

ANATOMY OF A WARHORSE: *IL TROVATORE* FROM A TO Z

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About

What is *Il trovatore* "about"?

- a. the standard *dramatis personae* of Italian Romantic opera—heroic tenor, yearning soprano, unpleasant and unsuccessful baritone, wronged and vengeful mezzo-soprano, loyal bass, plus these people's various attendants
- b. the Romantic Middle Ages
- c. the Middle Ages as romanticized in the later novels of Sir Walter Scott
- d. as further romanticized by Scott's followers, above all, in the dramas of Victor Hugo and *his* followers—most notably for *Il trovatore*, in the play *El Trovador* by Antonio García Gutiérrez
- e. the characteristic structure of arias and duets of its time: recitative leading into the cantabile, then the *tempo di mezzo*, and, finally, the cabaletta
- f. the dangers posed by gypsies (though gypsies did not yet reside in Aragon at the time the play was set)¹
- g. the gypsy's revenge—revenge becoming an emotion the audience can identify with since it is mediated by a romantically distant setting and by

music that seeks to overwhelm any moral
compunctions we may have (see **Violence**)

- h. very little in the present and a lot in the past
(see **Narrating**)
- i. two brothers separated in infancy after a gypsy
bewitches one of them and, in punishment, is sent
to the stake, after which her daughter steals
this child and, in revenge for her mother's
death, seeks to throw him into a fire but
mistakenly tosses her own child in, after which
she raises the noble son, who, when grown up,
attracts a young woman who also happens to be
loved by the other brother, with whom he fights a
duel, after which, having spared his rival in
this duel, he in turn abducts the woman they both
love from the convent she was about to enter and
then, just before his impending marriage to her,
goes into battle to save his supposed mother, who
had been captured by his real brother, who in
turn captures and jails the brother who had
outwitted him in abducting the mutually beloved
and who thinks he has finally won the latter
after she agrees to sleep with him if he releases
the man she loves but actually poisons herself
before he can enjoy her body, with the result
that the brother who holds the power in turn
executes his rival but is then informed by the
original gypsy's daughter of his kinship to his
victim

- j. the characteristic disposition of musical numbers of its time: arias, duets, trios, choruses, and a concertato at the end of a middle act
- k. the war between the Carlists and the Liberals in the Spain of the 1830s, this war being the contemporary subtext of García Gutiérrez's play,² though Verdi and his librettist Cammarano would likely have been unaware of this, or, even if aware, would scarcely have cared
- l. whatever a contemporary director chooses to make it about (see **X-rated**)

Brainworm

What can be more banal than Manrico's eight-note refrain from inside his tower cell during the Miserere? Outside the context of *Il trovatore* these notes come back to me obsessively at the most inopportune times and without giving me the opportunity to turn them off, as I can a CD player or an iPod. They belong to a musical genre that Oliver Sacks, looking at this phenomenon as a neurologist, has labeled "brainworms."³ Maddening as these notes may be, when I hear them within their appropriate context—interspersed with the male chorus solemnly intoning the Miserere and Leonora frantically assuring her lover that she will never forget him (see **Quoting** and **Thrust**)—what can be more sublime?

c"

Any aspiring tenor looking through David Lawton's critical edition of *Il trovatore* will notice that Manrico is never granted a high c in Verdi's score. Not even a b,

though at one point, inconspicuously in the first act trio, he gets a b flat, with the option of even lowering it to d flat.⁴ And in what has become his showpiece, the cabaletta "Di quella pira," the critical edition stipulates nothing higher than an a. By contrast, Leonora is amply rewarded with high c's and even a d flat in her two arias, while Azucena gets to show off a high c on top of the deep chest tones that define her personality. The Count, moreover, is expected to display an uncommonly high tessitura.

So what can a self-respecting tenor do? He simply inserts his own resounding c's into "Di quella pira." Indeed, it's been that way since within a few years of the *Trovatore* premiere, when Enrico Tamberlick, asking the composer's permission to violate the original score after he had tried out the c's in some provincial theaters, supposedly received this reply: "Far be it from me to deny the public what it wants. Put in the high c if you like provided it is a good one."⁵

Is Verdi's statement sufficient evidence to warrant—or even to demand—the high c? At one extreme one finds Riccardo Muti's insistence on playing Verdi's scores as the composer originally composed them and, as a result, brazenly challenging the audience's desires, as was evident at a performance of *Il trovatore* that he conducted in 2000 at a La Scala opening night and that invited the predictable fury from the upper balconies when Salvatore Licitra omitted the expected c.⁶

The question remains how one makes choices—does Verdi's original score have more authority than later performance practices that the composer is even thought to have sanctioned? Do not these practices have the authority that attaches to long-standing precedent? Does one want to

allow an audience accustomed to the high c to feel let down as Act Three comes to its dramatic conclusion? After all, Verdi wrote the part for a particular singer, Carlo Baucardé, who had begun his career as a baritone and may well not have been able to do any better than an a. But then there is also a story that Baucardé himself inserted the c in a performance in Florence a few months after the premiere.⁷

Moreover, to what extent should later interpreters of a role be guided by the vocal peculiarities of the singer for whom the role was originally composed? By that criterion, of course, coloratura sopranos struggling for the Queen of the Night's high f's should be allowed to settle for some lower note, for Mozart was able to make his demands only because the role was designed for the unusually agile voice of his sister-in-law Josepha Hofer.

And who is to make these choices—the singer, the conductor, or the impresario responsible for hiring both of them? Does the intent of some composers, above all, those of German vintage, have more authority than that of others, especially those, like Verdi, writing in a supposedly more populist mode? And does the warhorse status that a work such as *Il trovatore* is perceived to possess allow its interpreters greater or lesser freedom?

Dream

In *El Trovador*, just before Ruiz rushes in to tell Manrique to come to his supposed mother's rescue, the hero recites the following dream to Leonor:

I dreamt that I was with you in the silent night
Near the lake that kisses the feet
Of high Castellar.

Everything lay calm; only a
Melancholy and sad moan
Lugubriously approached my ear.
Tremulous like the wind along the lake
The sinister brilliance of the yellowing moon
Sparkled sadly.
Seated there on the shore and at your side,
I strummed my lute, and sweetly it sang
Your beauty and my tender love,
And with a sad melody
The wind that murmured over the waters
Repeated my song and your sighs.
Suddenly, ominously, through the murky mist
A brilliant flash of lightning crossed,
Wounding your face with melancholic splendor.
I witnessed a specter that on the opposite shore
Wandered like a ghostly illusion
With mysterious steps;
And a doleful moan was let loose
Interrupting the nocturnal silence,
Now looking sadly at us,
Now smiling with an infernal face.
Suddenly the hurricane shakes and quivers
With hundreds of thunder-bolts,
And a thousand rays crossed,
And the ground and the mountains trembled
At its terrifying imprint.
And, enveloped in smoke, the fierce fantasma
Fled, extending its arms to me.
"Avenge me!" it said, and it threw itself to the clouds;
"Avenge me!" repeating through the air.
Cold with fright, I extended my arms

To where you were You were no longer there;
And at my side I found
Only a skeleton; and when I touched it, it boldly
Turned into dust, which the violent, thunderous wind
Suddenly carried away.
I woke up startled; my head had become
A volcano, my eyes clouded;
But finally I succeed in seeing you, tender, gentle,
And your smile calms my anger.⁸

According to the scenario that Verdi sent to his librettist Cammarano, he had every intention of including this dream in the opera.⁹ Manrique's violent dream (Verdi was still using the Spanish version of his hero's name at this point) was to be recited at that spot in Act Three which eventually housed the lyrical aria "Ah! sì, ben mio." But Cammarano replied he had decided to eliminate the dream, which he found "superfluous."¹⁰ In a missing letter Verdi apparently insisted on retaining this dream, but the librettist, reminding the composer that the libretto already contained two long narratives, those of Ferrando and Azucena (or to Lady Macbeth, for that matter), had the last word.¹¹

