showpieces ‘Volta la terrea’ and ‘Saper vorreste’. Petrobelli sees Oscar as belonging entirely to what he defines as the ‘light’ side of the opera:

On the ‘light’ side, there is the carefree young sovereign, his love of disguises, jokes and pranks - that part of his personality which finds its perfect incarnation in the character of Oscar. For this element in the score Verdi draws unhesitatingly on the French tradition, as much for the musical forms as for the musical language. [He describes ‘Volta la terrea’ and ‘Saper vorreste’] It is the same musical style that characterises Riccardo’s part in the

<sup>108</sup> Hadlock, ‘The Career of Cherubino’, 73.

<sup>109</sup> Maribeth Clark, ‘Bodies at the Opéra: Art and the Hermaphrodite in the Dance Criticism of Théophile Gautier’ in *Reading Critics Reading* ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (Oxford University Press, 2001), 246-7.

Quintet at the end of Act One, ‘È scherzo od è follia’, the climax of his high-spirited masquerade at Ulrica’s dwelling.<sup>110</sup>

While agreeing with Petrobelli that the two numbers he cites are connected with the carnival laughter also expressed in Riccardo’s escapade and mockery of Ulrica, I would draw attention to the way Oscar’s music at other points does not align itself with Riccardo but with the woman in love, Amelia. This is particularly obvious in the very Quintet cited by Petrobelli, ‘È scherzo od è follia’. If we look at the ensemble at the close of the first scene of Act I, ‘Ogni cura si doni al diletto’ Oscar’s rising staccato phrases are marked *brillante* and are entirely in keeping with his solo characterization earlier in the scene, ‘Volta la terrea’. (See **Musical Example 21**.) He is responding enthusiastically to Riccardo’s proposal to visit Ulrica, and Riccardo in turn responds to him with a rising phrase that echoes and extends Oscar’s. Their musical style is certainly the same in this ensemble, in which the chorus joins them in a rollicking staccato finale in which all but the conspirators are described in the *disposizione* as ‘lietissimi per la mascherata proposta da Riccardo’.<sup>111</sup> In the next scene, however, Riccardo is the only person who laughs at Ulrica’s prophecy,. While he sings his staccato mockery, Oscar’s voice enters on a legato ‘Ah!’ of keening anguish which rises chromatically in strong and unmistakable contrast to it. (See **Musical Example 22**.) His master is laughing, but at this point in the drama Oscar separates himself musically from Riccardo and appears to ‘stand in for’ the woman who loves him and fears for him. Woodwinds accompany Oscar’s line as they have done Amelia’s sighs in the trio earlier in this scene, and as they accompany Amelia’s confession of love in the following Act. Verdi here is doing more than simply adding a soprano voice to the ensemble for a fuller effect: Oscar is the bearer of the dramatic message that the death predicted for Riccardo is intimately linked to his love affair with Amelia. When Oscar brings his invitation to Amelia in Act III, the position in ‘È scherzo od è follia’ is reversed. (See **Musical Example 23**.) Oscar reverts to his *brillante* style, opening his description of the delights of the forthcoming ball with an excited ‘Di che fulgor’ full of staccato jumps, trills and dynamic contrasts in B♭ major, a theme which Amelia turns into the minor key as a lament for the death which is threatening Riccardo as a

<sup>110</sup> Pierluigi Petrobelli, ‘The Fusion of Styles’ in *A masked ball: Un ballo in maschera: English National Opera Guide No. 40* ed. Nicholas John (London: John Calder, 1989), 12.

<sup>111</sup> *Disposizione scenica*, 10.

result of her action. The Page does not ‘develop’ as a character, moving from light-heartedness in the opening scene to loving anxiety in the next; his mercurial shifting from boyish sparkle to feminised lament and back again suggests that there is no underlying psychology to the character. Oscar takes on whatever vocal colour is required by the dramatic context and thereby undermines any attempt to find the ‘real person’ behind the performed character.

In the final scene Somma follows Scribe in creating a ‘Tra la la’ number for Oscar to sing in response to Renato, who is pressing him to identify Riccardo in the masquerade. I have already explored Renato’s characterization as a figure of the ‘official world’ in which loyal service, solemn oaths and marital fidelity are rigidly enforced. Renato is opposed to any kind of carnival foolery and has come to the masquerade only to carry out his vow of revenge on the man who has seduced his wife, an obligation which follows from the honour code that polices heterosexual relationships. He refuses to play along with the carnival practice of masking identity, snatching off Oscar’s mask and requesting his help in unmasking Riccardo. Oscar plays the fool, teasing the solemn minister by responding to his request with a nonsense song:

Saper vorreste  
Di che si veste,  
Quando l’è cosa  
Ch’ei vuol nascosa.  
Oscar lo sa  
Ma nol dirà  
Tra là là là  
Là là là là.  
Pieno d’amore  
Mi balza il core,  
Ma pur discreto  
Serba il secreto.  
Nol rapirà  
Grado o beltà,  
Tra là là là  
Là là là là.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Libretto, 12. ‘You would like to know/ What he is wearing/ When that is something/ He wishes to keep hidden./ Oscar knows/ But will not say, Tra la la la etc./ Full of love/ My heart is beating/ But it’s discreet/ It keeps the secret./ Neither rank nor beauty/ Will tear it from me.’

The deliberate confusion and frustration he seeks to arouse go beyond a simple refusal to break the etiquette of the masquerade party. The ‘tra la la’s, though devoid of lexical meaning, allow for a soprano vocal display which carries the clear message that the person who sings them is an adult woman, not a boy. (See **Musical Example 24.**) The phrases between the nonsense syllables also convey sexual ambiguity. ‘Pieno’ is masculine and refers to the noun ‘core’, which is the subject of the verb ‘serba’: the linguistic device allows the masculine subject to be kept at a distance from the singer, who need not commit to either gender in singing of love and of Riccardo’s secret. In the phrase ‘Nol rapirà / Grado o beltà’ it is unclear whether it is Oscar’s heart or Riccardo’s secret that cannot be seized or charmed by beauty or rank, and if it is Oscar’s heart, what makes it so unassailable? One does not have to follow Hexter in all the detail of his gay reading of the opera to note that there is something here that confounds the usual gender categories: a female performer is singing a masculine subject declaring himself full of love for a male object, but promising to keep the man’s secret.

The *disposizione* adds to the cross-dressing confusion by specifying a more affectionate physical contact between Renato and Oscar in this scene than is enacted at any point in the opera between Renato and his wife:

Oscar insegue Renato, e battendogli con la mano leggermente la spalla, gli dice: *Più non ti lascio, o maschera, ecc.* e quindi entrambi ridiscendendo la scena nel mezzo giungono presso la bocca d’opera. Dicendo: *Oscarre tu se*’, Renato gli toglie scherzando la maschera dal volto: ma alle parole: *Il Conte è qui*, egli trasalisce, e reprimendo la gioia, domanda ove sia. Oscarre gli risponde indispettito: *Cercatelo da voi*: allora Renato, accarezzandolo amichevolmente, cerca di trargli di bocca con qual abbigliamento Riccardo si celi alla festa. Oscar, graziosamente schernendolo, risponde: *Saper vorreste*, ecc., mentre Renato non cessa di pregarlo onde gli confidi il segreto. Al termine della ballata, Renato amichevolmente vuol ritenere per le braccia Oscar, ma questo si svincola, e fugge dileguandosi tra le coppie de’ ballerini. [...] Intanto Renato, raggiunto Oscar, e presolo sotto il braccio, torna con esso a bocca d’opera dicendogli: *Via, tu che sai distinguere*, ecc.: Oscar, quasi all’orecchio, con mistero gli risponde: *Veste una cappa nera*, ecc., e quindi vuol slontanarsi: Renato lo ferma per fargli altre interrogazioni; ma egli, soggiungendo: *Più che abbastanza ho detto*, fugge, dileguandosi tra la folla.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *Disposizione*, 34. ‘Oscar pursues Renato, and tapping him lightly on the back with his hand, says: ‘I shall not leave you, masker, etc.’ and then both come downstage to the front. Saying ‘You are Oscar’, Renato playfully removes the mask from his face: but at the words ‘The Count is here’ he gives a start of surprise, and repressing his joy, asks were he is. Oscar replies crossly ‘Find him yourself’: then Renato, caressing him in a friendly way, seeks to draw from his mouth under what

The male character Oscar is seen pursuing another male from behind, touching him and declaring that he will not leave him alone. The man he has touched goes off with him and playfully uncovers Oscar's face. Renato becomes excited at something Oscar says, caressing him (*accarezzandolo*) and urging him to say more - to open his mouth, in the telling words of the *disposizione*, to tell his secret. The gestures seem to echo the love scene of Act II in which Riccardo urged Amelia to open her mouth and disclose the secret of her love for him.<sup>114</sup> Oscar's mouth refuses to release what Renato seeks, but the man still tries to hold the boy affectionately by the arm. Oscar breaks away, but a little later Renato catches him by the arm and leads him away, begging him again to open his mouth. This time the boy brings his lips close to Renato, slipping out into his ear the secret he desires. The man wants more, but the boy runs away again into the crowd. In an earlier chapter I drew attention to the way hands are active in this libretto as the expression of the grotesque body's engagement with the world, performing physical contact of a kind acceptable to the censor. In this encounter between Renato and Oscar their hands touch one another's bodies *leggermente, amichevolmente, accarezzando* - in no other scene, even between the heterosexual lovers, is affection expressed so physically. I am not arguing that there is a homosexual relationship between Renato and the page, but rather that the scene between them deliberately plays around with gender expectations, with the man performing the gestures of chasing and wooing a reluctant boy. Oscar is both male and female - in the true spirit of carnival his character is on the boundary between art and life, overturning the social rules that govern contact between the sexes by refusing to be categorised as one or the other. Renato is a character whose moral code depends on the observance of these rules, but at the masquerade Oscar constantly slips from his control.

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costume Riccardo is concealing himself at the party. Oscar, gracefully teasing him, replies: *Saper vorreste* [You would like to know] while Renato does not cease begging him to confide his secret. At the close of the song, Renato with a friendly gesture on his arm wishes to hold Oscar back, but he breaks free and runs off, disappearing between the pairs of dancers....Meanwhile Renato, catching up with Oscar again, and taking his arm, returns with him to the front of the stage saying 'Come, you know how to pick him out' etc.: Oscar, almost in his ear, replies mysteriously 'He is wearing a black cloak' etc., and then he wants to move away: Renato stops him to ask more questions, but he, adding 'I have said more than enough', runs off, disappearing into the crowd.'

<sup>114</sup> Their encounter also echoes Riccardo's insistence that Ulrica opens her mouth to reveal what she saw when she looked at his hand; in each instance the telling of the secret is linked to Riccardo's death.

At the close of the opera, Oscar again abandons the *brillante* style and adds his voice to that of Amelia in the final ensemble 'Cor sì grande e generoso'. The sopranos sing in unison, *pianissimo* and *dolcissimo*, a prayer for Riccardo's soul. This is an utterance more usually associated with loving women than with boisterous pages; Oscar is no longer the sparkling lively echo of Riccardo but the grieving co-mourner of Amelia. He moves across the gender boundary again to reflect her grief, and is grouped physically with her on stage as the *disposizione* shows the two sopranos on Riccardo's right as he dies, Oscar supporting his master while Amelia kneels at his feet.<sup>115</sup>

### Oscar the embodiment of Carnival

Oscar, then, is a character hard to pin down: a male sung by a female, and who seems to have no definite personality of his own, 'carrying the message' of Riccardo, Amelia or Ulrica at different points in the opera. Any reading of the work which tries to construct a 'real person' for each of the characters, or delve into motivation and plausibility as though this were a naturalistic drama, is bound to stumble into difficulty over Oscar. Carnivalization seems a more helpful way to view the character. If carnival was the time in which hierarchical rank and prohibitions were suspended, 'the feast of becoming, change and renewal' in

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<sup>115</sup> It is fitting that Oscar is close to Riccardo at the moment of his death, since there is a good deal about Oscar which might remind a classically-educated audience of the god Hermes, one of whose functions was to lead souls down to the Underworld. In Greek myth Hermes brings orders from Olympus to mortals, and is commonly represented in art as a beardless youth. The young page Oscar announces the ruler's commands, leads characters on and off stage, and delivers invitations and messages. The *travesti* character may also suggest the myth of Hermaphrodite in which the union of Hermes and Aphrodite brings forth a being which is part male, part female, a deity whose cult involved men and women cross-dressing. Hermes was also associated with prophecy (in particular fortunetelling with pebbles) and was the psychopomp or guide of the dead to Hades. When Oscar defends Ulrica he declares that she derives her prophetic powers from the God Below, but he has no fear of going to her. He sets in motion the plot strand which will lead to Riccardo's death, encouraging him to go to the fortuneteller and preparing the disguise for him. In the second scene Ulrica is addressed as 'Sibilla' and urged by the courtiers to 'mount the tripod' to make her prophecies: those who were familiar with Virgil's *Aeneid* would call to mind the Sibyl who makes her prophecy to Aeneas then leads him down into the world of the dead. Oscar brings Riccardo to this zone of death, just as Hermes brings mortals to Hades. Hermes is also the god of trickery and, especially in his Roman equivalent Mercury, the god of cheating. People born when the planet Mercury was in the ascendant were believed to be lively but changeable in character: 'mercurial', and the liquid metal element was named 'mercury (*mercurio*)' for its unstable and unpredictable nature. When Oscar slips in and out of contact with Renato at the ball, he suggests this elusive, teasing, tricky identity. His *brillante* music with its leaps, trills and dynamic contrasts could aptly be called mercurial, as can his slipping to and fro between two vocal styles in different scenes.

Bakhtin's definition, then Oscar embodies carnival in the work.<sup>116</sup> As we have seen in the scene with Renato, his cross-dressing challenges the rigid gendering of society between male and female. Such *travesti* is grotesque in the Bakhtinian sense in that it draws the spectators' attention to the body, inviting speculation about which physical cavities or protuberances are present and which are not. This would explain why the Venice management found it unsuitable for the character of a King who must preserve an aura of dignity - see Brenna's letter rejecting the suggestion that Carlo in *Ernani* be played *en travesti*. Oscar, the least important person on stage in the first scene, leaps forward to advise the King and laughingly defends a supposedly criminal outsider, prompting the 'uncrowning' of the ruler in the visit to Ulrica. Oscar seems to exist on the surface only: he cannot be attributed a consistent personality as he shifts his musico-dramatic characterization from 'lively page' to 'mourning lover' and back again. He is the agent who draws the lovers together, but he also leads Riccardo towards his death, thus playing an essential role in the cycle of sex, fertility and death which, as traced in the last chapter, is characteristic of carnival images. He plays an important part in the masked ball and enacts a laughing, nonsense opposite to the serious Renato, representative of the world of 'honour' and seriousness.

As well as the grotesque mismatch of Oscar's female voice with his male character, the *tessitura* of Oscar's role suggests a further connection with carnival. One of the rituals of masquerade was that participants challenged one another: 'I know you!' while disguising their own voices to evade identification. The 'squeaking' high-pitched voice in which this was done was a carnival practice commented on particularly when masked balls were introduced to England in the early eighteenth century.<sup>117</sup> Auber incorporated this practice into his music for the chorus in Act V of *Gustave*, indicating in the score that the verse descriptions of

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<sup>116</sup> Bakhtin *Rabelais*, 10. 'Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.'