What if Verdi had prevailed in retaining this dream narrative? Surely it would have resulted in a dramatic aria, one that revealed a more troubled, introspective hero than the Manrico who emerged in the aria that replaced the dream. With its vision of the hero's supposed grandmother calling for vengeance, together with its graphic description of the heroine turning into a skeleton that then turns into dust, we have a thoroughly Gothic passage that calls more for the sort of music that Wagner designed for his Flying Dutchman, or even that Verdi had already

given to Azucena, than for anything we have come to associate with Manrico. Indeed, what plans might Verdi have had for accommodating this dream to the formal conventions of an aria to which he was still committed at this stage of his career? The horrors that Manrico recounts would surely have made for a strange cantabile section—granted that “Di quella pira” was at this point already intended to serve as the cabaletta. Or might Verdi have opted for a dramatic recitative like “Pari siamo” in *Rigoletto*?

Had Verdi won, as he did in most conflicts with his various librettists, we should not only have known a more rounded hero, but, as a result, our judgment of the opera as a backward-looking work might have been somewhat different, especially if the composer had given the dream the complex musical form it called for. The shape that operas ultimately take lies less in the composer’s initial desires than in the negotiations and ensuing compromises between him and his librettist.

Endings

The ending of an opera often defines the spectator’s experience more than any other single passage. *Il trovatore* has two endings, the powerful, quick, abrupt ending that we ordinarily hear and one that is lengthier by some thirty bars and that is used in the opera’s Paris version, *Le Trouvère*.¹² In addition, Cammarano’s original libretto was longer by several lines that help explain the actions going on in the final moments, but Verdi, after his librettist’s death, shortened this text on his own in order to achieve the concise ending that we know.¹³

I once attended a performance that pasted the longer, Paris ending onto the Italian version.¹⁴ It was impressive enough in its own way, with the male chorus in the background repeating its Miserere chant. And one could follow the action of the final moments far better than in the usual *Trovatore*, in which the count's final line, "E vivo ancor!" virtually collides with Azucena's announcement of her revenge, with neither of them being very intelligible. But with this more expansive ending the opera had become a different thing altogether. The driving force (see **Thrust**) that moves the work with such intensity from its earliest bars had become a bit lax. The next time I attended the opera I was relieved to find at the end that Romantic Fate, however unintelligible the words, had once again manifested itself in all its horrifying glory.

Foursome

Caruso supposedly said that *Il trovatore* demanded the greatest singers in the world for each of its four major voice ranges.¹⁵ Over the years, except for Maria Callas, I've heard everybody who, at any particular time, counted among this select company but never, alas, in the same opera and certainly not in *Il trovatore*.

Gesamtkunstwerk

Verdi recognized the obsolescence of *Il trovatore* even before he began composition. From a letter to Cammarano of April 4, 1851, it is clear that what he really wanted to do was something on the order of *Falstaff*, for which, given the expectations of librettists, impresarios and audiences, he had to wait another forty years. "If operas," he

writes, "had no more cavatinas, no more duets, no more trios, no more choruses, no more finales, etc., and if the whole opera were, so to speak, one single piece, I should find that more reasonable and right."¹⁶

Like his exact contemporary Richard Wagner, Verdi, as this remark suggests, was nurturing dreams of some artwork of the future. Is it wholly coincidental, moreover, that Verdi uttered his desire in the same year that Wagner published *Oper und Drama*, the treatise that proposed the new direction toward which he intended to steer opera? Indeed, the period 1851-53, the very years of Verdi's great trilogy of which *Il trovatore* is a part, is also the period in which Wagner theorized and first set into practice a method that was to revolutionize the way that operas were composed. Whereas 1851 marked the treatise, 1853 was the year in which he published the libretto of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and, in his celebrated vision at La Spezia on September 5, inwardly heard the E-flat chord that generated *Das Rheingold*.¹⁷

Yet to invoke Wagner in this context is also to remind us how retrograde *Il trovatore* looks within the history of opera (see **Judgments**)—and this despite Verdi's stated desire for seamless continuity.¹⁸ His librettist, not to speak of singers and impresarios, would have been wholly unprepared for so violent an assault on operatic form. By contrast, Wagner, living in exile, and without any hope of getting his operas performed, enjoyed the luxury of putting his dreams into action, at least on the written page.

Verdi was of course tied to the institutional system of opera as it was practiced in Italy in his time. When he

introduced innovations—for example, the creation of new voice configurations for the baritone and the mezzo soprano¹⁹--he did so one thing at a time. If he was cantankerous and overly demanding with his librettists, singers, and impresarios, this stance was doubtless necessary for him to institute what changes he needed to give his works the artistic integrity that he coveted. By the time of his final two operas, the only ones that sometimes receive praise from Wagnerians, he was enough of a cultural icon to force the system to bow to his demands.

Heroics

Being heroic also means being a little dumb, and Manrico is no exception. His chief functions, besides singing, are to love (both his mother and his girlfriend) and to fight. He is anything but introspective, though if Cammarano had allowed Verdi to set his dream (see **Dream**), Manrico might have displayed a bit of psychological complexity. But Verdi was concerned above all with maintaining his heroism, and when Cammarano sought to change the Spanish original by letting him be wounded in a duel rather than in battle, the composer insisted on a battle wound instead.²⁰

When Manrico sings well, especially if he can negotiate the unwritten c"s in "Di quella pira" (see **c**), he is irresistible. But even without these superfluous notes he is like few other tenors in the repertory—lyrical and at once grandly heroic.

I have experienced three celebrated Manrico's, each a singer-generation apart. But only one of these was at his best. Giovanni Martinelli, whom I heard in Seattle in 1941

with a pick-up touring company, was already over the hill. Still, despite the shards that were all that was left of his voice, one knew—from his gestures and the presence with which he commanded the stage—that here was the quintessential hero.

Luciano Pavarotti, for whom the role had not yet jelled when I heard him do it in San Francisco in 1975 (it was in fact his first Manrico), produced his usual beautiful tones but, quite in contrast to Martinelli, failed to project the necessary heroism. Not so with Franco Corelli, whose offstage serenade to Leonora, when I heard it in Rome in 1963, told me even before his appearance that I should never hear a Manrico like it again, and of course I never have. From beginning to end, from the passionate serenade to the fierce reproaches he leveled at Leonora when, near the end, he accused her of betrayal, I still hear that heroic voice in my mind when I attend performances of other, invariably lesser Manricos.

Yet there was another great Manrico (at least to judge by his recording of the role) whom I could and should have heard. In 1956 a friend called in sick to offer me his ticket to hear Jussi Bjoerling in Los Angeles that night do the part together with Eileen Farrell. How I wanted to go!—yet I felt obligated to prepare for my next morning's classes. In retrospect I know that my students of more than half a century ago would not remember my having to wing it as much as I might now be remembering (and boasting to have heard!) Bjoerling's Manrico. This was one of those missed opportunities that haunt you for life—like not buying Microsoft in 1986 or Google in 2004.

Intertextual

When hearing those Verdi operas composed after *Il trovatore*—as well as *Rigoletto*, which preceded it—the listener is more aware of what is new than what is similar to earlier Italian opera. Not so with *Il trovatore*, which has long been labeled old-fashioned, with such condescending terms as “hackneyed” and “vulgar” attached to it (see **Judgments**).

And we surely remain conscious of the operatic past when attending this opera. In one sense it is a reworking of *Ernani*: both are built around four voices, though *Ernani* has a star bass instead of a mezzo soprano, and in both operas we perceive these four characters more as voices than as individualized people. Both works are unremittingly heroic, and both lack the subtleties that have endeared, say, *La traviata* and *Un ballo in maschera* to sophisticated moderns. It seems no accident that both *Ernani* and *Il trovatore* were Verdi's two most resounding successes with the public when they were first performed.

Verdi's first audience might also have heard the two opening scenes as a reworking of the first scenes of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Each work begins with a family retainer recounting mysterious problems around the estate, then gives way to the soprano's entrance aria, in both cases a celebration of her love for a stranger—though the remainder of the act goes in a distinctly different direction in each work: an ecstatic duet between the lovers in *Lucia*, while in *Il trovatore* any possible duet of this sort is thwarted by the appearance of a rival suitor. It seems no accident that both Donizetti and Verdi used the same librettist for these works.

Once serious scholarly inquiry into Verdi began—long after Wagner had been established within the musicological canon—many details within the score of *Il trovatore* could be traced to various antecedents. Ferrando's opening aria emerges as a ballade echoing innumerable such passages in French opera, most notably Raimbaud's ballade in the first act of *Robert le Diable*.²¹ Leonora's entrance aria, in turn, reworks the conventions of the *romance*, in which a character often narrates the first glimpse of his or her beloved.²² Specific musical echoes have been suggested—notably the funeral march of Beethoven's Opus 26 sonata in the harmonies of the Miserere.²³ The idea for the ending, in which a character unwittingly sends a close relation to execution, may well have come from an earlier opera, though not by way of the composer or librettist, but rather through the source text, for García Gutiérrez evidently adapted the brutal catastrophe of Halévy's *La Juive*, in which the Cardinal learns that the woman he has executed is his long-lost daughter.²⁴

But *Il trovatore* has also been shown seeping into the other work that Verdi was working on at the time, namely *La traviata*. Different though these operas may be in other respects, at several points thematic shapes and certain brief orchestral accompaniments, as Roger Parker has suggested, made their way from one opera into the next.²⁵ It does not seem wholly accidental, for instance, that the opening theme of Ferrando's "Abbietta zingara" is echoed in the chorus of mock-gypsies in the later opera. Whether in the repetition of musical and plot elements, experienced operagoers are always aware that somewhere—whether or not they can identify precisely where—they have heard this before.

Judgments

1853

Last night 'Il Trovatore' was produced in a theatre overflowing with people . . . the music transported us to heaven; and, of a truth, it could not be otherwise, because this is, without exaggeration, heavenly music.²⁶

Gazzetta Musicale, Milano

1877

Trovatore,--Italian of the trashiest, most hackneyed, barrel-organ type! . . . When lovers of the best in music neglect the best, the appeal has to be made to the popular crowd.²⁷

Dwight's Journal of Music

1890

I know my *Trovatore* thoroughly, from the first drum-roll to the final chord of E flat minor, and can assert that it is a heroic work, capable of producing a tremendous effect if heroically performed. But anything short of this means vulgarity, triviality, tediousness, and failure; for there is nothing unheroic to fall back on--no comedy, no spectacle, no symphonic instrumental commentary, no relief to the painful flood of feeling surging up repeatedly to the most furious intensity of passion; nothing but love--elemental love of cub for dam and male for female--with hate, jealousy, terror, and the shadow of death throughout.²⁸

George Bernard Shaw

1931

"*Il Trovatore*" has been reproached with vulgarity and the reproach is not unfounded. But this vulgarity is the vulgarity of greatness, a by-product of the vitality and passion without which there can be no great art. Is Shakespeare never vulgar? Or Beethoven?²⁹

Francis Toye

1956

Its [*Rigoletto's*] success did not stop Verdi from glorifying the bad old style two years later in *Il Trovatore*, a magnificent demonstration of unprincipled melodrama.³⁰

Joseph Kerman

1978

Il Trovatore is unlikely to depreciate with the years. If it is not the composer's supreme masterpiece it is none the less without parallel in the whole operatic literature—a late flowering of the Italian romantic tradition possible only to one who had seen beyond it.³¹

Julian Budden

2008

Il trovatore and *Don Carlos*—my two favorite Verdi operas.

Herbert Lindenberger

Kultur

Does *Il trovatore* belong to high or to low culture? When I lived in Italy during the early 1960s it clearly belonged to the latter category, at least among the educated people whom I came to know there. They much preferred chamber music to opera, and if they were to be seen at the opera, it was for Wagner or Strauss, though they might even compromise for *Otello* and *Falstaff*, but certainly for nothing earlier by Verdi (see **Gesamtkunstwerk**).

The attitude shown by many postwar Italian intellectuals derived from a perception that Verdi, and nineteenth-century Italian opera in general, represented an earlier, cruder form of culture that, frankly, they found embarrassing. But this attitude actually goes further back in time, not only in Italy but throughout Europe. With the ascent of Wagnerism during the late nineteenth century Italian opera came to seem backward, at best some form of folk art better suited to the masses than to people who saw themselves as cultivated (see **Judgments**). To be sure, serious attempts were made, especially in Weimar Germany, to bring Verdi into fashion—yet it was largely those less popular operas such as *Simon Boccanegra*, *La forza del destino*, and *Don Carlos*—that attracted the attention of new Verdians like the writer Franz Werfel, who prepared his own performing versions of several operas in an attempt to make the composer palatable to sophisticated tastes.³²

Yet the current-day distinction between high and low culture had little meaning at the time that *Il trovatore* was composed—when the opera house was still an entertainment site for people from diverse classes. Opera counted as a popular form, not quite as light as, say,

opéra comique or vaudeville, but something that could communicate with everybody. In his book *Highbrow Lowbrow*, Lawrence W. Levine has shown how pervasive opera was in mid-nineteenth-century America—from regular performances to offshoots such as the Boston Peace Jubilee of 1869 that advertised the Anvil Chorus played with sledge hammers by a hundred firemen.³³ But Levine also describes the process by which opera was “sacralized” in the course of the century as new, more rigid canons of taste took hold.

If opera during the twentieth century was relegated to a ghetto comprising the affluent and the educated, there are signs today that perhaps the wall separating high and low culture can be broken down—or at least breached in a few spots. In view of the current fear that opera, especially in those countries with little or no state subsidy, will not have the resources to continue in its present form, impresarios are concocting new ways of enticing people to the opera. Stage directors with no previous experience in (and sometimes even no knowledge of) opera are mounting glamorous new productions utilizing the most advanced stage techniques. Major companies are presenting matinees of shortened versions of operas in English for children. Just as I started work on this essay the San Francisco Opera broadcast *Samson et Dalila* live in high definition at the local baseball stadium on a weekend when the Giants were on the road. And the Metropolitan is doing a good bit of its current repertory live in movie theaters throughout the United States—and with unexpectedly high attendance. Might this mean that ordinary folk will once again be humming the Anvil Chorus?

Ladies

Culture in America, at least regarding opera, has long been entrusted to certain so-called beautiful people, ladies whose husbands are expected to accompany them (though often with considerable reluctance) to performances. These female sponsors, immaculately blond, face-lifted, de-la-Renta-gowned, Bulgari-choked (to judge from the photos on the San Francisco *Chronicle's* society page after opening night each year), see to it not only that the repertory remain conservative but that productions retain the period costumes and scenery they remember from their distant youth. An innovative recent impresario in San Francisco was excoriated after she chose the dowdy *Mother of Us All* (an opera whose plot, the old subscribers complained, goes nowhere), for an opening night—the very occasion that these ladies count on to show off their all. Had this doomed impresario only chosen the company's tired and easily available production of *Il trovatore* (whose plot, the subscribers would have found, manages to go everywhere)!