<sup>117</sup> Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 36. 'Descriptions of masquerades frequently refer to the "caterwauling", "cat-calling" or peeping sounds made by a roomful of masks. According to a commentator in the *Weekly Journal* (January 25, 1724), "The first Noise which strikes your Ears upon your entering the Room is a loud confused Squeak, like a Consort of Catcalls." The company "affect this unnatural Tone," it turns out, "to disguise their Voices." There are many references to the "masquerade squeak" which seems to have been employed by men and women alike.... "This Piece of ridiculous, squeaking Nonsense" is how an irate correspondent in the *Daily Advertiser* (February 19, 1740) referred to masquerades when he called for a return to "the old English manly Exercises.'

masqueraders and their amorous encounters should be sung ‘avec la voix que l’on se fait au bal masqué’, while the refrain should be sung in ‘voix naturelle’.<sup>118</sup> By casting Oscar as a soprano in an opera entitled ‘A Masked Ball’, Verdi is adding the connotations of masquerade challenge, playfulness and disguise to the character whenever he takes centre stage with ‘his’ high-pitched voice. The ‘squeaking’ effect is enhanced by a piccolo accompaniment when he sings in this *brillante* style, although this is absent when he takes the legato ‘female’ line in the two ensembles discussed above. (See **Musical Examples 4, 21, 22, 23 and 24.**)

### Masquerade and carnivalization

To Verdi masks and dominos were an essential element of the closing scene of Act III and he refused absolutely to change the ball to a banquet as required by the Naples censor. In his comments on the substitute libretto *Adelia degli Adimari* he draws attention to the features of the ball scene which will be lost if it is changed to a different kind of social event:

Si osservi tutta questa scena sino alla fine dell’opera, e veggasi se il cambiamento del *ballo* in *banchetto* poteva logicamente effettuarsi. Tolte le maschere tutta l’azione resta distrutta. Più non avrebbe avuto luogo il dialogo rapido, misterioso fra i tre nemici del Duca: non più la scena graziosissima nella quale Renato fa cader la maschera al paggio; non più il movimento di chi va in traccia, di chi evita, di chi corteggia e di chi persegue. S’immagini il lettore tutto questo spettacolo: la scena di quei tre: i scherzi e la canzone del paggio: quel certo non so che di strano e di bizzarro che va sempre prodotto sulla scena dal *dominò* e dalla *maschera*: l’orchestra che ora manda note allegre, ora freme, in quella che le musiche interne sul palcoscenico suonano *waltz*, *galop*, ecc. e si comprendrà facilmente il grande effetto che poteva esser prodotto da scena così vasta e così varia. Cambiate o togliete qualche tratto e l’azione e la musica scapiteranno di carattere e di significato. Sono insomma tali squarci che o non bisogna farli o conviene lasciarli intatti e come furono concepiti: un soffio basta ad offuscarli, a toglierne ogni illusione, a distruggerne l’effetto.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Auber, *Gustave ou le bal masqué*, Partition piano et chant (Paris: Brandus Dufour, n.d.), 405, 408. Clark draws attention to this ballroom mimicry in ‘The role of *Gustave ou le bal masqué*’.

<sup>119</sup> Marginal comment on *Adelia degli Adimari* libretto in *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 264. Italics represent Verdi’s own emphasis. ‘Look at the whole of this scene up to the end of the opera, and see if the change from *ball* to *banquet* can logically be made. If you take away the masks, the whole action is destroyed. The rapid, mysterious dialogue between the three enemies of the Duke can no longer take place; nor the really delightful scene in which Renato takes down Oscar’s mask; nor the movement as one gives chase and another evades, one woos and another pursues. The reader can picture the whole spectacle: the scene with these three: the jests and the song of the page: the desperation of the two lovers: that certain feeling of the strange and the bizarre which is always produced on stage by the *domino* and the *mask*: the orchestra which now sends out happy notes, now trembles, just as the internal music on the stage is playing waltzes and galops, etc. and he will easily grasp the great effect which can be produced by such a vast and varied scene. Change or take away

Verdi conceives the scene as a whole, and values the contrasts and variety which the masquerade setting permits. He puts himself in the place of the spectator, whose eye and attention range across the stage as different characters and actions are highlighted in turn, and whose ear takes in both the music of the orchestra and that of the stage band with their contrasting moods. The fluidity and movement of the masked ball are important to Verdi's idea of the scene; he draws attention to the physical to-and-fro which is possible at a ball rather than a banquet, and to the contrast in music which becomes possible as different characters move rapidly in and out of 'focus' onstage while the dancing continues. The 'rapid, mysterious interchange' between the conspirators is an essential part of the masquerade scene for Verdi, echoing those earlier masked revenger figures I have noted from *Don Giovanni* onwards. In the previous section I have drawn attention to the gestures of sexual pursuit enacted in the little scenes between Renato and Oscar. In Verdi's marginal comment quoted above, the description of their interaction is immediately followed by a mention of the kind of sexual pursuit ('il movimento di chi va in traccia, di chi evita, di chi corteggia e di chi persegue') which Verdi wanted to keep in the scene.<sup>120</sup> The masked ball licensed sexual pairing and made it obvious, both through the physical coupling of the dance but also through the playful soliciting and flirting made possible by the abandonment of everyday identities and social roles. A banquet would make it much more difficult to bring sexuality to the fore in this scene, and it would therefore be almost impossible to present the lovers Amelia and Riccardo within an eroticized context.

Verdi's comments on the ball show that he considered it an informal occasion by comparison with the proposed banquet, which would have many of the characteristics of the 'official feast' Bakhtin saw as the opposite of carnival freedom.<sup>121</sup> He points out that it would be impossible for the ruler to slip in unobserved to a banquet in his residence; protocol would require Riccardo as host to

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any part and the action and the music will lose character and meaning. It is, in fact, one of those pieces that you either don't do at all or you must leave intact and as they were conceived. A breath is enough to dim them, to take away any illusion, to destroy their effect.'

<sup>120</sup> The phrase also appears in the printed libretto description of the opening of the scene, though this was clearly completed after Verdi's 1858 comment on *Adelia* since it places the ball in the Boston setting. (Libretto, 40)

<sup>121</sup> See page 35 above.

welcome his guests on arrival.<sup>122</sup> He also draws attention to the restriction which would be placed on a married woman at a banquet, making it impossible for Amelia to approach Riccardo in full view of other guests to warn him of the threat to his life. The censors' librettist, aware of the dramatic difficulty, decided to keep the Amelia character veiled, but Verdi pointed out that this made the scene even less plausible:

Quello che mette il colmo al ridicolo di questa scena si è la venuta di *Adelia velata*. Prima di tutto non si va ad un banchetto in quel modo: poi in mezzo a tanta gente a viso scoperto non è possibile che ella (la sola che sia velata) non sia presa di mira o segnata a dito da tutti e notata dal marito che pure doveva essere al banchetto: ed allora come può ella avvertire l'amante della morte che lo minaccia?<sup>123</sup>

At a masquerade, however, men and women could mingle without restriction, and messages could be passed in the casual jostling of the crowd - not only between the lovers but also, as Verdi wished, between the conspirators. Masquerade was free from the surveillance of authority.

The opening of the ball scene as finally premiered at Rome was to present the carnival crowd in all its diversity. The libretto and the *disposizione* call for some of the chorus to be masked, while others wear dominos, with others in full evening dress with their faces uncovered.<sup>124</sup> The free mingling allowed at a masked ball is heightened in the Boston setting by the visual signalling of racial diversity amongst those present. The libretto describes the scene as the curtain rises:

Liete musiche preludiano alle danze, e già all'aprirsi delle cortine una moltitudine d'invitati empie la scena. Il maggior numero è in maschera, alcuni in dominò, altri in costume di gala a viso scoperto; fra le coppie danzanti alcune giovani creole. Chi va in traccia, chi evita, chi ossequia, e

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<sup>122</sup> Marginal comment on *Adelia* libretto: 'Se dessa [Amelia] è là invitata ad un banchetto, come mai Egli, il padrone di casa non è venuto ad incontrarla ed a riceverla? Poteva esentarsene in un ballo in maschera, ma non mai in un pranzo.' (*Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 264) 'If [Amelia] is present as a guest at a banquet, why has [Riccardo] as host not come to meet her and receive her? He need not do so at a masked ball, but cannot be excused at a meal.'

<sup>123</sup> *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 267. 'To cap it all, the most ridiculous part of this scene is the arrival of *Adelia under a veil*. First of all, no-one goes to a banquet like that: then in the midst of all these people whose faces are not covered it isn't possible that she (the only one who is veiled) should not be singled out and pointed at by everyone and noticed by her husband who must also be at the banquet: and then how can she warn her lover of the death which is threatening him?'

<sup>124</sup> The costume directions which precede the *disposizione scenica* indicate that half the male chorus are to be masked and wearing dominos or other costumes, while two-thirds of the female chorus are to be masked with dominos or other costumes, the other third to be luxuriously dressed as Ladies.

chi persegue. Il servizio è fatto dai negri, e tutto spirà magnificenza edilarità.<sup>125</sup>

Quite what Somma and Verdi meant by ‘creole’ has puzzled critics such as Budden and Rosen, nor is the visual appearance of these guests clarified by the *disposizione scenica*, which merely includes among the *comparse* ‘bianchi, neri mulatti, creoli d’ogni ceto del Popolo’.<sup>126</sup> The intention to include racial mixing in the scene is nonetheless there, just as it is in the scene with Ulrica, who in the Boston setting becomes Black in Somma’s text. In both scenes formality and social rank no longer operate, as all kinds of people mix and express their sexual desires and fears.<sup>127</sup>

As well as the implications for dramatic plausibility and visual effect of changing the ball to a banquet, the musical character of the masquerade scene led Verdi to mount a determined resistance to the censors. In the passage quoted earlier he points out how the lighthearted stage music for the dancing can play against the singers and orchestra presenting a more sombre mood. Such an effect is, in his view, impossible in a banquet scene with its greater formality, where it would be difficult to present dramatic actions with different moods taking place simultaneously. Writing of the duet in which Amelia warns Riccardo of the threat to his life, he insists that this is part of an interwoven musical scheme in which the dance music plays an essential part:

Vi sono d’altronde in musica pezzi immaginati, creati, intrecciati in modo che non possono patire la menoma alterazione senza diventare mostruosi. Per esempio in questo Duetto, l’espressione desolata, straziante del canto di questi due personaggi è tessuta in modo da non potersi disgiungere dai suoni festivi della danza. Come dunque si saria potuto accettare il radicale

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<sup>125</sup> Libretto, 40. ‘Light music plays before the dancing, and already at the opening of the curtains a crowd of guests fills the stage. The greater number are masked, some are wearing the domino, others are in evening dress with their faces uncovered; amongst the dancing couples are some young Creoles. Some chase, some evade, some pay their respects, some pursue.. Black servants are in attendance, and everything breathes magnificence and hilarity.’

<sup>126</sup> Budden (Vol. 2, 376n) points out that this description of the *comparse* implies that ‘a Creole should be recognizable at sight without being black, white or mulatto’. Rosen believes ‘creolo’ is used by Somma in the sense of ‘a person of mixed race’ rather than ‘a person of European origin born in the colony’ but notes that none of the costume sketches or descriptions show racial difference for any of the *comparse*. (Introduction to the *Disposizione*, 74 and footnote 13).

<sup>127</sup> At Riccardo’s ball, however, the Black people on stage are silent servants: the Black Carnival Queen has been uncrowned and reduced to servitude. Further proof that the costume designs of the *disposizione* depart considerably from Verdi and Somma’s text is that the sketch of Ulrica shows a white-skinned woman with long, straight hair dressed in something resembling Gypsy costume. (Figura 35/11, Tavola 12 in the *Disposizione* 2002 edition, 249)

cambiamento di un banchetto, la cui espressione musicale deve essere il brindisi?<sup>128</sup>

The metaphor of weaving is one that recurs frequently in Verdi's description of this scene, which he calls 'questa gran scena di ballo brillantissimo, piena di movimento e d'intreccio'.<sup>129</sup> The dynamic shifting of the masquerade, with its couples constantly moving in and out of the figures of the dance, changing partners, chasing one another on and off the stage, fired his musical imagination to create a scene in which different musics are woven together yet retain their contrasting identities.

As Petrobelli has pointed out, the use of the *banda* playing dance music at odds with the tragic encounter of the lovers is an idea Verdi seems to have taken from *Don Giovanni*, and he used the dramatic effect of 'indifferent' stage music in earlier works such as *Rigoletto* and *Traviata*.<sup>130</sup> In *Ballo* Verdi uses it even before the curtain rises on the ball scene by having the *banda* begin to play offstage during the scene which precedes it, as Riccardo struggles with his desire for Amelia and his duty to send her away. In a technique which has now become a cliché of film scoring, the offstage music begins to take the audience focus away from the internal conflict of a single character and prepare for a contrasting scene; Riccardo is no longer the object of undivided attention as the collective celebration warms up offstage. His dialogue with Oscar about the warning letter is slipped in between outbursts of dance music, and as it becomes more continuous and insistent his mood changes. The 'invitation to the dance' becomes irresistible, and he too seeks out the sexual pairing it promises, declaring exultantly his desire for Amelia with the starry metaphor of shining we noted in the earlier chapter on their attraction.

For the ball scene itself I have tabulated separately the way in which the orchestra and stage band alternate or play against one another through the ball scene. (See **Musical Example 25.**) There are in fact two stage bands in this scene, each

<sup>128</sup> Marginal comment on *Adelia* libretto, *Carteggi verdiani*, Vol. 1, 267. 'Besides, there are in music pieces which are imagined, created, woven together in such a way that they cannot suffer the least alteration without becoming monstrous. For example in this Duet, the desolate, harrowing expression of the singing of these two characters is woven in such a way that it cannot be disengaged from the festive music for the dancing. How then could it be acceptable to make the radical change to a banquet, the musical expression of which would have to be a drinking song?'

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.* 'this great sparkling ball scene, full of movement and weaving'.

<sup>130</sup> Petrobelli, 'Verdi and *Don Giovanni*', 37.

with a distinct instrumental colour and connotations: the brassy *banda* which plays lively opening fanfares and initiates the dancing, and the small string orchestra which replaces it to play the elegant mazurka as Riccardo and Amelia appear on stage.<sup>131</sup> It is this latter band whose dance music Verdi saw as forming a heartbreaking contrast with the tragic farewell scene of the lovers, and he brings back its delicate trills for a few bars after Riccardo is stabbed for a similar dramatic effect as he lies dying.

Once again, Verdi may have had in mind Hugo's metaphor in the *Préface de Cromwell* of the different musics of the sublime and the grotesque which he believed were brought together in great dramas such as *King Lear*.<sup>132</sup> The composer had recently been working on his adaptation of *Lear*, and had indicated to Somma at the beginning of their collaboration on it that he wanted particularly to avoid the monotony of tone he detected in some of his own earlier works.<sup>133</sup> The masked ball music allowed him to use two different kinds of stage band, as well as the orchestra and the singers' voices, to create different and competing musics. It is clear from the *disposizione* that during most of the scene chorus, dancers and extras are present on stage and that the dancing is to be understood as continuing whilst the main characters interact at the front of the stage. There is thus a visual, physical embodiment of the light-hearted music the audience can hear at the same time as they engage with the unfolding tragedy of Riccardo's impending murder.

Verdi's desire to interweave different kinds of music and create different moods within one scene demonstrates that carnivalization lies far more deeply in this opera than the surface manifestations of masks and dominos. In his examination of the way 'carnivalistic folklore' enters into authored works, Bakhtin sees such diversity as a main feature of carnivalized literature:

[Characteristic] is the deliberate multi-styled and heterovoiced nature of all these genres. They reject the stylistic unity (or better, the single-styled nature) of the epic, the tragedy, high rhetoric, the lyric. Characteristic of these genres are a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious

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<sup>131</sup> In the opening scene of *Rigoletto* Verdi also introduces a small string orchestra on stage to accompany the courtly minuet and *perigordino* which form the background to the Duke's encounter with the Contessa Ceprano, another married woman wooed by her ruler. The *banda* returns after they leave the stage, and plays behind the jester's taunts of her cuckolded husband; it is also the background for Marullo's news of the grotesque sexual liaison he suspects between the hunchback and a young girl. Note that each of these episodes of dance music accompanies words or plot points connected with sexual pairing.

<sup>132</sup> See note 97 above.

<sup>133</sup> See note 98 above.

and comic; they make wide use of inserted genres - letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues, parodies on the high genres, parodically reinterpreted citations; in some of them we observe a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargons [...] are introduced, and various authorial masks make their appearance. Alongside the representing word there appears the *represented* word; in certain genres a leading role is played by the double-voiced word.<sup>134</sup>

The use of the stage band playing dance music may be compared to Bakhtin's reference to the 'inserted genres' of letters and manuscripts within a work of literature. In each case the work of art incorporates a supposedly 'real-life' excerpt which sets up an implicit dialogue with the authorial frame in which it is placed. Verdi did not wish his audience to experience the scene - or the opera - as uniformly tragic, nor uniformly comic, but deliberately mixed musical and dramatic genres, and fought his battle with the censors to avoid the kind of stylistic unity he feared would be the consequence of a formal banquet scene. The irruption of the mazurka as Riccardo is dying makes clear this refusal to choose a single 'appropriate' tone, deliberately breaking the audience's focus on the tragic plight of the tenor. The masked ball of *Ballo* is the most developed instance of this type of carnivalization, but Verdi had used 'indifferent' stage music to relativize other moments of death. I noted earlier the Fatted Ox of carnival which passes under the windows of the dying Violetta in *Traviata*, and there is also the offstage banda and barcarolle in Act II of *I due Foscari* as the gondoliers sing outside the Venetian prison cell of Jacopo Foscari. Piave puts into Jacopo's mouth text which draws attention to the relativity of this situation: 'Là si ride, qui si muor!',<sup>135</sup> Bakhtin sees carnivalized works as sharing with carnival itself a celebration of relativity, change and impermanence in opposition to 'rhetorical seriousness, rationality, singular meaning, dogmatism'.<sup>136</sup> The use of different musics creates this sense of relativity for the audience, preventing them from directing their attention solely at the characters singing centre stage. The 'movimiento' and 'intreccio' which Verdi valued in the masquerade bring first one character, then another, then the chorus, then the dancers, into focus, each

<sup>134</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 108. Bakhtin's 'double-voiced word' aptly describes Riccardo's Act I 'Di' tu se fedele', which purports to 'represent' him as a fisherman seeking guidance for his next voyage, but is in fact a performance in which the musical conventions of seafaring music are represented. Bakhtin's discussion of double-voiced discourse is to be found in Chapter 5 of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 185-204.

<sup>135</sup> *I due Foscari*, Act II, 78: 'There someone is laughing, here someone is dying!'

<sup>136</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 107.

with a different mood and musical language. Thus the Italian tradition of the masked ball is integrated into an art work which refuses to privilege a single character or point of view.

This kind of carnivalization also ‘uncrowns’ Riccardo. The title of the opera is not, as it was in Scribe’s version, the name of the King. The audience are not invited to fix their attention on a protagonist and his fate, but to watch ‘A Masked Ball’, an event which they know from their own experience as full of possibilities of surprise, unmasking, movement, laughter and change. I have pointed out how the *banda* music begins to sound offstage during the scene in which Riccardo decides to send Renato and Amelia away, drawing the audience’s attention away from him towards a new scene with a contrasting mood. The ‘King’ in the privacy of his study, writing an order which will be obeyed without question, is interrupted by the merrymaking of his social inferiors, and vacates the stage to go and join them. Immediately the curtain marking out the private space of the ruler’s ‘sontuoso gabinetto’ is swept away to allow the dancing masqueraders to take his place at the front of the stage.<sup>137</sup> As Verdi pointed out, there is no welcome speech or receiving line at a masked ball to set out formally the relationship between host and guest, ruler and subject, ticketholder and gatecrasher.<sup>138</sup> The stage becomes Bakhtin’s ‘marketplace’, the imaginative space in which all are equal; hierarchical rank counts for nothing, and many different shouts and street cries compete to be heard.<sup>139</sup> As

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<sup>137</sup> The ‘Descrizione delle scene’ attached to the *disposizione* shows the Act III scene 2 setting for Riccardo’s ‘ricco gabinetto’ occupying the front part of the stage, with a curtain which rises to reveal the final ball scene; *Disposizione scenica* 2002 edition, 163-4. The *disposizione* directs that Riccardo leaves the stage after his exclamation ‘Sì, rivederti, Amelia’, then the stage is momentarily empty before the scene change is made ‘al forte della musica interna’. As the ballroom comes into view the dancing couples advance down the centre of the stage while the chorus members, men and women arm in arm, come down to the proscenium (*Disposizione*, 31-3). It is as though the dance music itself forces a way through into the King’s apartments for the crowd.

<sup>138</sup> Even in the twenty-first century, royal protocol can be overturned by the familiar freedoms permitted by masquerade. At a fancydress party to celebrate Prince William of Wales’ coming of age in June 2003, it proved possible for a gatecrasher *travestito bizzarramente* as a bearded Osama bin Laden in a pink satin frock to enter Windsor Castle and interrupt the Prince’s speech by grabbing his microphone. Everyone present, including the police guarding the highranking host, laughed at this breach of protocol, believing the masquerader to be an invited guest playing a carnival trick.

<sup>139</sup> ‘In the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age.... Such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit.’ *Rabelais*, 10. ‘The marketplace of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was a world in itself, a world which was one; all “performances” in this area, from loud cursing to the organized show, had something in common and were imbued with the same atmosphere of freedom, frankness, and familiarity. Such elements of familiar speech as profanities, oaths, and curses were fully legalized in the marketplace and were

the 'King' says his last farewell to Amelia, and as he lies dying, dance music whispers to the audience that he may not be the most important person in the world, and that his troubles may mean nothing to others even in the same ballroom.

The refusal to be bound by a single focus or a single meaning is also demonstrated in the character of Oscar and his music; I have shown how thoroughly carnivalized a character he is and it is therefore fitting that he plays a major role in the masked ball scene. In terms of plot necessity, the two little scenes between Renato and Oscar are redundant since the lovers take off their masks during their encounter in the duet in Act III, with the result that Riccardo's face is uncovered before the moment at which Renato strikes him down. To Verdi, though, they were an important part of his conception of the whole scene - in the passage quoted earlier in this section he defends the 'scena graziosissima' between them from the censors' meddling, and speaks of the 'scherzi' of the page as one of its highlights. Tellingly, in this scene Renato, the character who embodies the 'official world', refuses to comply with the etiquette of masking, showing his face to the conspirators when the password is sufficient, and lifting the mask from Oscar's face. He presses Oscar to 'unmask' Riccardo, trying to pin him down physically as well as with his authority, announcing that he has 'gravi cose' to impart. His encounters with Oscar, which lead nowhere in the assassination plot, enact the opposition of Seriousness and Carnival which is essential to the opera. Renato is single-minded, driven first by his sense of duty to his ruler and later by his sense of moral outrage at his wife's infidelity, but in this scene his gloomy pursuit of revenge is frustrated and mocked by Oscar's tra-la-las and teasing as the page gives voice to the 'pointlessness' of carnival enjoyment and its celebration of the fleeting moment. Renato is never cast as the villain. What Verdi does is to make a straight-faced presentation of a character driven by unwavering principles, but to place his *tragedia* alongside the *commedia* enacted by Oscar so that the audience is uncertain whether to laugh at the cuckolded husband or to sympathize with his pain.

The deliberate mixing of genres within a carnivalized work of the kind described by Bakhtin casts doubt on any monolithic certainty. The code of honour

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easily adopted by all the festive genres.... The marketplace was the center of all that is unofficial; it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology.' *Rabelais*, 154.

by which Renato lives is based on absolute values and unbroken continuity between past actions and present moral status. (Once a lady has been touched by another man, she can never become ‘pure’ again; a gentleman who has been insulted remains dishonoured until he has fought a duel; an oath must be fulfilled, even though circumstances may change.) If a man vows to exact revenge for an injury he must be sure to identify the culprit accurately and he cannot admit that an individual or a situation can have changed. These conditions cannot be met in the shifting trickery of carnival where identities are swapped and individuals behave in unaccustomed ways.<sup>140</sup> This opposition between the honour code and carnival perhaps underlies the recurrent dramatic situation we have noted in which a masked revenger lurks in the dancing crowd. It is at Don Giovanni’s free-for-all party that the masked Don Ottavio first asserts his determination to avenge the sexual attack on Donna Anna. It is at Ernani’s masquerade wedding celebration that Silva arrives masked to exact his revenge for the loss of Elvira, demanding that the nobleman fulfil his oath by taking his own life. I have noted the many carnival features of Act I of *Rigoletto*; the Duke’s guests are not masked, but as they dance to the *banda* and he pursues his indiscriminate sexual intrigues, the ‘code of honour’ character Monterone interrupts the party to swear revenge for the Duke’s seduction of his daughter, promising that it will be exacted even after he dies, and invoking a solemn curse on Rigoletto who has mocked his code of honour.<sup>141</sup> The opposing value systems play off one another in a dramatically effective way, and in Verdi’s musical realisation of the drama the *banda* dance music creates a distinctive context in which the absolute values of the honour-driven characters can be placed in dialogue with the transient pleasure and guilt-free sexual satisfaction sought by other characters. This juxtaposition is typical of the carnivalized work, in which different styles and characters are brought alongside one another, their very co-existence in the piece sending a message about the impossibility of a single coherent message.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> For example, in Germany extramarital sex during Fasching could not (cannot?) be cited as adultery in divorce proceedings.

<sup>141</sup> In Act Two of *Rigoletto* the jester’s *commedia* turns into *tragedia* when he finds his own daughter has been in bed with the Duke; he immediately adopts his social superiors’ honour code and vows ‘Vendetta, tremenda vendetta’, even though Gilda herself is ready to forgive her lover.

<sup>142</sup> ‘This [carnival] sense of the world ... bringing one person maximally close to another (everything is drawn into the zone of free familiar contact), with its joy at change and its joyful relativity, is opposed to that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness which is dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change, which seeks to absolutize a given condition of existence or a given social order. From precisely that sort of seriousness did the carnival sense of the world liberate man’; *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 160.

*Un ballo in maschera* is an opera which through its carnival elements signals continually to the audience that nothing in the performance is to be taken at face value. It is about disguise, about mistaken identity and misunderstood situations, about misplaced trust and words that turn out to mean something different. One of its main characters plays across the gender boundary, both in casting and through the way he interacts with other characters in physical gesture and in music. The opera confounds genre expectations, interspersing gloomy scenes of terror and tragedy with *brillante* episodes of laughter and dance music. The Masked Ball of 1859 allows its Italian audience to play with possible readings, to take the drama as a love story, or as a comment on contemporary politics, or as a supernatural tale of a prophecy come true, or as an opportunity for some fine singing and some eye-catching tableaux. The very refusal to follow Scribe in naming the opera after a single character indicates a decentering and rejection of hierarchy which is characteristic of carnival. Just as the ball scene allows the characters and chorus to mingle, each coming and going as the focus of attention, with the stage band alternating with the orchestra, the whole opera opens up after the initial *levée* scene into a shifting drama in which different characters and plot strands vie for attention, and one which resists categorisation in either the tragic or the comic genre. It is a thoroughly carnivalized work.

**Marian Gilbart Read**  
**Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*:**  
**an approach through Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival**

**PART III**

**CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER 3.1

### CONCLUSION

In earlier chapters I have drawn attention to some of Verdi's operas before *Ballo* which prefigure elements of its carnivalization. After 1859 the carnival tradition began to wane in Italian cities, and the direct link between the Carnival season and the writing of new operas was weakened as the repertory system took hold in Italian opera houses. However, Verdi had been composing Carnival commissions for Italian theatres for twenty years and although he accepted no commission in Italy after *Ballo*, he did not forget the strategies of carnivalization he had developed. Although I have deliberately excluded discussion of his later works from my study of *Un ballo in maschera*, two works which post-date it invite further consideration from a Bakhtinian perspective: *La forza del destino* and *Falstaff*.

When invited to compose a new opera for St Petersburg in 1862 his first suggestion was a third Hugo adaptation; he had long admired *Ruy Blas*, in which a valet is elevated to a position of power at Court, identities are mistaken and there is a mixture of comic and tragic action.<sup>1</sup> The Tsar's censor would not permit any subject by the dangerous liberal Hugo, so Verdi chose as his subject a play written under the influence of Hugo, *Don Álvaro* by the Duque de Rivas, which was adapted by Piave as *La forza del destino*.<sup>2</sup> The mixture of tragic and comic genres was already in the play, and the conflict arising from the Spanish honour code, but Verdi decided to

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Somma in April 1853 Verdi commented on the comic character Don César in *Ruy Blas* 'mi piacerebbe principalmente pel contrasto che produce quel carattere originalissimo'. See *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma* ed. Alessandro Pascolato (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1913), 47. 'It would appeal to me principally because of the contrast this very original character produces.'

<sup>2</sup> Rivas had been living in exile in Paris at the time Hugo's *Hernani* was premiered and wrote the first version of *Don Álvaro* in French the following year; after his return to Spain he reworked it in Spanish verse and it was premiered in Madrid in 1835, initiating the vogue for Romantic drama on the Spanish stage. See Angel Valbuena Prat, *Historia del Teatro Español* (Barcelona: Editorial Noguer, 1956), 479. (Valbuena Prat compares *Hernani*, *Don Álvaro* and *Die Räuber* as the three significant texts of Romantic drama without mentioning that all three were turned into operas by Verdi.) The success of *Don Alvaro* encouraged the young García Gutiérrez to turn from translations of Scribe vaudevilles for the Madrid theatre and write a drama in the new Hugolian style: *El Trovador* was premiered the year after Rivas' play. After more translations, his next major success was *Simón Bocanegra* in 1843. A common thread between Hugo, Rivas and García Gutiérrez is their own or their family's experience of political conflict, civil war and exile; is it the reflection of these issues within their dramas that proved so compelling to Verdi?

insert a major scene drawn from Schiller's *Wallensteins Lager* into Act III of the opera. This scene at the military encampment becomes the equivalent of Bakhtin's marketplace, in which all classes of society meet and their differing languages vie with one another for attention. The tragic plot involving the aristocratic characters Don Alvaro and Don Carlo is undercut by the comic characters Preziosilla, Trabuco and Fra Melitone, each of whom dominates the stage for a while before the attention of the chorus moves on, a chorus split into groups of soldiers, *vivandières*, homesick recruits and hungry peasant women. Verdi writes magnificent religious scenes for Leonora, but undercuts them by importing from Schiller the parodic sermon of Fra Melitone, who preaches in puns in the festive tradition described by Bakhtin and incorporated into literature by Rabelais. Leonora's refusal to eat at the inn in Act II and her later fasting as a hermit are brought into contrast with the needs of the belly expressed in the communal meal enjoyed by everyone else at the inn and by the dole of soup to the poor by Melitone in Act IV. The title 'The Force of Destiny' suggests that the aristocratic lovers Alvaro and Leonora are doomed from the start and cannot escape their fate, but this elevated destiny is comically paralleled by the earthy fortunetelling of the gypsy Preziosilla, who intersperses her prophecies with Oscar-like 'Tra la la's and foretells promotions, prizes and the comfort of female company to the soldiers. Although the opera begins and ends on an elevated, tragic tone, there are significant episodes in which this tone is broken, and Verdi was insistent that he must have the best possible performers to take the parts of the comic characters Preziosilla, Melitone and Trabuco.<sup>3</sup> Musical styles and stage action are manipulated to prevent any one character or theme dominating the opera for long, and *Forza* certainly merits further investigation as another example of carnivalization in Verdi's work.