Movies

Il trovatore has made two significant forays into the movies—the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera* (1935) and Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954). No two films could be more different—the first, a zany Hollywood farce, the second, a sumptuously outfitted postwar Italian meditation on Italian-German relations.

The uses to which Verdi's opera is put in each film are as different as the films themselves. *A Night at the Opera* pokes merciless fun at the opera, not so much perhaps at *Il trovatore* itself but rather at opera as an institution. The film opens with a snippet of *I pagliacci*

and culminates in a long sequence from *Il trovatore*. It is hardly an accident that the Marxes chose these two operas to represent the institution as a whole, for both are among the few operatic works with whose titles—and even a few of whose tunes—the middle-class movie-going public of the thirties would have been familiar. (One can of course no longer count on this familiarity with the film public.) If opera as a form is known for representing emotional situations in an extravagant form, both these operas serve as extreme examples.

Within the Marxes' world (also, perhaps, within the whole American world), opera represents at once high culture and high society (see **Kultur** and **Ladies**). In the *Trovatore* sequence shots of the opera alternate regularly with shots of formally clad opera patrons who, in the course of the performance, display their horror at the antics with which the Marx brothers disrupt the musical proceedings on stage. The key representative of society in this film is the benefactress Mrs. Claypool, played by Margaret Dumont, who, in various Marx films, customarily enacted the ladies whose pretensions the brothers deflated.

The upshot of all this is that social and musical pretensions need to be cut down to size. The unrestrained, corrosive wit exercised above all by Groucho suggests an anarchic social vision that leaves no room for the formalities demanded by either high society or high art. Low-brow culture emerges as the only viable alternative to the artifice represented by both the benefactress and the opera that she finances.

The antics go on from the start. When the orchestra gets to page two of the prelude, it starts playing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," whose sheet music one of the

brothers has inserted in the score. Next thing we see is Harpo Marx swinging his violin as his brother Chico pitches to him while Groucho moves through the audience pretending to peddle peanuts. Baseball becomes an alternative institution to opera—and a more authentic one to boot. The antics continue throughout the film with one comic trick following another, for example, a backdrop suddenly emerging to advertise the American Taxicab Company.

The capers that define *A Night at the Opera* stand at an opposite extreme from the earnest use to which Visconti puts *Il trovatore* in *Senso*. The opera performance, supposedly taking place in Venice's La Fenice in 1866, when northern Italy was liberating itself from Austria, serves as an allegorical cover for the film's plot. The glamorous heroine, Countess Livia Serpieri, is measured throughout against Verdi's Leonora, whose idealism in sacrificing herself for Manrico contrasts with Livia's betrayal at once of her Austrian lover Franz Mahler (who, like Manrico, is executed at the end) and of the cause of Italian freedom.

Indeed, the whole first section of the film is dominated by the *Trovatore* performance. The film opens with the brief (and only) duet between the lovers, followed by Manrico's rousing "Di quella pira," which suffices to set off a demonstration in the audience.³⁴ This cabaletta, as Visconti must have known, was long associated with Italian patriotism during the Risorgimento: Cavour, for instance, burst into song with Manrico's music when, in 1859, he received a dispatch that assured him that France would ultimately join Piedmont in war against Austria.³⁵

Although on one level the tenor's heroic stance in the filmed opera sequence contrasts with Mahler's deception of Livia, at another level it accords with the genuinely

heroic action of Livia's cousin, the Italian patriot Ussino. Yet Verdi is left behind about one third of the way through as the background music shifts to Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, as though to signal the turn to the Austrian enemy.³⁶

Visconti's film is actually a double allegory, as its audiences showed in the controversies generated at its early showings. Just as the hero and heroine of *Il trovatore* enact an idealism that could not be emulated in the film's historical plot, so the latter represents a world that Visconti saw paralleling the betrayal of the ideals of Italian leftist partisans at the end of World War II. And in the positive use to which he put Verdi's opera, Visconti took a markedly different stance from his generation of Italian intellectuals, who tended not only to reject Verdi but also Italian opera as a whole (see **Kultur**). But then Visconti was, in fact, a distinguished opera director, having staged several of Maria Callas's most famous productions—and also, a decade after *Senso*, his own version of *Il trovatore*.

Narrating

Il trovatore may well be the only opera in which Verdi emulates Wagner in the high proportion of text devoted to retelling the past. And when it is not concerned with the past, the opera repeatedly projects a happy future—of course never to be achieved. The present, by contrast, gets short shrift throughout this opera.

The whole first scene is devoted to narrating events from the far past—the bewitching by Azucena's mother, the theft and burning of a child, and all the familiar rest. And when the second scene opens with Leonora's entrance

aria, we hear the heroine's memory of meeting her unknown knight at a tournament and her later dream of his pursuing her. Her cabaletta moves to the future with her hopes—note, for example the future tense in the words *vivrò* and *morirò* in which it culminates. Even the troubador's brief serenade that follows is future-oriented in the hope that it expresses. Only the trio that ends the act is rooted in the present.

And so it goes all through the opera. Azucena's "Stride la vampa," though in the present tense, recounts the burning of her mother. In her long duet with Manrico she tells her own version of the tale we had already heard from Ferrando. And the Count's aria in the following scene is built around his future hope of attaining Leonora, who, when she appears with the nuns, voices her own hopes for her future in the convent. Only with her abduction at the end of the scene do we return briefly, as at the end of the first act, to the present.

The scene in the Count's camp that opens Part Three is again concerned with the past as Azucena reshapes her story in the hope of saving herself, but once she is recognized, the ensuing ensemble allows each character to project a future for her. Manrico's aria in the second scene is built around his hopes for his impending union with Leonora, but the cabaletta, like the endings of the preceding acts, brings us back to the real present as he prepares to save Azucena.

Leonora's aria that opens the final act is future-oriented both in the cantabile and the cabaletta—though the *Miserere* that provides the thoroughly unconventional *tempo di mezzo* returns us briefly to the painful present. And her duet with the count that follows is built around their

divergent accounts of the future, as the verb *vivrà* that generates their cabaletta conspicuously shows. In the opera's final scene the dialogue and duet between Manrico and Azucena mixes together memories of a bloody past with idyllic hopes for their future—an illusion that Azucena maintains in the ensemble that follows. But once Leonora enters, she and Manrico face up to the present, which, suppressed as it was throughout much of the opera, returns with a vengeance (literally!) as the execution and its accompanying revelation take place.

Does all this mean that what we experience in *Il trovatore* is distanced from us in time? As Carolyn Abbate has argued in *Unsung Voices*, musical narrative, to the extent that it achieves a presentness, indeed, a presence in the context of performance, works differently from literary narrative.³⁷ By a strange paradox, *Il trovatore*, however obsessed its libretto may be with past and future, actually affects its audiences with the powerful presence of an ongoing present.

Ornamenting

I have always wondered why I did not feel thrilled on hearing the Leonora performed in San Francisco by Joan Sutherland, whom I had revered in all her other parts. At the time—1975—she was still in top form. Groupies around the opera house attributed the problem as stemming from her bad back: the production was so abominably dark, they said, that her fear of falling as she groped around the set must have inhibited her singing, which, as always, was never less than competent.

But I did not buy that excuse. She was not a great Leonora simply because she was ornamenting too much. Each

of her two arias, but especially the first one, was paced (as her husband-conductor-mentor Richard Bonyngge made sure it was) to give her the maximum opportunity to display her vocal prowess. To find space for all the notes she (and he) wanted, she proceeded at the leisurely pace one associates with Bellini, a composer at whose works she excelled. As a result she missed the fierce momentum that should characterize *Il trovatore* from start to finish (see **Thrust**).