Verdi finally returned in old age to present new work to Italian audiences, though he insisted that *Otello* and *Falstaff* were projects he undertook for his own amusement, claiming throughout the process of composition that he might not complete them. After the success of *Otello* at La Scala, Verdi began to shape another

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to Giulio Ricordi, 15 December 1868, in preparation for the Milan première of the revised *Forza*, quoted in Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1992), Vol. 2, 440. ('Don't forget that in *Forza* you need three artists who are completely at their ease on stage to do Preziosilla, Melitone and Trabuco. Their scenes are comedy, pure comedy. Therefore good diction and an easy stage manner.')

and very different opera on a Shakespearean subject. Boito modelled *Falstaff* on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* but, as in the case of *Forza*, Verdi and his librettist imported into the drama a section of another play which added a further dimension of carnivalization to the piece. In this case it was the mockery of honour from *Henry IV Part I*. Shakespeare makes no reference to the belly or eating in the original speech, which is delivered on a battlefield and deals with the effects on the body of wounds. Boito and Verdi place the text in a tavern, and make Falstaff give voice to ‘the belly’ in its widest interpretation as the instinct of the body for its preservation and perpetuation, and its refusal of demands and restrictions which come from what is claimed to be a ‘higher plane’ of non-physical entities such as Honour and Heaven. In his parodic catechism to Pistol and Bardolph the Fat Knight asks ‘Può l’onore riempirvi la pancia?’ and his robust ‘No!’ sets out clearly the opposition of the honour code with the carnivalesque world of the grotesque body and its appetites which I have noted in my earlier discussion of *Ballo*. Boito and Verdi worked from the French translation of Shakespeare by François-Victor Hugo, and it is very likely that as both composer and librettist were admirers of the translator’s father, they had also read Victor Hugo’s 1864 study *William Shakespeare*.<sup>4</sup> In it he celebrates the Rabelaisian vigour and physicality of the English dramatist, using metaphors of drunkenness, of carnival and of song which specifically include Falstaff:

Si jamais un homme a peu mérité la bonne note: ‘Il est sobre’, c’est à coup sûr, William Shakespeare....

Shakespeare, c’est la fertilité, la force, l’exubérance, la mamelle gonflée, la coupe écumante, la cuve à plein bord, la sève par excès, la lave en torrent .... Shakespeare n’a point de réserve, de retenue, de frontière, de lacune. Ce qui lui manque, c’est le manque. Nulle caisse d’épargne. *Il ne fait pas carême.*

....

En licence et audace de langage, Shakespeare égale Rabelais....

Comme tous les hauts esprits en pleine orgie d’omnipotence, Shakespeare se verse toute la nature, la boit, et vous la fait boire. Voltaire lui a reproché son ivrognerie, et a bien fait.... Il ne s’arrête pas, il ne se lasse pas, il est sans pitié pour les pauvres petits estomacs qui sont candidats à l’académie. Cette gastrite, qu’on appelle ‘le bon goût’, il ne l’a pas. Il est puissant. Qu’est-ce que cette vaste chanson immodérée qu’il chante dans les siècles, chanson de guerre, chanson à boire, chanson d’amour, qui va du roi Lear à la reine Mab, et de Hamlet à Falstaff, navrante parfois comme un sanglot, grande comme l’*Iliade*!<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> James A. Hepokoski, *Cambridge Opera Handbook: Otello* (Cambridge University Press, 1987) 25.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare* in *Oeuvres complètes: Edition chronologique* ed. Jean Massin (Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1969), Vol. 12/1, 240-1. ‘If ever a man failed to merit the good report: ‘He is sober’, that man was certainly William Shakespeare... Shakespeare is fertility, force, exuberance, the bulging breast, the foaming cup, the brimming vat, sap in excess, lava in torrent...//

The creation of the operatic Falstaff seems to follow Hugo's view of Shakespeare and his character as the incarnation of carnival excess and appetite, constantly open to the world around them and its pleasures. After Falstaff's first humiliation at the hands of the Wives he sits brooding over the 'Mondo reo', his grey hairs and his decline towards death. The ingestion of a cup of mulled wine is shown in words and music spreading its effects from his stomach throughout his body, changing his mood and putting him once more in tune joyfully with the world around him. Falstaff's belly is the centre of the world, and pouring wine into it banishes all forebodings of death. This is the conjunction of drinking and death which Hugo sees in Rabelais' and Shakespeare's celebration of the belly: the tavern laughter in a corrupt world, the last drop drunk with the last gasp, the song with death as its refrain.<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin's theorisation of the grotesque body moulds itself perfectly across Falstaff's paunch.

I have earlier discussed the carnival laughter which closes Act II of *Ballo* and relativises both the love duet and Renato's outrage at his wife's apparent infidelity. The final scene of *Falstaff* at Herne's Oak goes further in its mockery of love by replaying the action of the *Ballo* love scene as comedy. As Riccardo is drawn to the gallows, Falstaff is drawn by his erotic desire to a lonely place associated with witchcraft to meet a married woman at midnight. The midnight chimes toll as he arrives alone at this frightening place, as they do for Amelia, and when Alice arrives he declares his love to her ardently: 'Io t'amo', the words echoing Amelia's confession to Riccardo, the pivotal moment in their love duet. The illicit love of Falstaff and Alice is interrupted, and when her husband arrives the upper-class lover is 'uncrowned' by a noisy and violent *charivari* of his social inferiors who punish his physical appetites by subjecting his body to all kinds of invasive and humiliating attacks. Ford, the baritone 'honour' character in the opera, seeks to regain his

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Shakespeare has no reserve, no control, no frontier, no gap. What he lacks is any kind of lack. No savings bank. *He does not observe Lent.* [My italics] // In the licence and audacity of his language, Shakespeare is the equal of Rabelais....// Like all great spirits in the full orgy of omnipotence, Shakespeare pours out for himself the whole of Nature, he drinks it and gives it to you to drink. Voltaire complains of his drunkenness, and he is right.// He does not stop, he does not tire, he is without pity for the poor little stomachs who are candidates for the Academy. This queasiness called 'good taste' - he has none of it. He is potent. What is this vast immoderate song which he sings across the centuries, a war song, a drinking song, a love song, which goes from King Lear to Queen Mab, from Hamlet to Falstaff, heartbreak sometimes like a sob, as grand as the *Iliad*!"

<sup>6</sup> See Hugo's comments on Rabelais, quoted on page 41 above: 'Death is sitting at table. The last drop is drinking a toast with the last sigh ... Rabelais enthrones a dynasty of bellies, Grandgousier,

authority over the women in his family by arranging Nannetta's marriage. However, he is foiled when the white veil which covers the face of the virgin bride he gives to Dr Caius is whisked away to reveal the grotesque male head of Bardolph, a parodic echo of the falling of Amelia's veil; Ford's exclamation 'Tradimento!' parallels Renato's outrage at being deceived in *Ballo*. In this last opera, however, the honour code gives way to carnival good humour. The final fugue expresses the 'carnival sense of the world' in which everything and everyone is subjected to laughter: 'Tutto nel mondo è burla'. Each character takes it in turn to step forward and lead the crowd in declaring amusement at the way life and mortality trick them all, embodying the festive laughter Bakhtin defines as directed at those who laugh as well as those who are laughed at. The eighty-year-old Verdi closes his career with carnival laughter: he celebrates and mocks sexual and physical appetites, and the attempts of men like Ford to keep them under control. The Bakhtinian grotesque seems to offer a means of exploring the work further; after all, few composers write their first major comic opera as the grave gapes for them.

I have pointed out in my Introduction that with one or two exceptions, the carnival theory of Bakhtin has been little used in discussion of opera, and I have tried to show in my exploration of *Un ballo in maschera* how far it can illuminate certain aspects of the music, text and stage action of an opera with very clear links to Italian carnival practice. However, the theory seems to me to be capable of wider application. There are of course many works to which it is irrelevant, as well as operas which seem to have carnival features but which show no deeper carnivalization than the requirement for masks in the costume list. Nonetheless, there seem to be certain operas that invite inspection through the Bakhtinian optic.

The collaboration of Mozart and Da Ponte produced three operas which seem to offer a range of carnival features.<sup>7</sup> *Commedia dell'arte* routines and tricks are incorporated into *Don Giovanni*, which also includes the elevation of Leporello to

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Pantagruel and Gargantua... Let us eat, then, my masters, and drink, and be done. Living is a song with death as the refrain.'

<sup>7</sup> It may be no coincidence that carnival features are incorporated into operas written by a Venetian, from the city whose Carnivals attracted visitors from all over Europe at that period, and an Austrian who liked to adopt a Harlequin disguise to participate in the Vienna Carnival. See Matthew Head, *Orientalism, Masquerade and Mozart's Turkish Music* (London: Royal Musical Association Monograph 9, 2000), 100.

impersonate his master followed by his violent uncrowning. The *dramma giocoso* juxtaposes the honour-code characters Donna Anna and Don Ottavio with the comic characters Leporello, Masetto and Zerlina, and their competing musics in the Act I finale are a model of carnivalization which others have followed, as I have discussed in an earlier chapter. In *Così fan tutte* the enduring love Ferrando and Guglielmo claim at the start is exposed to mockery and degradation through the masquerade trick they play on their fiancées. The authority of doctors and lawyers is ridiculed by Despina's impersonation (as she takes off her disguise at the end her excuse is that she has just returned from a masked ball). When the fickleness and power of sexual appetite has been demonstrated to the lovers, the opera closes with an invitation to carnival laughter: what makes others cry should be a cause for mirth. However, the ending is notoriously one of the most open in the operatic canon; Mozart and Da Ponte refuse the closure of either returning each lover to their former partner, or accepting the new pairings, or even of showing that the lovers intend to pair off at all. Successive generations of directors, censors and operagoers have wrestled with the unsettling refusal of *Così* to declare a result to the moral and psychological testing in its 'School for Lovers'.

*The Marriage of Figaro*, based on Beaumarchais' *La Folle Journée*, alludes to the 'day of folly' at its close: the action of the opera may be regarded as a temporary overturning of order, of the authority of the Count, of sexual pairings and roles, and of identities, before the final restoration and celebration of marriage. Not only is there a *travesti* role in Cherubino, but the gender boundary is recrossed by dressing him up as a girl, not once but twice, while his sexual interest in every woman is declared and described. Nothing about this character can be safely categorised, and there is a further overturning of expectations when Figaro's elderly but determined pursuer Marcellina is revealed to be his mother, a moment which invites an interpretation in the light of the Bakhtinian grotesque. The final act elevates Susanna to the status of the Countess, while the fickleness of sexual appetite is demonstrated by the Count's wooing of his own wife in disguise. His implacable authority in denouncing the supposed infidelity of the Countess is suddenly challenged by the revelation of the mistake he has made, and their positions are reversed as he kneels to ask her pardon. Again, the opera closes with a call to look on the day's folly with a smile and to join in the ball and the joking which are to

follow. The complexity of the finales and the Act III sextet, in which the relative positions of authority and recognition between the characters keep shifting, offer the possibility that Bakhtinian carnivalization is at work in them.

In an earlier chapter I drew attention to the uncrowning which takes place in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, in which the Prince and his valet swap places, and in which a girl of low status is elevated to marry the sovereign after a night of dancing at a ball. Don Magnifico quenches his thirst so deeply in the royal cellar that he is appointed to preside over it and issues a parodic ordinance as a typical Carnival King. A similar raid on the wine cellar is carried out by Raimbaud in *Le Comte Ory*, which is parodically described in terms of a military campaign and conquest. The opera is rich in carnival features, based as it is on a bawdy medieval ballad.<sup>8</sup> The sexual appetite of Comte Ory is given free rein while he dons different disguises, first as a hermit and then *en travesti* as a female pilgrim, but further gender confusion is created by the *travesti* page Isolier, to whom the Count finds himself making love in the dark. There is also a bizarre element of uncrowning and disguise in the music itself, self-borrowed by Rossini from *Il viaggio a Reims*, written for the coronation of the French King Charles X in 1825. As Philip Gossett comments: 'In Rossini's world of disguises and masquerades, the "true" meaning of his music is as difficult to pin down as are his characters'.<sup>9</sup> A theory which deals with masquerade, disguise and the avoidance of closed meaning seems to offer a possible approach to this opera.

In the previous chapter I discussed certain carnival features of *Lucrezia Borgia*, and its relationship to Hugo's drama and to *Don Giovanni*. It seems to be an opera grotesquely wide open for a Bakhtinian interpretation, offering as it does connections between masquerade, the maternal womb, incestuous sexual attraction, ingestion and death. Another opera of the period, arising from the same Parisian artistic milieu, is Berlioz' *Benvenuto Cellini* with its Act I carnival scene. The Piazza Colonna setting becomes musically a Bakhtinian marketplace in which the musics of the maskers, dancers and barkers for the show compete for attention. The

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Gossett, 'A World of Disguises and Masquerades: Rossini's *Le Comte Ory*' in CD booklet accompanying John Eliot Gardiner's recording of *Le Comte Ory* (Philips 422 406-2, 1989), 12.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, 10.

*commedia* ‘pantomime opera of King Midas’ incorporates the physical gesture of carnival mockery as Harlequin and Pasquarello perform a mime of singing to amuse the crowd and to deride the artistic taste of the Papal Treasurer. That Berlioz himself was pleased with his carnivalized music is shown by the fact that after the failure of the opera he recycled it as an overture, the *Carnaval romain*. A third opera which draws its inspiration from this period and milieu is Ponchielli’s *La Gioconda* of 1876, based on Hugo’s play *Angélo, tyran de Padoue*, in which masquerade, maternity and poisoning feature in a Venetian setting. In adapting the play Arrigo Boito provided a barcarolle to be sung by Barnaba disguised as a fisherman with a chorus of sailors; there is also a confrontation between Alvise and his wife Laura for which the motivation and expression bear a close resemblance to that of Renato and Amelia in Act III of *Ballo*. The villain Barnaba soliloquizes on the contrast between the joy of carnival in Venice and the repressive rule of the Doge and his spies; by the time the opera was written, not only had Venice become part of the unified Kingdom of Italy but its carnivals had become a source of nostalgic borrowing for more regulated entertainments.<sup>10</sup> It would be interesting to compare this opera with the carnival operas of the 1830s to see whether there is a difference in the depth and operation of carnivalization within them.

In the twentieth century the *œuvre* of Richard Strauss offers several possibilities for exploration through Bakhtin’s theorisation of carnival. *Salomé* opposes the austere Lenten figure of Jokanaan, associated with desert fasting and the mortification of the body, with the dancing figure of Carnival appetite, Salome, who voices her desire for his body and finally possesses it by having his head served on a dish for her to taste with a kiss. Death, sex and her ‘eating’ of the body she desires invite an investigation through the theorisation of the grotesque, which might also have something to say about the orchestration which accompanies Salome’s erotic desire; it has an almost palpable physicality compared with the patriarchal solemnity in which John the Baptist’s prophetic verities are uttered. *Der Rosenkavalier* revives the *travesti* role and its possibilities for the confounding of gender categories when Octavian becomes Mariandel. Ochs is a figure of carnival appetite and initiates the comic plot which plays throughout the opera alongside the serious plot of the

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<sup>10</sup> See Flora Gandolfi, ‘Les fêtes du XIXème siècle’ in *Venise en fêtes* (Paris: Chêne, 1992), 180.