Would Verdi have approved of Sutherland's ornamentation? The great trilogy of which *Il trovatore* is the central member stands at a watershed between the still relatively florid style that marked Verdi's and other composers' operas of the 1840s and the leaner style toward which he was moving. Although the *Trovatore* score contains some strikingly florid passages, especially in Leonora's music, they are always contained, as it were, within the rapidly moving drama that was central to his intent. For example, as a study of the manuscript materials shows, some embellishments Verdi composed for Leonora's entrance aria and for the Count's Act Two cabaletta were simplified in the final version.³⁸

Yet what few comments Verdi recorded on singers' ornamentations of his work do not give us a firm answer: sometimes he approved, and at other times he did not, though his negative reactions sometimes had to do with what he saw as a performer's poor taste.³⁹ As Philip Gossett, who has worked not only as editor of the Verdi critical edition but also as an advisor to many singers, has put it, "As a practical matter, it seems to me that modest variations, an occasional diminution, a turn figure, can

appropriately be applied to repeated passages in Verdi when the operas are performed complete, but ornamental variations *alla* Rossini and Bellini are to be excluded."⁴⁰

Yet given the fashion of baroque and *bel canto* operas today, together with the fact that many younger singers are training to meet the technical rigors of these works, it scarcely seems accidental that it has become difficult to find Verdi singers who can catch the right note.

Parody

The parodying started even before Cammarano and Verdi got to work on *Il trovatore*. In 1846, several years before Verdi had even discovered García Gutiérrez's drama, the playwright had himself subjected his own, still quite popular play to ruthless parody. After nearly a decade of writing plays in the vein of *El Trovador*, his first success, García Gutiérrez moved mainly to comedy and zarzuela, though, luckily for Verdi and the later history of opera, not before he had written *Simón Bocanegra* (1843).

The result was *Los Hijos del Tío Tronera*, which shifts the setting of his original play from the north of Spain to the depressed south. Moreover, the characters, all of a lowly sort, speak in Andalusian dialect. Although the author retains his plot—in sharply condensed form, to be sure—the characters and incidents are all reduced to mockeries of their original selves. Manuel (formerly Manrique) recites an absurd dream to Inesilla (formerly Leonora), in which he sees her turn into a witch on a broomstick instead of the grim skeleton he imagines in the earlier work (see **Dream**). When she later announces she is dying of the poison she has consumed for his sake, she

receives the simple dialect reply, "Has jecho una tontería" [You've done something foolish].⁴¹

Il trovatore was itself often parodied in Italy together with *Rigoletto* and other popular Verdi operas. Giovanni Tebaldini, a musicologist who befriended the composer, wrote in his memoirs of seeing Verdi, in the company of his later librettist Arrigo Boito, attending a performance of one such parody, *Minestron*, in Milan in 1884. He also reported noticing "grotesque statuettes" of the two actors mimicking the Count and Manrico on Verdi's writing desk thirteen years after this performance.⁴²

Operatic parody found an especially welcome home in Victorian England, in which the genre called burlesque was a popular comic form. In her detailed study of burlesques of *Ernani*, *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*, Roberta Montemorra Marvin has shown a wide range of approaches to the genre.⁴³ In some the original tunes were used with new (and of course comic) lyrics, while, in other examples, parodies of the aria text were attached to melodies from various popular sources such as music halls. Above all, the absurdity of operatic plots was a central concern of these burlesques, as in the following lines assigned to Ferrando in *Il Trovatore, or Larks with a Libretto* (1880):

Look here my dear
 don't you attempt to make the outline clear
 or to explain the plot because the story
 of the original *Il Trovatore*
 is what Dundreary'd call without a doubt
 one of those things no fellow could make out.⁴⁴

Those art forms such as epic and opera that distance themselves from everyday realism are especially open to parody. In one of his anti-operatic moments Theodor Adorno

wrote, "The closer opera gets to a parody of itself, the closer it is to its own most particular element."⁴⁵ And as operas go, *Il trovatore*, with its unrelentingly high style, is a sitting duck.

Quoting

Nobody would dream of calling *Il trovatore* a modernist text or even a proto-modernist text, a term appropriate to *Falstaff*.⁴⁶ Yet its sheer old-fashionedness makes it the ideal foil for modernist appropriation, as in the poetry of Eugenio Montale. Note, for example, the following short lyric, "Lungomare" [Seaside Walk]:

Il soffio cresce, il buio è rotto a squarci,
e l'ombra che tu mandi sulla fragile
palizzata s'arriccica. Troppo tardi

se vuoi esser te stessa! Dalla palma
tonfa il sorcio, *il baleno* è sulla miccia,
sui lunghissimi cigli *del tuo sguardo*.⁴⁷

The wind rises, the dark is ripped to shreds,
and the shadow you cast upon the fragile
paling shrivels. It's too late

to be yourself! The rat thuds down
from the palm tree, *lightning* plays about the fuse
and in the longest lashes *of your gaze*.⁴⁸

In this love poem addressed to Clizia (his poetic name for his American friend, Irma Brandeis), Montale alludes to the count's description of Leonora from his aria in *Il*

trovatore: “*Il balen del suo sorriso . . . Sperda il sole d'un suo sguardo.*” As Gilberto Lonardi has demonstrated in his book on Montale’s operatic allusions, this is only one of several poems that play upon the same aria.⁴⁹ An Italian reader familiar with *Il trovatore* would likely recognize the allusion, but even more important, this reader would be aware of the gap that separates Verdi’s world from that of the poet. Whereas the count speaks his love in an uncomplicated manner (though he is never of course to see it fulfilled!), the poet suggests a tortured, complex relationship: in the darkening day it has become “too late” for the woman to “be herself”; her shadow “shrivels” on the “fragile paling”; and the lightning that seemed so positive in the aria is now associated with a potentially exploding fuse.

Another lyric to Clizia, “*Il fiore che ripete,*” echoes one of the most memorable phrases spoken by Manrico in the *Miserere*—“non ti scordar di me” [don’t forget me]—soon answered repeatedly by Leonora—“di te, di te scordami di te” [I should forget you?]:

Il fiore che ripete
dall’orlo del burrato
non scordati di me,
non ha tinte più liete né più chiare
dello spazio gettato tra me e te.

Un cigolìo si sferra, ci discosta,
l’azzurro pervicace non ricompare.
nell’afa quasi visibile mi riporta all’opposta
tappa, già buia, la funicolare.⁵⁰

The flower on the mountainside,
 which keeps repeating its
forget-me-nots from cliff
 to cliff, has no colors brighter
 or happier than the space
 set between us.

A screech of metal is pulling us apart.
 The obstinate blue is fading. In a sky
 so sultry you can barely
 see through it, the funicular
 carries me back to the other station
 where it's already dark.⁵¹

The two stanzas of this poem, which appears in the cycle "Motets," offer a dramatic contrast—from closeness between the lovers to their parting as the poet leaves in the funicular, from the "obstinate blue" and total clarity to the darkness that takes over. Yet in the word "forget-me-nots" the happy first stanza already anticipates the negativity of the second. As Lonardi has suggested, Montale's allusion refers at once to Manrico and Leonora's cries, to the forget-me-not flower, and to a popular song, "Non ti scordar di me," performed in a 1935 film of the same title by Beniamino Gigli.⁵² This network of allusions gives this lyric about leave-taking an ironic edge that defines the pathos surrounding a farewell with a scrupulous avoidance of sentimentality.