Marschallin's farewell to her young lover.<sup>11</sup> The final act includes the disguises and tricks played to bring about the downfall of the aristocratic Ochs, but the comically drunk servant Mariandel metamorphoses into the Rose Knight for the shimmering sentimental dénouement with its trio of female voices. This is another opera which hovers between genre categories, and the inclusion of 'inserted genres' - the Italian tenor's song in Act I and Ochs' hummed song of seduction - show that carnivalization is at work in the musical structure.<sup>12</sup> The clash of genre expectations even becomes the subject of an opera in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, in which the Prologue tackles the question of how art which makes great claims to seriousness can co-exist with audience expectations of entertainment. The *commedia dell'arte* has a long association with carnival, and Zerbinetta declares that her troupe can improvise any kind of performance to fit the situation and amuse the audience. The Composer's *opera seria* with its tragically abandoned figure Ariadne is then disrupted by song-and-dance numbers in which the *commedia* performers try to cheer her up and Zerbinetta treats her disappointment in love as just a temporary matter which will quickly be remedied when a new man takes her fancy. The *commedia* is the voice of fleeting carnival pleasure in the opera, opposed to the serious claims of eternal, undying love. At the close of the opera Ariadne and Bacchus make these claims, but Zerbinetta repeats her earthy reminder that every new man who comes along appears to be a god. Once again, carnival laughter seems to put an ironic distance between the audience and the belief of two lovers that their experience is transcendent and sublime.

The crowning of a May King would seem to be a carnival activity very much in keeping with Bakhtin's theorisation of popular festivity. However, in Britten's *Albert Herring* the elevation of the virgin greengrocer to preside over the May Day high tea is presented as very much an 'official feast', authorised and blessed by all the figures of power and influence in the town: Mayor, Police Inspector, Vicar and Lady of the Manor. The carnival trick is played by Sid, the voice of sexual appetite in the opera, who spikes Albert's lemonade and sets him on the path to satisfying his

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<sup>11</sup> To female spectators of a certain age the Marschallin is nothing less than a tragic figure, but I am prepared to accept that her Act I meditations on the passing of time may not pass the Aristotelian test for everyone.

<sup>12</sup> For Bakhtin's description of the characteristics of carnivalized works, see page 197.

own physical desires for drink and sexual fulfilment. The official crown is cast aside and discovered in the road, symbolic of the loss of Albert's virginity, and an elaborate mourning of his death is performed before he bursts in, his white suit now filthy. The grotesque cycle of death and rebirth through sexual activity is enacted here, Albert being resurrected after laying out one of his prize sovereigns to try out some sin overnight. Physical appetites are equated by Sid's use of a 'nice juicy peach' in his seduction of Nancy, and the change in Albert after his night out is signalled by his invitation to the village children to come and help themselves to a juicy peach. The opera is rich in 'inserted genres', for example the 'Hail Albert' acclamation coached by Miss Wordsworth, the speeches at the May Day tea, and the children's bouncing ball rhyme which break up the musical texture and tone, as well as non-musical insertions such as the whistling of Sid and Albert, and the spoken lines of Harry. The opera makes a curious pendant to *Le Jeu de la Feuillée*, a drama for a May Day nearly seven centuries earlier, which Bakhtin considers one of the first examples of carnivalized art. Nevertheless, an English audience would certainly recognise within the twentieth-century opera features of local celebrations and street parties, and the parodying of authority figures such as councillors, vicars, policemen and schoolteachers, as well as mockery of attempts to control the socially disruptive forces of drunkenness and sexual promiscuity.

This very brief review of some of the operas which might be explored from the perspective of Bakhtin's carnival theory indicates that it may be a useful tool for musicologists. At a time when interest is turning to the physical gestures and stagings through which each opera first reached an audience, and to the cultural and social context in which it was received, Bakhtin's theorization offers a means of drawing into consideration the links between stage action, music and the socio-political world in which a work was created. It may assist in the work of bringing operas back from the score and the stereo and re-situating them in the communal experience of opera house performance.

**Marian Gilbart Read**  
**Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*:**  
**an approach through Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival**

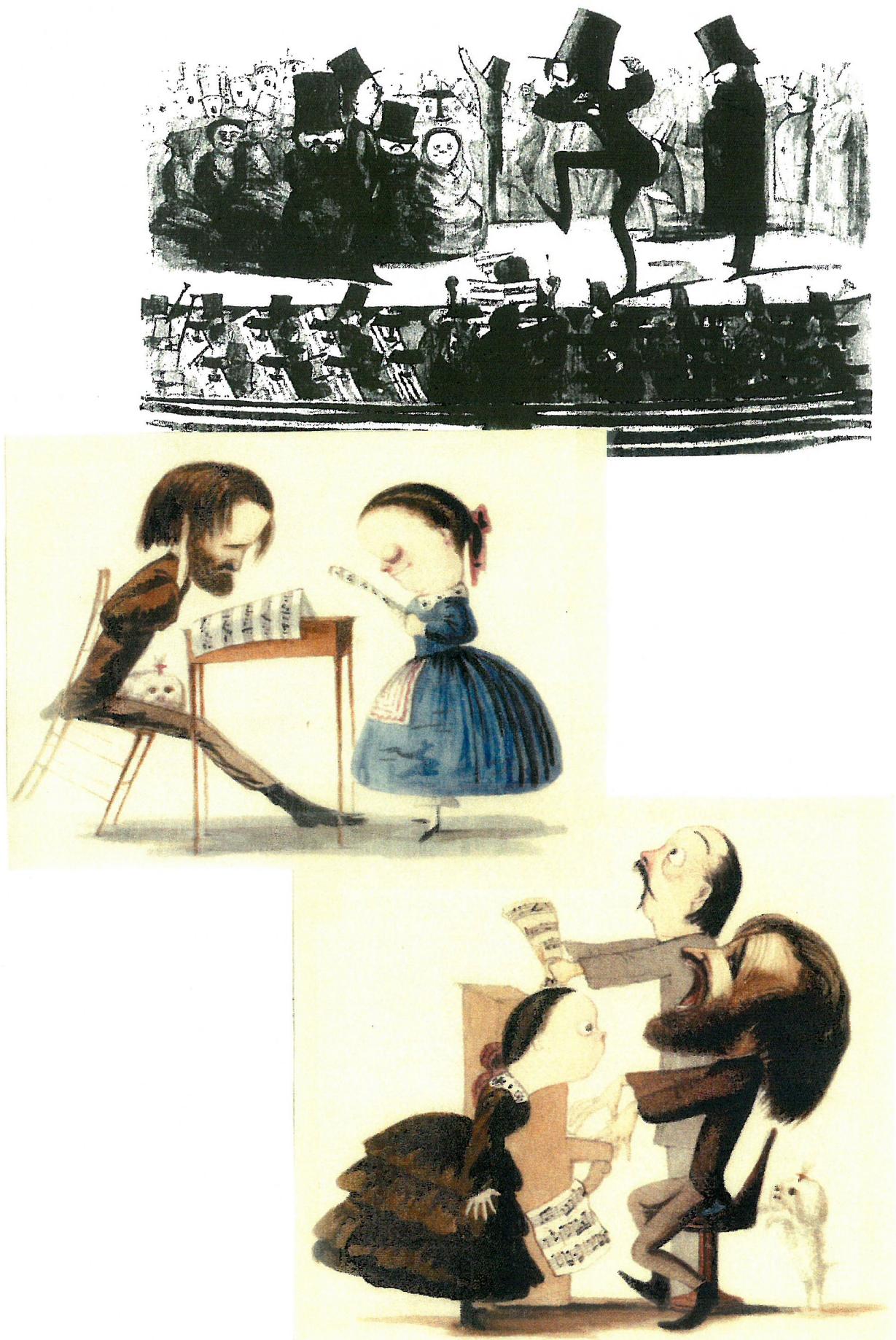
**ILLUSTRATIONS**

**AND**

**MUSICAL EXAMPLES**

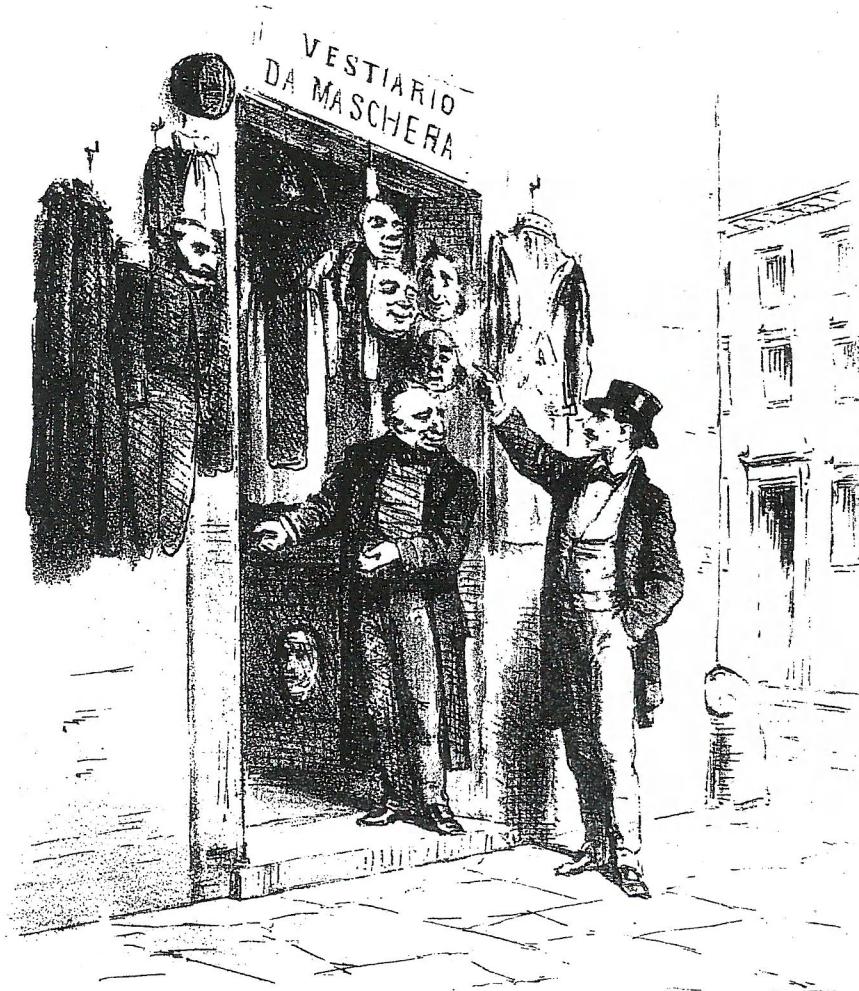
**Illustration 1**

Verdi rehearsing *Simon Boccanegra* at Naples,  
late 1858, in caricatures by Melchiorre Delfico



**Illustration 2**

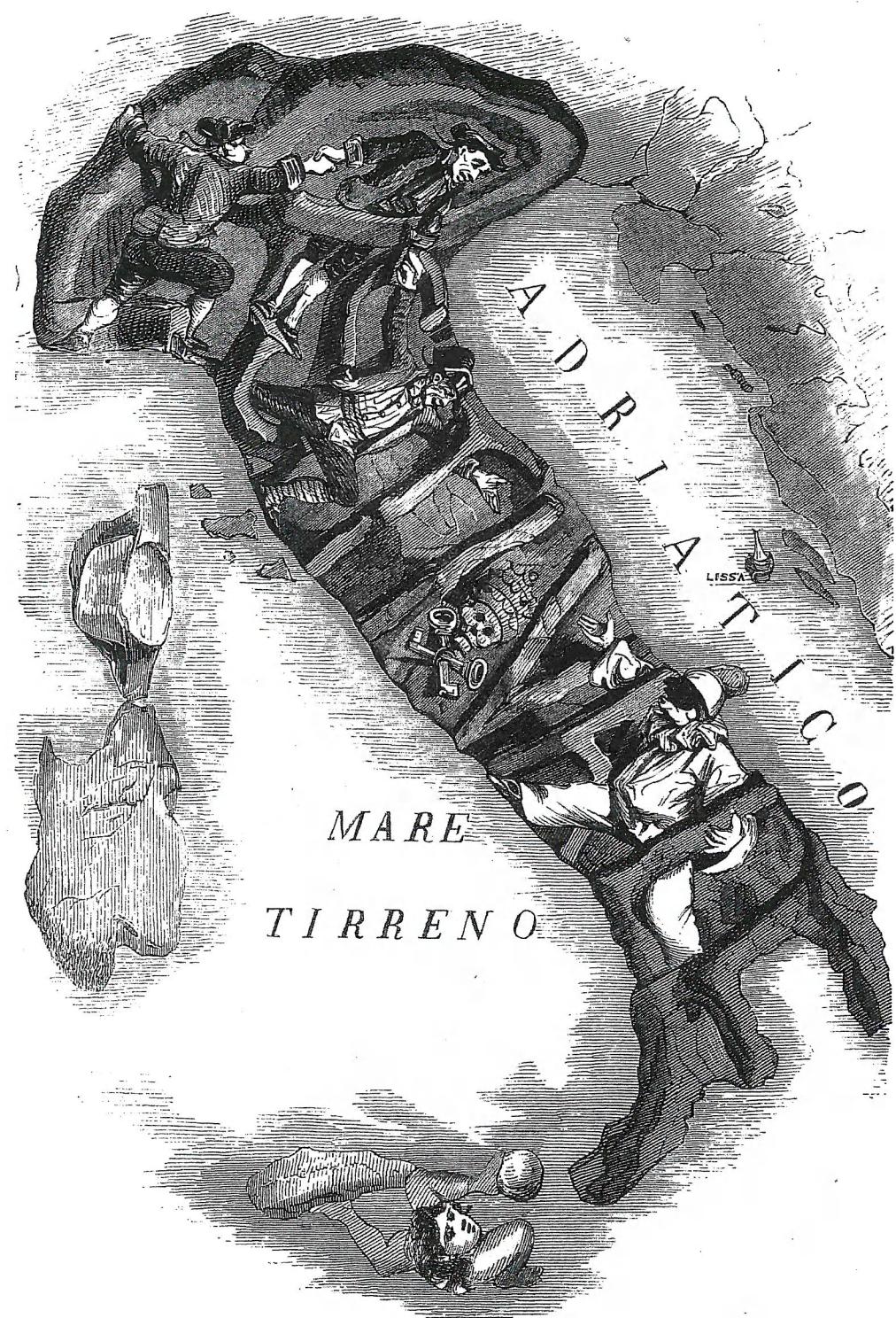
‘Vestiario da maschera’: illustration by Adolfo Matarelli for Giuseppe Giusti’s poem ‘La rassegnazione’ (Florence, 1868 edition of *Poesie*)



Una maschera compro alla bottega  
De’ Sanfedisti

**Illustration 3**

‘The Boot of Italy’: illustration by Adolfo Matarelli for Giuseppe Giusti’s poem ‘Lo stivale’ (Florence, 1868 edition of *Poesie*)



**Illustration 4**

A masked ball at La Fenice, Venice after 1837 rebuilding:  
lithograph by Giovanni Pividor

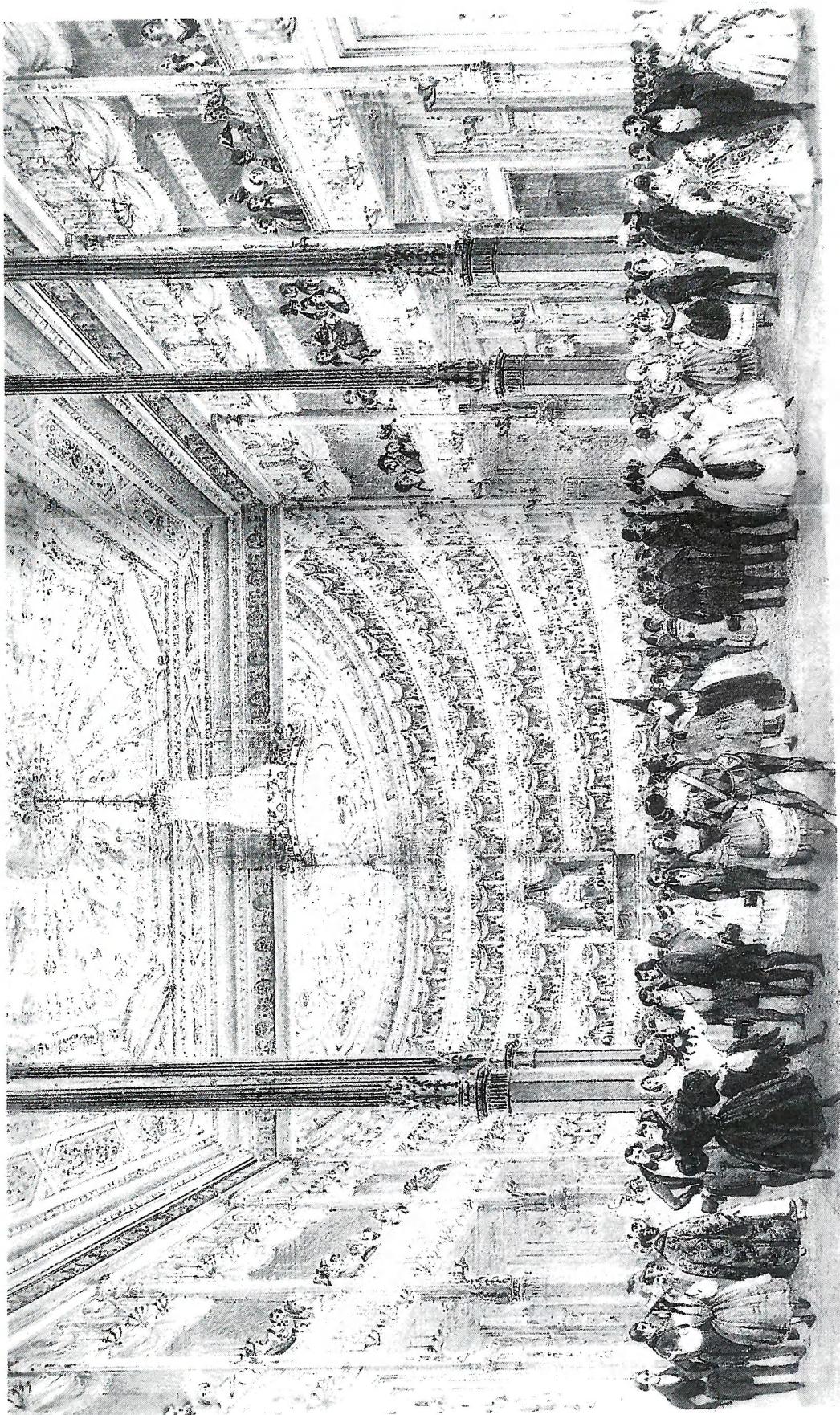
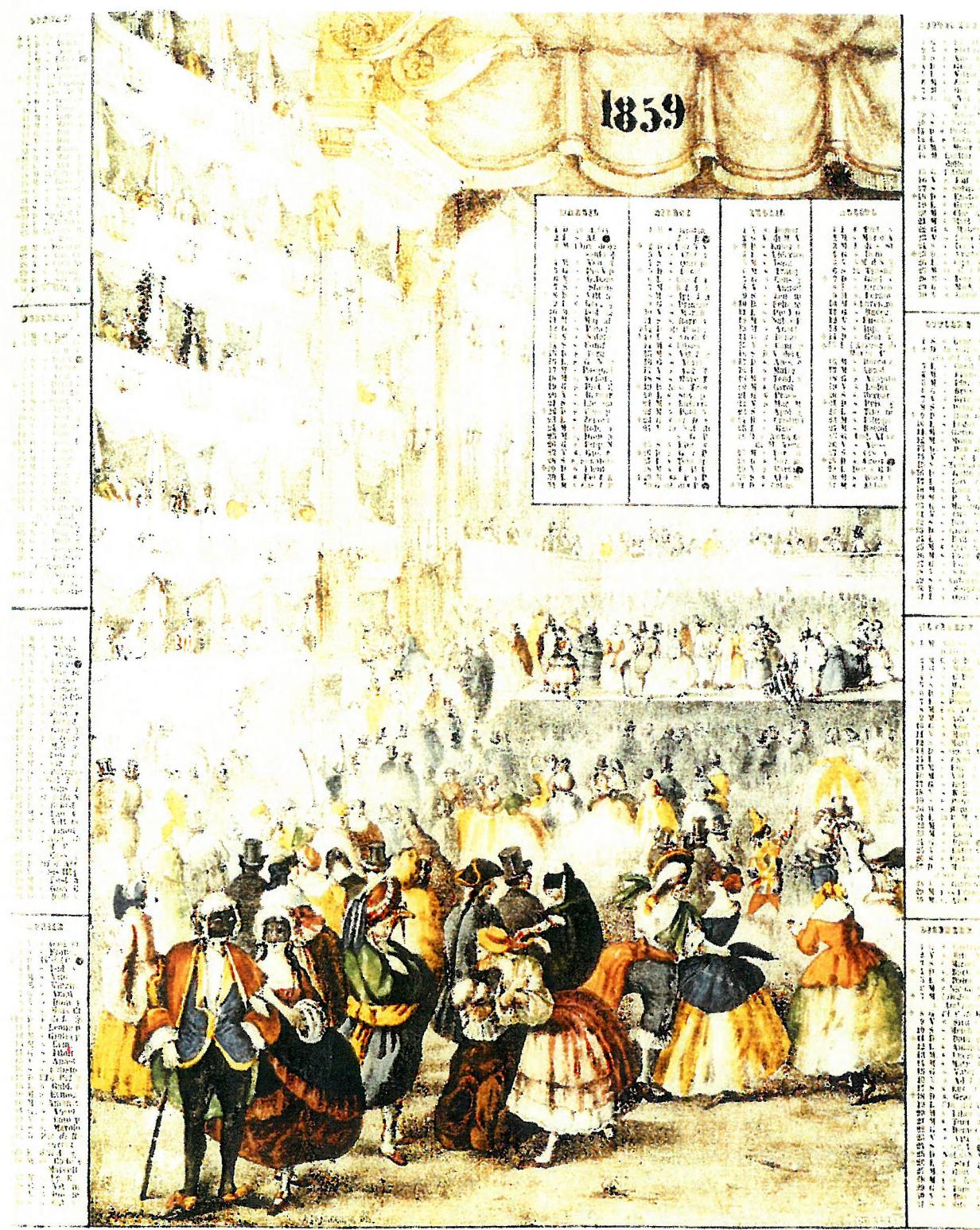


Illustration 5

Calendar for 1859 showing a masked ball at La Scala  
(Moretti, Milan, 1858)



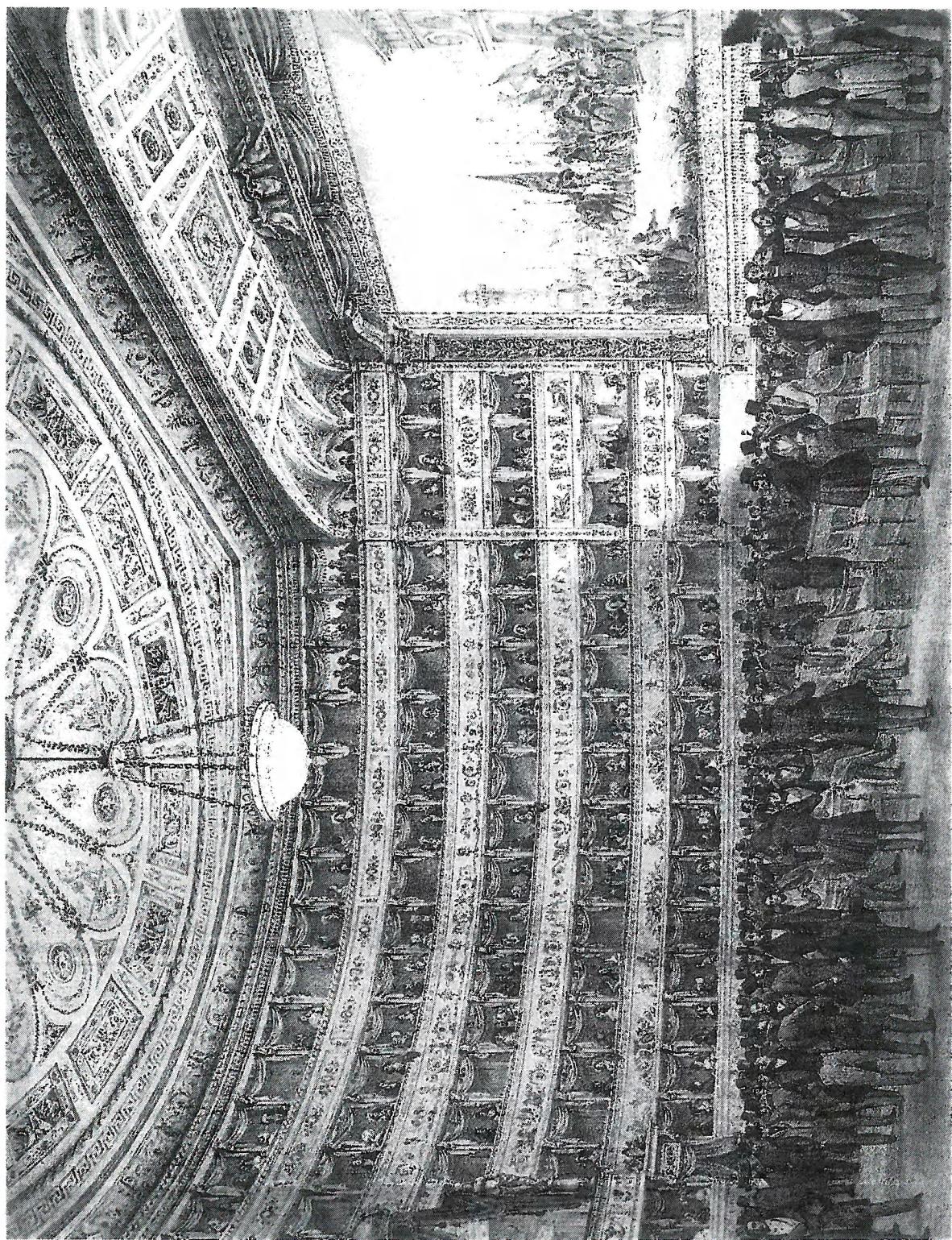
**Illustration 6**

Inside a box at La Scala, Milan, about 1844:  
engraving after A. Focosi



**Illustration 7**

Interior of La Fenice, Venice on a night of opera performance  
after 1837 rebuilding: lithograph by Giovanni Pividor



**Musical example 1**  
Act I Preludio

**Allegro assai moderato  $\text{d} = 63$**

*dolciss.*

Flauto

Ottavino

Oboe I.

Oboe II.

Clarinetto I.  
in La

Clarinetto II.  
in La

Fagotto I.

Fagotto II.

Corno Le II.  
in Mi

Corno III e IV.  
in Mi

Tromba I in Mi

Tromba II in Mi

Tromboni

Cimbasso

Timpani

Violini

Viole

Violoncelli

Contrabbassi

**Musical example 2**

Act I scene 1: Riccardo 'Del popol mio'

Più lento

vo. Del popol mio-o l'amor mi guardi, e mi protegga Id-di-o.

Più lento

### Musical example 3

Act I scene 1: Judge and Oscar 'S'appella Ulrica'

**I<sup>o</sup> Giudice**  
 donna! Or d'onde? qual è il suo nome? dice re-a?  
 S'appella Ul-

**Oscar**  
 In - tor - no a cui s'uf -  
 ri - ca, dell'im-mondo san-gue dei ne - gri.

**Osc.**  
 - fel - la-no tut - te le stir - pi. Del fu - tu - ro l'alta di - vi - na -  
 tri - ce...

**I<sup>o</sup> Giudice**  
 Che nell'an - tro ab - biet - to chiama i peg - gio - ri, d'o - gni re - o con -

**I<sup>o</sup> Giud.**  
 - si - glio sospet - ta già. Do - vu - to è a lei l'e - si - glio: nè mu - tail vo - to

**Riccardo** (ad Oscar)  
 Che ne di' tu? Che ne di'  
**Giud.** mi - o

**Oscar**  
 Di - fen - der - la vo - gli - o  
**Ricc.** tu?

**Musical example 4**

Act I scene 1: Oscar 'Volta la terrea'

**Allegretto  $\text{♩} = 88$**

Fl.

Ott.

Ob.

Osc. Vol - ta la ter-re-a-

Viol.

Vle

Vc.

Cb.

Fl.

Ott.

Ob.

Clar. in Sib

Osc. — fronte alle stel - le co - me sfa - vil - la la sua pu - pil - la,

Viol.

Vle

Vc.

Cb.

### Musical example 5

Act I scene 2: Riccardo and Ulrica 'L'onore a me cedi'

RICC. (offrendo la mano ad Ulrica)   
 L'o-nore a me cedi.

ULR. (esaminando la mano) (solemnemente)  
 È la de - - stra d'un

OSCAR  
 Nel vero ella

U gran - - de, vis - su - to sot - to gli astri di Mar - - te.

O col - - se. (staccandosi da lui)  
 U In - fe -

RICC. Ta - ce - te.

U - li - - ce... va, mi lascia... non chie - der di più!

RI. Su, pro -  
 (evitando)

U No... la - sciami. Va. Te ne

RI. - segui. Parla. Par - la.

U pre - - go. continues...



### **Musical example 5** continued

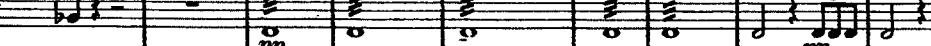
### Act I scene 2: Riccardo and Ulrica 'L'onore a me cedi'

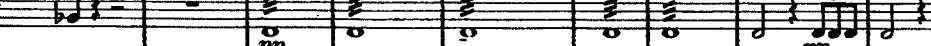
in Mib      a2      b  
Corni      -      b  
in Lab      a2      -  
Tr.ble      -      ff  
in Mib      -      b  
Tr.bni      -      ff  
Cimb.      -      ff  
Ulr.      -      ff  
Ricc.      -      ff

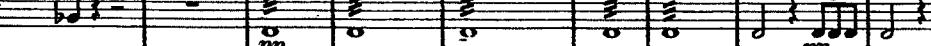
*a piacere*

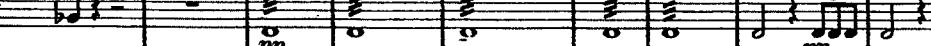
Eb-ben, presto mor-rai.

Te      lo im-pon-go.      Se sul cam-po dò-nor, ti so gra-

Tim. 

G. C.  
e Piatti 

Osc. 

Ulr. 