Although, as Lonardi shows, a number of famous operas—notably *Manon*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*—inhabit Montale's poetry, none is as pervasive as *Il trovatore*.⁵³ And quite appropriately so, for the emotional and cultural

distance standing between this opera and Montale's body of poetry is nothing short of immense. Whereas the characters of *Il trovatore* sing out loud and clear, a hermetic, introspective poet such as Montale can utter only by indirection. From the point of view of the modernist poet, *Il trovatore* evokes an unselfconscious state of mind that, though it can never be restored, can at least leave its fragmentary remains in his writing. Isaiah Berlin, building on Schiller's famous distinction between the "naïve" and "sentimental" poet, once described Verdi as the epitome of the naïve artist.⁵⁴ If we translate these two terms into their contemporary equivalents, say, unselfconscious as against self-conscious, Montale's appropriation of Verdi becomes a prime example of the modernist artist's attempt to recover that lost earlier state.

Realistic

Opera of course is never realistic even when it calls itself *verismo*. Still, certain members of the audience wish to think they are witnessing something resembling the real world as they know it. Operatic characters, they insist, should act instead of just standing there to sing. And the characters they impersonate should have the complexity of the people they meet in real life. Scenery and costumes, moreover, should be faithful to the time and place in which the opera is set. You should, in short, forget you're hearing music and think you're experiencing some well-made Ibsen play. (Real life, to be sure, is never well made and sometimes is not very realistic).

For people with these particular needs, *Il trovatore* doesn't quite do the trick—at least not in comparison with

the two Verdi operas that came directly before and after it. The title characters of *Rigoletto* and *La traviata* suggest hidden depths that no character in *Il trovatore* possesses—not even Azucena, who simply gravitates back and forth between the two passions, filial and maternal love, that Verdi defined for her (see **Zingara**). When Violetta and the elder Germont engage with one another in their long duet, the change in their relationship that develops with each new segment displays a psychological realism totally missing in the duets in *Il trovatore*.

The plot of *La traviata* might really have happened (it's even based on a real-life story!); that of *Rigoletto* could conceivably have happened (though that may be a stretch), but the *Trovatore* story, even if one can follow its labyrinthian paths (see **About, sect. i**), could never have happened. Yet *Il trovatore* remains the perfect opera for those of us who relish make-believe within an earnestly heroic mode.

Soul

Up to then it had been a rather routine performance (like most performances, to be sure)—and this despite the presence of Leontyne Price, one of the great Leonoras of the last century. She had been singing somewhat sleepily that night, and so had the others.

But then Act Four began, and from Leonora's opening "Vanne . . . lasciami," we all knew that something had happened. Every phrase she uttered led powerfully into the next, and every segment of the remaining score, including the often omitted cabaletta to Leonora's aria, glowed with a fervor one encounters only at rare intervals in the opera house.

When it was over, I bumped into a colleague in physics who, I could tell, had felt the same vibrations that I had. "How do you account for that transformation?" I asked.

"Soul," he replied.

Thrust

Verdi is the pre-eminent composer of thrust, and no opera displays thrust more powerfully than *Il trovatore*. By thrust I mean the composer's penchant for moving the music forward constantly even with slow tempi. Rossini, to be sure, established the principle of thrust in Italian opera, but, especially in his *opere serie*, he allowed delays in his forward movement to give his singers the luxury of showing off their technical prowess. Bellini often—and also thrillingly—froze his forward movement to allow us to languish in his languid melodies. And Donizetti was only sporadically a composer of thrust.

Consider the unwavering movement pervading the next-to-last scene of *Il trovatore*, which consists of only two numbers, Leonora's aria and her duet with the Count. The orchestral opening, with its staccato triplets in the woodwinds, already suggests the urgent business ahead. Leonora's cantabile, though marked adagio, thrusts forward as her voice rises; as this section closes, her precipitous downward movement rushes us to a tentative closure, at which point the bell sounds, and the Miserere—that most elaborate of *tempi di mezzo*—takes off. For a moment, as we hear the male choir intoning its liturgical phrases, everything turns static. But Leonora's impassioned pleas to Manrico—and his equally impassioned pleas to her, all of this punctuated frighteningly by the bell—work against the static chorus to create an even more powerful forward

movement than we might have experienced with only their two voices alone. Her cabaletta, with its frequent upward leaps, confirms this movement; indeed, to omit this cabaletta, as was frequently done until recent years, is to impede rather than confirm the thrust central to them.⁵⁵

The duet between Leonora and the count consists of some jaunty tunes that one could scarcely have imagined if one knew only the grim words of the libretto as these two figures negotiate with one another—yet these tunes work to propel the action forward to the brief but event-laden *tempo di mezzo* in which, in quick succession, the two swear their oaths to one another, Leonora swallows her poison, and the count speaks out his “Vivrà,” a word which, when Leonora jubilantly repeats it, sets off the allegro-brillante cabaletta, after which the duet rolls mercilessly to its fast and brilliant conclusion.⁵⁶

What we hear in this scene is not so much music that sets a text as something more like program music, in short, music that has let itself be inspired by a text so that it may proceed in its own, purely musical way. Indeed, Verdi may well have set Leonora’s aria even before he had received any text.⁵⁷ As we listen to this scene, we hear the music thrust forward with an inexorable force analogous to what Aristotle meant when he demanded that the events of a tragedy be linked to one another in a way that seems probable. The sheer momentum that drives the opera forward from beginning to end provides that illusion of probability so notoriously lacking in the libretto as well as in its antecedent play.

Upstaging

Common operatic wisdom has it that Azucena characteristically runs away with the show. My own wisdom—or at least my memory—tells me that the character who runs away with *Il trovatore* is the one who happens to be delivering the best performance that particular night. In my own experience the Manrico of Franco Corelli once ran away with the show (see **Heroics**), and on other occasions it was the Leonora of Leontyne Price (see **Soul**) and the Azucena of Dolora Zajick. This never happened with a Conte di Luna or a Ferrando.

If Azucena is going to upstage everybody else, this can be ascribed to the fact that the soprano, the tenor, and the baritone are not the world's greatest singers in their respective voice ranges (see **Foursome**).

Violence

Violence is endemic within nineteenth-century opera, and *Il trovatore* displays perhaps more of it than any other of Verdi's major works—an abduction, a duel, a wounding on the battlefield, plus death by bonfire, poison and beheading. Yet except for the soprano's self-administration of the poison and her subsequent death, *Il trovatore's* violence is something we know not from what we witness onstage but from its characters' still vivid memories (see **Narrating**).

Violence is not the same in opera as it is in spoken drama and other non-musical forms. Although some violent films and TV shows purportedly instigate violent acts among their viewers, an opera as loaded with violence as *Il trovatore* is perfectly safe fare for the young. Once the music has taken over, it is as though the violence has been transformed into something more benign. Moreover, a

warhorse such as *Il trovatore*, whose audiences have usually heard much its music over the years, works to inure its viewers against any ill effects of violence by dint of its familiarity.

A recent experiment may shed some light on how we experience violence in musical works. Two neuroscientists, Vinod Menon and Daniel J. Levitin, imaged the brains of a group of subjects (all of them non-musicians) using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) while these subjects were listening to selected pieces from the classical repertory.⁵⁸ The researchers discovered significant activation in those areas of the brain—above all the mesolimbic dopaminergic reward system—that respond to pleasurable experiences. Activation in, for instance, the nucleus accumbens and the ventral tegmental area showed a correlation between dopamine release and response to music.

The experiment, which used examples ranging from the high drama of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to the soothing "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" of Mozart, did not attempt to distinguish differences in the emotional content of the works. But it is likely that music composed to render violent situations, whether in purely instrumental or in vocal forms, taps the same reward system that other musical works do. Thus, when a composer such as Verdi composes a libretto loaded with violence—and of course he carefully sought out these subjects in the first place—he revs up his musical engine to produce the maximum of excitement in his listeners. The resulting work poses no danger to society. Like such other stimulants as food, drugs, and sex that tap the reward system in our brains, *Il trovatore* simply leaves you feeling high.