Musical example 6

Act I scene 2: Riccardo 'È scherzo od è follia'

Fl. *p*      ott.      Ob. *f*      Clar. in Sib *p*      Riccardo (guardando intorno) *con eleganza*

È scherzo od è fol - li - a sif - fat - ta profe -  
pp leggeriss.

Viol.

ott.      Ricc. *pp*  
- zi - a, è scherzo od è fol - li - a sif - fat - ta profe - zi - a: ma co - me fa da ri - de - re la lor cre - du - li -

Viol.

Fl. *p*      ott. *p*      Clar. in Sib *I.* *p*      Ricc. *p*  
- tà, ma co - me fa da ri - de - re, da ri - de - re la lor cre - du - li - tà!

Viol.

### Musical example 7

Act I scene 2: Silvano 'Evviva!'

Silvano acclaims Ulrica

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Soprano (S), the middle for the Chorus (CORO), and the bottom for the Alto (s). The key signature is A major (three sharps). The vocal parts are in Italian. The Soprano sings 'sogno!...dell'o-ro ed un gra-do! Ev-vi-' followed by a dynamic 'f' and a fermata. The Chorus sings 'DONNE E FANCIULLI' and 'Evviva la no-stra Si-bil-la immor-'. The Alto sings 'va, ev-vi- - - - - va! Si-ta-le, che span-de su tut-ti ricchezze e pia- - cer! Si'. The score includes dashed lines and arrows indicating vocal entries and dynamics.

### Musical example 8

Act I scene 2: Silvano 'Tutti con me chinatevi'

Silvano acclaims Riccardo

The musical score consists of three staves, all for the Alto (SI). The key signature is A major (three sharps). The vocal part is in Italian. The lyrics are: 'pa - - dre. Tut - - ti con me chi - na - tevi al suo pie - - - de e l'in - no suo - - - ni del - - la no - stra fè.....'. The score includes dynamic markings and a bracket indicating a group entry: '(tutti entrano in scena)'.

**Musical example 9**

Act II: Renato 'Lo giuro'

Clar. in Do

Fag.

Tr. bni

Cimb.

Ricc.

rai.

Ren.

Lo giu - ro.

Viol.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

Tim.

Ricc.

Ren.

Lo giu - ro, e sa - ra.

div.

15

16

17

18

**Musical example 10**

Act III scene 3: Renato 'Ciel, che feci'; Riccardo 'Signor qui sono'

REN.

RE. fe - - ci! e che m'aspet - - ta e seca - - to sul - la

RE. ter - - ra! e - seca - - to sul - la ter - - - - - ra! di qual

RICC.

RE. sangue e qual vendet\_ta m'asse\_tò l'inausto er\_ror!

RI. so - - no: tut - - - ti as - - sol - - - - - ve il mio per -

RI. - dono...

Annotations: Arrows indicate rhythmic patterns and vocal inflections. The word 'a tempo' is written above the Riccardo vocal line. The word 'grandioso' is written above the Riccardo vocal line, with a line pointing to the end of the phrase.

**Musical example 11**

Act I scene 2: Ulrica 'Re dell'abisso'

ULRICA (come ispirata)

Re ..... dell'a \_ bis \_ so, af \_ fret \_ - - - ta \_ ti, pre \_

U ci - - - pi \_ ta per l'e \_ - - - tra,

U sen - - - za li \_ bar la fol - - - gore il tet - - - to

U mi - - - o pe \_ ne - - - tra. O -

U mai ..... tre vol - - - te i'u - - - pupa dal \_

U l'al - - - to so - - - spi - - - rò;

U la ..... sa \_ la \_ man - - - dra i \_ gni - - - vora tre

U vol - - - te si - - - bil - - - lò ... e

U del - - - le tom - - - be il ge - - - mi \_ to tre

U vol - - - te a me par - lò!

continues.....

**Musical example 11**

Act I scene 2: Ulrica 'Re dell'abisso' continued

**Musical example 12**

Act I scene 2: Ulrica 'È lui! è lui!'

continues .....

**Musical example 12** continued  
Act I scene 2: Ulrica 'È lui! è lui!'

### Musical example 13

Act I scene 2: Ulrica 'Della città all'occaso'

*POCO PIÙ LENTO*  $\text{♩} = 54$   
*Cantabile*

U Della cit - tà al - l'oc - ca - - - so, là do - ve al te - tro la - - -

U to bat - te la lu - na pal - li - da sul "cam - po ab - bo - mi -

U na - - - to... ab - bar - bi - ca gli sta - - - mi

U a quel - le pie - tre in - fa - - - mi, o - ve la col - - pa

U scon - ta - sì col - ful - ti - mo so - spir! o - ve la

U col - - pa scon - ta - si col - ful - ti - mo so - spir!

U col - - - ful - ti - mo so - - - spir!

### **Musical example 14**

## Act I scene 2: Riccardo and Amelia 'L'aura de' tuoi sospir'

### Musical example 15

Act II: Amelia 'Son la vittima che geme'

AMELIA

sciate.... Son la vit - - tima che geme.... il mio  
no - - me almen sal - - va - - te.... o lo stra - - zio ed il ros -  
so - - re la mia vi - - ta abbat - - te - - rà.

### Musical example 16

Act II: Riccardo 'Non sai tu'

RI.

Non sai tuche se l'a\_ni\_ma mi\_a ..... il ri\_morso di\_la\_cera e  
ro - de, quel suo gri-do non cu\_ra, non o\_de,..... sin che l'empiedi fremiti a - mor?... Non sai tuche di te reste - ri\_a,..... se ces - sasse di battere il  
cor! Quante notti ho vegliato a\_ne - lante! come a lungo infe - li - ce lot -  
ta - i! quante volte dal cie\_lo implo - ra - i la pie - tà che tu chiedi da  
me! Ma per questo ho potuto un i - - stan - te, in - - fe - li - ce, non vi - ver di - te?

**Musical example 17**

Act II: Riccardo 'O qual soave brivido'

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The top system shows the Arpa (harp) and Ricc. (rackett) parts. The Arpa part has six staves, and the Ricc. part has three staves. The vocal parts (Ricc., viol., vle., vo.) sing in unison with dynamic markings: *a messavocce dolcissimo*, *ppp leggeriss.*, *ppp leggeriss.*, *ppp leggeriss.*, and *ppp leggeriss..* The bottom system shows the RI. (rackett) part in six staves. The vocal line is: *ce - - so pet - - to ir - - ro - - - ra! Ah chio t'a - scol - ti an -* (with *con espansione* above the last note). The next line is: *co - - - ra ri - - spon - der - mi co - - si! A -*. The third line is: *stro di que - ste te - - nebre a cui con - sa - cro il*. The fourth line is: *co - - - re: ir - - - ra - - dia.mi d'a - mo - re, e più non*. The fifth line is: *sor - - ga, non sor - - ga il dì, ir - ra - - diam..... d'amor,..... e più....*. The final line is: *.... non sor - - ga il dì, e più non sor - - ga, non sor - - ga il dì!*

**Musical example 18**

Act II: Riccardo and Amelia 'Ah! ah! sul funereo letto'

RI. *cres.*

RI. *pp*

A. *subito a mezzavoce*

RI. *ff*

A. *portata la voce*

RI. *ff*

A. *pp*

RI. *ir*

A. *con entusiasmo*

RI. *ir*

Amelia (A) and Riccardo (RI) sing a duet in Act II. The vocal parts are shown on staves with lyrics in Italian. The music includes dynamic markings like *cres.*, *pp*, *subito a mezzavoce*, *ff*, *portata la voce*, and *ir*. The vocal parts are labeled A and RI.

Amelia's lyrics: Ah!..... ah!  
Ah sul fu-ne - - reo let - - to ov'io so-gna - - va  
qual so - - a - - ve bri - vi - do l'ac - - ce - - so pet - - to ir - -  
spe - - gnerlo, torna gi - gan - - te in pet - - tol'a - -  
- ro - - - ra! ah ch'io t'a - - scol - tian - - co - - - ra ri - -  
- mor che mi fe - - ri! Chè non m'è da - - to in  
- spon - der - mi co - - si! A - - astro di que - - ste.  
se - - no a lui ver - - sar que - - st'a - - ni ma? o  
te - - nebre ir - -  
nel - - la mor - - te al - me - - no, al - me - - no ad - dor - men - - tar - - mi  
ra - - dia mi d'a - - mo - - re, e più non sor - - ga, non sor - - ga il

**Musical example 18** continued

## Act II: Riccardo and Amelia 'Ah! ah! sul funereo letto'

### Musical example 19

Act II: Samuel and Tom 'Ve' se di notte'

(sogghignando)

SAM.

Ve' se di not - te qui colla spo - sa l'innamo -

ra - to campionsi po - - sa, e come al raggio lunardel

SA.

mie - le sulle ru - gia - de corcar si sa! Ah! ah! ah!

TOM.

Ah! ah! ah!

leggermente

SA.

ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! E che bac - ca - no sul ca - so

T

ah! ah! ah! ah! ah! E che bac - ca - no sul ca - so

poco più cres.

SA.

strano, e che commen - ti per la cit - - tà! e che bac - ca - no sul ca - so

T

strano, e che commen - ti per la cit - - tà! e che bac - ca - no sul ca - so

SA.

strano, e che commen - ti per la cit - - tà!

T

strano, e che commen - ti per la cit - - tà!

**Musical example 20**

Di' tu se fedele  
 Il flutto m'aspetta  
 Se molle di pianto  
 La donna diletta  
 Dicendomi addio  
 Tradi l'amor mio.  
 Con lacere vele  
 E l'alma in tempesta  
 I solchi so franger  
 Dell'onda funesta,  
 L'averno ed il cielo  
 Irati sfidar.  
 Sollecita esplora  
 Divina gli eventi  
 Non possono i fulmini,  
 La rabbia de' venti,  
 La morte, l'amore  
 Sviarmi dal mar.

Act I scene 2: Riccardo 'Di' tu se fedele'

Tell me if faithful  
 The sea awaits me,  
 If weak from crying  
 The lady beloved  
 Saying goodbye to me  
 Betrayed my love.  
 With torn sails  
 And the soul in storm,  
 The wake I can cut  
 Of the deadly wave,  
 Hell and heaven  
 Challenge in their anger.  
 Quickly explore,  
 Divine what is to happen,  
 Lightning cannot,  
 Nor the rage of the winds,  
 Nor death, nor love  
 Turn me from the sea.

Oboe I.

Musical example 20 continued

Act I scene 2: Riccardo 'Di' tu se fedele'

RI. *stacc. assai e pp*  
 - dar, l'a\_ver\_no ed il cie\_lo i\_ra\_ti sfi\_dar. Sol\_le\_ci\_ta\_e\_

RI. - splo\_ra, di\_vi\_na gli e\_ ven\_ti, non pos\_so\_no i ful\_min, la rab\_bia de'

RI. venti, la morte, l'a\_mo\_re svi\_ar\_mi dal mar, no,..... no,..... no,.....

RI. *con slancio*  
*ff*  
 no, la mor\_te, l'a\_mor svi\_ar\_mi dal mar, la mor\_te, l'a\_mor svi\_ar\_mi dal

RI. mar.

Sull'agile prora  
 Che m'agita in grembo  
 Se scosso mi sveglio  
 Ai fischi del nembo,  
 Ripeto fra i tuoni  
 Le dolci canzoni,  
 Le dolci canzoni  
 Del tetto natio,  
 Che i baci ricordan  
 Dell'ultimo addio,  
 E tutte raccendon  
 Le forze del cor.  
 Su, dunque, risuoni  
 La sua profezia,  
 Di ciò che può sorger  
 Dal fato qual sia;  
 Nell'anime nostre  
 Non entra terror  
*Chorus, Oscar, Samuel, Tom:*

Nell'anime nostre  
 Non entra terror.

On the agile prow  
 Which rocks me in its lap,  
 If shaken I awake  
 To the whistling of the storm,  
 I repeat between the thunderclaps  
 The sweet songs,  
 The sweet songs  
 Of the home where I was born,  
 Which recall the kisses  
 Of the last farewell,  
 And rekindle all  
 The forces of the heart.  
 Come, now, sound out  
 Your prophecy,  
 Of what can arise  
 From fate, whatever it may be.  
 In our hearts  
 No terror enters.

continues...

### **Musical example 20** continued

### Act I scene 2: Riccardo 'Di' tu se fedele'

RI. *le dol - - - ci can - zo - - ni. Le*

RI. *dol - ci can - zo - - ni, le dol - ci can - zo - ni del tet - to na -*

RI. *- ti - o, che i ba - ci ri - cor - dan dell'u - timo ad - di - o, e tut - te rac -*

RI. *- cen - don le for - ze del cor, e tut - te rac - cen don le for - ze del*

RI. *staccato e leggeriss.*  
*cor. Su dun - que, ri - suo - ni la tua pro - fe - zi - a, di' ciò che può*

RI. *sor - ger dal fa - to qual si - a; nell'a - ni - me nostre non entra ter -*

RI. *f*  
*- ror, non ..... en - - - tra ter - ror, nel - l'a - ni - me*

RI. *ff con slancio*  
*no - stre non en - tra ter - ror, nel - l'a - ni - me*

Oscar  
*Nel - la - ni - me no - stre non en - tra ter - ror, non en -*

Ricc.  
*no - stre non en - tra ter - ror.*  
*Nel - Pa - ni - me*

Samuel  
*Nel - la - ni - me no - stre non en - tra ter - ror, non en -*

Tom  
*Nel - la - ni - me no - stre non en - tra ter - ror, non en -*

Tenori  
*Nel - la - ni - me no - stre non en - tra ter - ror, non en -*

Coro di Cavalieri  
*Nel - la - ni - me no - stre non en - tra ter - ror, non en -*

Bassi  
*Nel - la - ni - me no - stre non en - tra ter - ror, non en -*

**Musical example 21**

Act I scene 1: Oscar 'L'indovina ne dice di belle'

Fl.

Ott.

Ob. I.

Clar. I.  
in Sib

Fag. I.

Oscar

Ricc.

Ren.

brillante e leggero  
leggero  
leggero  
brillante  
L'in-do - vi - na ne di - ce di bel - le, e sta  
e folleggi con me.  
pet - to di chi nul - la paven - ta per sè

Ott.

Ob. I.

Clar. I.  
in Sib

Osc.

ben che l'inter-roghian-chi-o; sen-ti - rò sem'arri-don le stel - le, di che sor - ti be - ne - fi - ca

Ott.

Ob. I.

Clar. in Sib

Fag. I.

Osc.

mè. Riccardo

Ogni cu - - rasi do - - ni al pia - cer.

Renato

E s'ac - corra, e s'accorra e si ve - - gli.

### **Musical example 22**

Act I scene 2: Oscar: 'Ah! E tal fia dunque il fato?'

Ob. *p* I. *p* *p*

Clar. in Sib. *p*

Fag. I. *p*

Oscar Ah! *pp*

Riccardo *pp*

È scherzo od è fol - li - a sif - fat - ta pro - fe -

Ob. I. *f*

Clar. I. in Sib. *f*

Fag. I. *f*

in Mib

Corni in Sib. *p*

Osc. *f*

tal fia dun - que il fa - - - - - to? — ch'ei

Ob. I. *f*

Clar. I. in Sib. *f*

Fag. I. *f*

in Mib

Corni in Sib. *f*

Osc. *f*

ca - - - - - da as - sas - si - na - - - - to?

**Musical example 23**

Act III scene 1: Oscar 'Di che fulgor'

Oscar.

Ah! Di

Allegro brillante  $\text{♩} = 132$

Ott. Ott. Ott.

Osc. che ful - gor, che mu - si - che e - sul - te - ran, le so - - glie, o

Viol.  $\text{pp}$   $f$   $\text{pp}$

Fl. Fl. Fl.

Ott. Ott. Ott.

Ob. Ob. Ob.

Clar. in Sib Clar. in Sib Clar. in Sib

Osc. - ve di tan - te gio - va - ni bel - lez - ze il fior s'ac - coglie, di quan - te al -

Viol.  $\text{pp}$   $f$   $p$   $p$   $p$

Fl. Fl. Fl.

Ott. Ott. Ott.

Ob. Ob. Ob.

Clar. I. in Sib Clar. I. in Sib Clar. I. in Sib

pp pp pp

Amelia.

(Ed io me - de - sma, io

Osc. - tri - ce pal - pi - ta, ah! questa gentil, gentilcitt - ta!

### **Musical example 24**

### Act III scene 3: Oscar 'Saper vorreste'

### Musical example 25

#### TABLE SHOWING MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF ACT III SCENE 3 MASKED BALL SCENE

(Shaded areas indicate silence or subordinate role)

Orchestra	Banda offstage	Characters in focus	Action
46 Bb $\frac{2}{4}$ alternates with banda	46 Bb $\frac{2}{4}$ banda alternates with orchestra	Chorus, dancers and extras	Curtain rises on ball scene with dancing couples, spectators and servants
Subordinate role to banda, adding emphasis	47 tutta forza banda accompanies chorus and is heard playing between their lines	Chorus 'Fervono amori e danze'	Chorus sing their stage song at front of stage.
Last 8 bars tutti take over accompaniment to chorus	Bar 47 tutti orchestra takes over accompaniment	Chorus close song	Dancers perform a Stryenne. Extras watch, walk to and fro.
	48 Light dance melody with trills	Samuel, Tom and fellow conspirators	Chorus and dancers move upstage.
			Conspirators gather + exchange passwords silently at front of stage
Subordinate role to banda, adding emphasis	Dance melody with trills	Renato and conspirators	Renato arrives and slowly approaches conspirators
	49 Dance melody marked 'pochi istruimenti per non disturbare i parlanti'	Renato, Samuel, Tom: 'Altro de' nostri è questo', 'Come', 'Perchè'	Renato, Samuel and Tom exchange password 'Morte' and discuss assassination plan
	50 continues	Oscar, Renato	Conspirators disperse.
			Oscar approaches Renato from behind.
	51 Eb 'courtly' dance music marked <i>con eleganza</i> .		
	Direction 'rinforzate gli strumenti per ottenerne un <i>mezzo forte</i> '		
	'Pochi istruimenti come prima'	Oscar, Renato dialogue 'Più non ti lascio'	Physical gestures as Oscar makes contact with Renato
	52 as above	Oscar, Renato dialogue 'Tu se' Renato'	Oscar identifies Renato. Renato unmasks Oscar
Strings pp		Renato, Oscar	Renato begs Oscar to tell him Riccardo's disguise
53 G major 3 Canzone		Oscar 'Super vorreste'	Oscar sings nonsense song in response to Renato
54 repeat		Chorus and dancers	Oscar slips away from Renato into crowd of maskers and
4 closing bars after Oscar finishes singing			dancers moving downstage
	Adds emphasis to banda in chorus reprise	Chorus 'Fervono amori e danze'	Chorus and dancers perform at front of stage
	55 Bb $\frac{4}{4}$ reprise of Chorus 'Fervono amori e danze'	Chorus and dancers	Chorus and dancers move upstage then out of sight
	56 4 bars dance melody with trills	Renato, Oscar	Physical gestures: Renato pursues, makes contact with Oscar
	13 bars dance melody with trills	Renato, Oscar	Renato begs Oscar to reveal Riccardo's disguise.
	57 Eb <i>con eleganza</i> dance music as 51 marked 'pochi istruimenti'		Oscar finally does so.
	58 continues		
	Adds emphasis to banda accompaniment to chorus	Chorus 'Fervono amori e danze'	Oscar slips away from Renato into crowd of dancers.
	59 Bb <i>tutta forza</i> reprise of chorus 'Fervono amori e danze'		Renato moves upstage towards fellow conspirator.
	60 Verse 'Notte de' cari istanti' marked 'Banda interna senza Gran Cassa'		Chorus and dancers move downstage.
			Chorus sing downstage, reaching rousing climax
60 tutti chords punctuate verse of chorus			
	61 Occasional phrases		
61 Rising staccato phrases accompany chorus			
62 Tutti coda of chorus	62 Join in <i>tutti</i> coda of chorus		
	BANDA ends here.		

continues....

**Musical example 25** (continued from previous page)  
**TABLE SHOWING MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF ACT III SCENE 3 MASKED BALL SCENE**  
(Shaded areas indicate silence or subordinate role)

Orchestra	Small string orchestra on stage	Characters in focus	Action
	N.B. Banda now silent		
	63 F major $\frac{3}{4}$ mazurka with trills	Riccardo, Amelia	Dancers and chorus move upstage but remain in view. Riccardo appears, moves downstage, Amelia following him.
65 D $\flat$ Duet with light 'uno solo' string accompaniment	64 Mazurka continues	64 Dialogue 'Ah! perché qui! Fuggete'	64 Amelia, disguised, pleads with Riccardo to save his life
Flute phrases accompany Riccardo and light strings	65 Mazurka continues <i>con eleganza</i>	Amelia opens duet 'T'amo, si, i amo' Riccardo responds 'Sin che tu m'ami Amelia'	Amelia sings of love and death to Riccardo Riccardo sings of his love to Amelia.
67 Woodwinds and <i>tutti</i> strings crescendo as lovers reach duet climax		Amelia, Riccardo 'Cadavere domani'	Amelia interjects phrases urging him to leave. Amelia sings of death, Riccardo of love
Duet accompaniment continues	2 bars of mazurka precedes repeat	Amelia, Riccardo repeat 'Cadavere domani' to close duet	Amelia and Riccardo repeat phrases of death and love
70 C major $\frac{4}{4}$ strings and bassoons	68 Mazurka resumes 69 Mazurka continues	Amelia, Riccardo dialogue 'Riccardo! Mi schianto il cor'	Riccardo tells Amelia he is sending her away with Renato They prepare to part.
71 Fortissimo chord as Renato is unmasked		Renato, Riccardo, Amelia	Renato leaves conspirators upstage, approaches from behind. Renato stabs Riccardo. Amelia cries for help.
$\frac{2}{4}$ Tutta forza accompaniment to chorus denunciation, with 'death figure' on brass		Oscar, guards and chorus appear downstage. Samuel and Tom appear at back of stage.	Oscar, guards and chorus appear downstage. Samuel and Tom appear at back of stage.
	72 F major $\frac{3}{4}$ mazurka with trills resumes	Renato	Renato is unmasked as assassin. All present express shock. Chorus denounce Renato's treachery
	Mazurka dies out	Riccardo: 'Non, no, lasciate lo'	Riccardo calls Renato to his side Oscar and others move away. Riccardo speaks privately to Renato
	String orchestra finishes here	Riccardo, Renato	Riccardo: 'Ella è pura' 'Io l'amarai'
73 B $\flat$ minor $\frac{4}{4}$ divisi violins and solo clarinet		Amelia: 'Oh rimorsi' Oscar: 'O dolor'	Riccardo sings of his love for Amelia as he is dying.
74 Clarinet arpeggios and <i>PP</i> strings		Renato: 'Ciel! che feci!'	Amelia and Renato express remorse, Oscar grieves as they watch Riccardo die.
Rapid flute and violin, trumpet 'death figure'		Renato: 'Di qual sangue e qual vendetta...!'	Renato declares his regret for assassinating Riccardo
		Riccardo: 'Grazie a ognun'	Riccardo is helped to his feet and pardons conspirators. Chorus, dancers, extras kneel before him.
75 Strings <i>pp</i>		Chorus: 'Cor si grande e generoso'	His subjects sing hymn of praise to dying ruler.
Harp arpeggios <i>ppp</i>	Woodwinds and violins crescendo to close.	Renato, Amelia, Oscar, Samuel, Tom	Renato joins in <i>ppp</i> , then other characters. All rise and pray.
Light strings		Riccardo: 'Addio per sempre'	Riccardo says farewell to his subjects and his country.
		Riccardo: 'miei figli... per sem... Addi'	All comment that he is dying.
$\frac{4}{4}$ Fortissimo unison with bass drum	All characters: 'Notte d'orror'		Riccardo's last phrase; he falls back on to the chair and dies. Outburst of grief and horror at his death as curtain falls.

**Marian Gilbart Read**  
**Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*:**  
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### Audio and video recordings

*Un ballo in maschera: Selezione* (Sarabandas CD 54533)

1943 audio recording, Orchestra e Coro del Teatro dell'Opera di Roma

Conductor: Tullio Serafin

Riccardo: Beniamino Gigli; Amelia: Maria Caniglia; Renato: Gino Bechi.

*Un ballo in maschera* (Pioneer DVD)

1975 video record of performance at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

Conductor: Claudio Abbado; Director: Otto Schenk;

Gustavo: Plácido Domingo; Amelia: Katia Ricciarelli; Renato: Piero Cappuccilli;

Oscar: Reri Grist; Samuel: Gwynne Howell.

*Un ballo in maschera* (EMI cassette 29 0710 5)

1975 audio recording, Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and New Philharmonia Orchestra. Conductor: Riccardo Muti

Riccardo: Plácido Domingo; Amelia: Martina Arroyo; Renato: Piero Cappuccilli;

Ulrica: Fiorenza Cossotto; Oscar: Reri Grist;

Samuel: Gwynne Howell; Tom: Richard Van Allan.

*Un ballo in maschera* (Bella Voce CD BLV 107 236)

1978 audio recording of performance at La Scala, Milan

Conductor: Claudio Abbado

Riccardo: Luciano Pavarotti; Amelia: Mara Zampieri; Renato: Piero Cappuccilli;

Ulrica: Elena Obraztsowa; Oscar: Daniela Mazzucato.

*Un ballo in maschera* (Philips CD 456 316-2)

1978-79 audio recording, Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Conductor: Sir Colin Davis

Riccardo: José Carreras; Amelia: Montserrat Caballé; Renato: Ingvar Wixell.

*Un ballo in maschera* (Deutsche Grammophon CD 415 685-2)

1981 audio recording, Coro e Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala

Conductor: Claudio Abbado

Riccardo: Plácido Domingo; Amelia: Katia Ricciarelli; Renato: Renato Bruson;

Ulrica: Elena Obraztsova; Oscar: Edita Gruberova; Samuel: Ruggero Raimondi.

*Un ballo in maschera* (Polygram video 079 291-3)

1990 video record of performance at Sydney Opera House.

Conductor: Jun'ichi Hirokami; Director: John Cox

Gustavo: Richard Greager; Amelia: Leona Mitchell;

Anckarström: Malcolm Donnelly.

*Gustave III ou le bal masqué* (Arion CD 368220)  
1991 audio recording of Théâtre Impérial de Compiègne concert performance.  
Ensemble Vocal Intermezzo et Orchestre Lyrique Français  
Conductor: Michel Swierczewski  
Gustave: Laurence Dale; Amélie: Rima Tawil; Ankastrom: Christian Tréguier.

*Ein Maskenball* (ORF video)  
1999 video record of performance on Bregenz Festival Lake Stage.  
Bregenzer Festspielchor und Wiener Symphoniker  
Conductor: Marcello Viotti; Directors: Richard Jones and Antony McDonald;  
Gustavo: Stephen O'Mara; Amelia: Elizabeth Whitehouse;  
Ankastrom: Pavlo Hunka

*Gustavo III* (Dynamic CD CDS 426/1-2)  
2002 audio recording of performance at Gothenburg Opera House  
Chorus and Orchestra of the Gothenburg Opera House  
Conductor: Maurizio Barbacini  
Gustavo: Tomas Lind; Amelia: Hillevi Martinpelto; Ankastrom: Krister St Hill.

#### Live performances and their documentation

*Un ballo in maschera*  
Welsh National Opera at Mayflower Theatre, Southampton  
Original Production: Göran Järvefelt  
10 April 1987: Conductor: Martin André  
Gustav: Frederick Donaldson; Amelia: Christine Teare; Ankarström: Luis Giron May

24 March 1993: Conductor: Carlo Rizzi  
Gustav: Richard Margison; Amelia: Lisa Gasteen; Ankarstrom: Donald Maxwell  
Oscar: Rebecca Evans; Ulrica: Anne Marie Owens

Programme with extracts from Verdi correspondence, Scribe's *Gustave*, historical accounts of Gustav III; articles by Roger Parker, Roger Savage and Antony Peattie.

*A Masked Ball*  
English National Opera at the London Coliseum  
September 1989 Director: David Alden Designer: David Fielding  
Conductor: Mark Elder  
Gustavus: Arthur Davies; Amelia: Janice Cairns; Anckarstroem: Jonathan Summers  
Oscar: Lesley Garrett; Horn: Clive Bayley

Programme with extracts from Mazzini, Byron, Thomas Carlyle, Foscolo, historical accounts of Gustav III; interview with David Alden, article by Mercedes Viale Ferrero on 'Politics and Design'.

*Un ballo in maschera*

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden      Original Production: Otto Schenk

15 March 1994      Conductor: Daniele Gatti

Gustavo: Dennis O'Neill;    Amelia: Nina Rautio;    Anckarstrom: Paolo Coni  
Oscar: Judith Howarth;    Madame Arvidson: Jane Henschel

28 April 1995      Conductor: Edward Downes

Gustavo: Luciano Pavarotti;    Amelia: Deborah Voigt;  
Anckarstrom: Giorgio Zancanaro;    Oscar: Lillian Watson;  
Madame Arvidson: Florence Quivar

Programme with articles by Mary-Jane Phillips-Matz, Roger Parker, Alison Latham, Derek McKay on Gustav III, Marian Smith on 'The Parisian Ball', Elizabeth Forbes.

*Ein Maskenball*

Bregenz Festival Lake Stage    Directors: Richard Jones and Antony McDonald

31 July 2000      Conductor: Marcello Viotti

Gustav: Marco Berti    Amelia: Elizabeth Whitehouse    Ankarström: Pavlo Hunka  
Oscar: Elena de la Merced    Ulrika Arvedson: Ildiko Szönyi

Programme with photo documentation and design sources for the production.  
Interviews in German with Jones, McDonald and Viotti.

*A Masked Ball*

English National Opera at the London Coliseum

6 April 2002      Director: Calixto Bieito

Conductor: Andrew Litton

Gustavus: John Daszak    Amelia: Claire Rutter    Anckarstroem: David Kempster

Programme with extracts from Verdi correspondence, historical material on Gustav; articles by Michael Walling on 'Verdi, Bieito and the Spanish Transition', Roger Parker, Marina Sperling on Gustav III.

*Gustave III ou le bal masqué*

Opéra Théâtre de Metz      Director: Laurence Dale

11 October 2003      Conductor: Jacques Mercier

Gustave: Marc Laho    Amélie: Georgia Jarman    Anckarström: Didier Henry

Programme by Roger Lévy with reproductions of original 1833 set designs; design sources and photos of maquettes for Metz 2003 staging, shared with *Gustave Terzo* (*Un ballo in maschera*) in same season.

Programme for *Gustave Terzo* (Gossett & Narici 'reconstruction') by Yonel Buldrini with discussion of Gabussi and Mercadante versions of Scribe's *Gustave*, as well as differences between Verdi's 1858 '*Gustavo*' and *Un ballo in maschera*.