Warhorses

An operatic warhorse is whatever can fill the house even if the cast has to be pulled off the street and the backdrops and costumes reveal their moth holes well into the orchestra section. At any particular moment in history only a few works fit this criterion. The warhorse list nowadays is topped by Puccini's biggest hits—*Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Butterfly*, and *Turandot*—plus *Carmen*, the *Barber*, and a few of Verdi's—certainly *Rigoletto* and *Traviata*, probably also *Aida*. *Il trovatore*, for long the quintessential crowd-pleaser, is barely hanging in.

X-rated

An X-minded director in need of staged sex would find *Il trovatore* hard going. Leonora and Manrico are left alone onstage together for little more than a hundred bars—five to six minutes at best—before Ruiz rudely interrupts them to send the groom-about-to-be to rescue his mother. And how, without eliciting laughter, could one ever stage sex against that organ music or the words “di casto amor” that the two fervently (and repeatedly) sing together?

No such problem with *Rigoletto*. I remember the tremors shaking the audience in a 1973 production in San Francisco by the late Jean-Pierre Ponnelle when he arranged for the ducal rape to be performed not offstage but in an elaborate four-poster bed—curtained, to be sure—to which the hapless Gilda was delivered just before her father arrived to plea before the courtiers. Although her father, and the audience as well, could not see behind the curtain, a director bringing this production up to current-day standards would need to open the curtain that's facing the

audience—and promptly send Rigoletto off to the side to keep him, unlike the audience, unaware of what is going on.

Although a graphic portrayal of the *Rigoletto* rape would expose the horror lurking beneath the opera's surface, it is hard to imagine a way of X-rating *Il trovatore* properly. To be sure, I know of a 1996 Hans Neuenfels production at the Deutsche Oper, Berlin, in which, as Leonora describes her lover during her first aria, we are shown "a gigantic photograph of a scruffy Latin youth, nude except for a tattoo on each folded arm, genitalia concealed by crossed pieces of black tape."⁵⁹ Since I did not see this production, I cannot judge how convincingly it gets under *Il trovatore's* skin. Yet it was clearly an attempt to "unsettle" this opera—to cite the term used by David J. Levin in the title of his recent book on those many productions, starting with the Patrice Chéreau *Ring des Nibelungen* of 1976, that seek to uncover the unspoken subtexts of classic operas.⁶⁰

Suppose I were to attempt my own unsettling production of *Il trovatore*. Taking some cues from Visconti's *Senso* (see **Movies**), I'd move the setting to the turmoiled Italy of Verdi's time, with Manrico a heroic officer in Garibaldi's campaign; Leonora, an aristocrat who has read too many Romantic novels and heard too many Romantic operas the likes of *Il trovatore*; the Count, a love-crazed landowner collaborating with the Austrians; and Azucena, just as Verdi conceived her, a primordial creature driven by passion for mother and son. My production, I'm sure, would not find favor with the stubbornly conservative American opera public, especially since I should be critically examining my characters' obsessions—heroism and

their various varieties of love. And since there would be little room within this conception for staged sex, I should have to forego the badge of an X-rating.

Yawn

Nothing's so boring as a routine performance of *Il trovatore*. Even if the work's tempi are correct, the fierceness is missing; even if the Leonora sings her *fioriture* as Verdi notated them, they sound labored; even if the anvils pound down on time, you know they don't in the least mean it. Who has not witnessed a show like this at least once too often?

But why should so wondrous a work be as vulnerable as it is? There are certain warhorses that, in my experience at least, have proved pretty routine-resistant—or rather they manage to please however shabbily they may be done. I remember a wretched *Tosca* in Florence that still sent chills during its high spots. Or a third-string Met *Bohème* in Zeffirelli's plush production that still pushed one's emotional buttons at the required moments. Or a Vienna *Carmen* with a tired, superannuated cast that still cast an exotic spell.

These other warhorses, for one thing, don't demand as much from their singers as *Il trovatore*: the Toreador Song, for instance, can't compare in its rigors with the Count di Luna's "Il balen del suo sorriso," nor can "Mi chiamano Mimi" compare in trickiness with Leonora's "D'amor sull'ali rosee." At least as important, the scores of these less demanding operas seem to carry their singers and their conductors along if they more or less observe the markings, while *Il trovatore* asks for an unremitting energy from

start to finish. As Shaw put it, "There is nothing unheroic to fall back on" (see **Judgments**).

High energy, high passion, high heroics fast dissipate in the face of routine.

Zingara

Azucena---

- a. was *Il trovatore*'s initial reason for being. It was her role in *El Trovador* that attracted Verdi to this play, just as Victor Hugo's Triboulet had attracted him to *Le Roi s'amuse*.
- b. speaks the most readable lines in García Gutiérrez's play. It is no accident that her part, like that of the other lowly characters, is in prose,⁶¹ while the higher-born personae speak a high-falutin' verse (see **Dream**).
- c. sings a correspondingly more earthy music in *Il trovatore* than that assigned to the other three major characters.
- d. is less a character than a force of nature—these two concepts not being wholly compatible with one another.
- e. represents the birth of the Verdi mezzo-soprano, who, with those chthonic tones emanating from deep within the abdominal cavity, together with her consciousness of feeling wronged, is reincarnated in Eboli and Amneris, all of whom have spawned generations of singers alternating regularly among these roles.⁶² (As with most of his innovations, there are anticipations of the Verdi mezzo in French *grand opéra*, namely, Fidès in Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*.)
- f. rarely goes wrong in the hands of one of these specialists. My own most memorable ones have been

Elena Obratzova, Fiorenza Cossotto, and Dolora Zajick. In my mind I can still hear and see all of them cry revenge.

- g. was the major single bone of contention between librettist and composer during their work on this opera. Whereas Cammarano sought to portray Azucena as demented, Verdi insisted that she was perfectly sane, that she was in fact motivated by "two grand passions, filial love and maternal love."⁶³
- h. for a while during the process of composition emerged as the prima donna. At one point Verdi was even willing to forego an entrance area for Leonora,⁶⁴ with the result that Azucena would have had little competition.
- i. was a role Verdi would love to have sung, as we can see from a comment he made after a diva asked him to recompose Leonora's entrance aria: "Why does la Barbieri undertake that part if it doesn't suit her? If she wants to do *Il trovatore* there's another part, that of the Gipsy. . . . If I were a prima donna (a fine thing that would be!) I would always rather sing the part of the Gipsy in *Il trovatore*."⁶⁵ Imagine Verdi croaking out "Giorni poveri vivea" while pleading with the Count. In my mind I can hear and see him.

I am grateful to Roberta Montemorra Marvin for suggesting some of the sources used in this essay.

NOTES

¹ See the introduction to Antonio García Gutiérrez, *El Trovador (drama); Los hijos del tío Tronera (sainete)*, ed. Jean-Louis Picoche (Madrid: Alhambra, 1979), p. 20.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26.

³ See the chapter entitled "Brainworms, Sticky Music, and Catchy Tunes," in Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Knopf, 2007), pp. 41-48.

⁴ Verdi, *Il trovatore*, ed. David Lawton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 84 (m. 261).

⁵ Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2 (1978), 98-99.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the issue, see Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 124-27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 546 (note 49).

⁸ García Gutiérrez, *El Trovador*, pp. 151-53. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁹ *Carteggio Verdi-Cammarano (1843-1852)*, ed. Carlo Matteo Mossa (Parma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 2001), p. 191.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹² For descriptions of how *Le Trouvère* diverges from *Il trovatore*, see Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 2:107-11, and David Lawton, "'Le Trouvère': Verdi's Revision of *Il trovatore* for Paris," *Studi Verdiani* 3 (Parma, Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1985), pp. 79-119.

¹³ For Cammarano's text, see Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 2:64-65.

¹⁴ The words to the Paris ending are reprinted in Verdi, *Le Trouvère, L'Avant Scène Opéra*, No. 60 (February, 1984): 83. A critical edition of *Le Trouvère* is being prepared by David Lawton, who edited the critical edition of *Il trovatore*.

¹⁵ Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 2:112.

¹⁶ *Carteggio Verdi-Cammarano*, p. 188.

¹⁷ Wagner described his vision in *Mein Leben*, ed. Eike Middell (Bremen: Carl Schünemann Verlag, 1986), 2:60.

¹⁸ Even if Verdi's middle-period operas seem retrograde from a Wagnerian point of view, an essay on the criticism of his contemporary Alberto Mazzucato shows that during the early 1850s a shift occurred between "two diverse conceptions of opera"—an earlier one in which the desires of the singer were primary, and a later one, represented by Verdi, in which the individual opera emerges as "opus perfectum, as monument, set in every detail by the author's will." See Fabrizio Della Seta, "Gli esordi della critica verdiana: a proposito di Alberto Mazzucato," *Verdi-Studien: Pierluigi Petrobelli zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Sieghart Döhring and Wolfgang Osthoff (Munich: G. Ricordi, 2000), p. 69.

¹⁹ See Paul Robinson, *Opera and Ideas: From Mozart to Strauss* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 171-79.

²⁰ See *Carteggio Verdi-Cammarano*, pp. 188-89, 190, 195.

²¹ See James Hepokoski, "Ottocento Opera as Cultural Drama: Generic Mixtures in *Il trovatore*," *Verdi's Middle Period: 1849-1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice* ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 166-75.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 175-85.

²³ Wolfgang Osthoff, "'Pianissimo, benché a piena orchestra'—Zu drei Stellen aus *Trovatore*, *Traviata* und *Otello*," *Verdi's Middle Period*, pp. 222-23.

²⁴ Martin Chusid, "A New Source for *El Trovador* and Its Implications for the Tonal Organization of *Il trovatore*," *Verdi's Middle Period*, pp. 208-10.

²⁵ Parker, "Of Andalusian Maidens and Recognition Scenes: Crossed Wires in *La traviata* and *Il trovatore*," *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 22-41. See also David Rosen, "Meter, Character, and *Tinta* in Verdi's Operas," *Verdi's Middle Period*, pp. 380-82.

²⁶ Quoted in Francis Toye, *Verdi: His Life and Works* (New York: Knopf, 1931), p. 79.

²⁷ Quoted in Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 639-40.

²⁸ *Shaw's Music*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1981), 2:78.

²⁹ Toye, *Verdi*, p. 320.

³⁰ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Knopf, 1956), p. 164.

³¹ Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 2:112.

³² See Sigrid Wiesmann, "'Eine verlachte Liebe ist die ehrgeizigste Liebe, die es gibt'"—Anmerkungen zu Werfels Nachdichtungen von *La forza del destino*, *Simon Boccanegra* und *Don Carlos*, *Verdi-Studien: Pierluigi Petrobelli zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Sieghart Döhring and Wolfgang Osthoff (Munich: G. Ricordi, 2000), pp. 281-89. For a comprehensive history of the Verdi revival of the 1920s and early 1930s, together with Werfel's pivotal role, see Gundula Kreuzer, "Zurück zu Verdi: The 'Verdi Renaissance' and Musical Culture in the Weimar Republic," *Studi Verdiani* 13 (Parma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 1998), pp. 117-54.

³³ Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 85-168. For the sledge-hammer performance, see p. 105.

³⁴ See Luchino Visconti, *Two Screenplays: La Terra Trema, Senso*, trans. Judith Green (New York: Orion, 1970), pp. 107-09.

³⁵ See Marcello Conati, "Higher than the highest, the music better than the best," trans. Jonathan Keates, in Verdi, *Il trovatore*, English National Opera Guide No. 20 (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 14.

³⁶ For studies of *Senso's* relationship to *Il trovatore*, see Deborah Crisp and Robert Hillman, "Verdi in Postwar Italian Cinema," *Between Opera and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 156-63, and Michael P. Steinberg and Susan Stewart-Steinberg, "Fascism and the Operatic Unconscious," *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 278-82.

³⁷ Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

³⁸ Verdi, *Il trovatore*, ed. David Lawton, p. xxxii. See also Lawton's detailed discussion of Verdi's not always consistent attitude to ornamentation in "Ornamenting Verdi's Arias: The Continuity of a Tradition," *Verdi in Performance*, ed. Alison Latham and Roger Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 49-78.

³⁹ Will Crutchfield, "Vocal Ornamentation in Verdi: the Phonographic Evidence," *19th Century Music* 7 (1983): 14-17. Crutchfield's article demonstrates, on the basis of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century recordings, that famous singers, many of whom had worked with

Verdi, employed a wide variety of ornamentations (see Crutchfield's notations of these ornaments, pp. 21-54).

⁴⁰ Gossett, *Divas and Scholars*, p. 324.

⁴¹ García Gutiérrez, *El Trovador*, p. 314. For a brief study of the parody, see Nicholson B. Adams, "A Spanish Dramatist Parodies Himself: *Los Hijos del Tío Tronera*," *PMLA* 45 (1930): 573-77.

⁴² See *Encounters with Verdi*, ed. Marcello Conati, trans. Richard Stokes (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 1984), p. 359.

⁴³ Marvin, "Verdian Opera Burlesqued: A Glimpse into Mid-Victorian Theatrical Culture," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 15 (2003): 33-66.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁵ Adorno, "Bourgeois Opera," trans. David J. Levin, in *Opera through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 26.

⁴⁶ For discussions of *Falstaff* as proto-modernist, see Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, "'Tutto nel mondo è burla': Rethinking Late Style in Verdi (and Wagner)," *Verdi 2001*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin, and Marco Marica (Florence: Olschki, 2003), 2:926-27; Roger Parker, "In Search of Verdi," *ibid.*, 2:924-35; Emanuele Senici, "'Se potissimo tornare da capo'," *ibid.*, 2:942-43; and Herbert Lindenberger, "Anti-Theatricality in Twentieth-Century Opera," *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage*, ed. Alan Ackerman and Martin Puchner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 60.

⁴⁷ Montale, *L'opera in versi*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Gianfranco Contini (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1980), p. 190. Here and in subsequent quotations I have italicized the words that Montale borrows from *Il trovatore*.

⁴⁸ Montale, *Selected Poems*, trans. Jonathan Galassi, Charles Wright, and David Young (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College Press, 2004), p. 64.

⁴⁹ For a detailed description of how Montale uses words from this aria, see Lonardi, *Il fiore dell'addio: Leonora, Manrico e altri fantasmi del melodramma nella poesia di Montale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), pp. 206-08. I am greatly indebted to Lonardi's book for the many operatic borrowings in Montale's poetry that he has discovered.

⁵⁰ Montale, *L'opera in versi*, p. 148.

⁵¹ Montale, *Mottetti: Poems of Love*, trans. Dana Gioia (St. Paul, MN: Greywolf Press, 1990) p. 55.

⁵² Lonardi, *Il fiore dell'addio*, p. 202.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-06.

⁵⁴ Berlin, "The Naiveté of Verdi," *Hudson Review* 21 (1968): 138-47. For a commentary on Berlin's essay, see Bernard Williams, "Naïve and Sentimental Opera Lovers," in *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, ed. Edna and Avishai Margalit (London: Hogarth Press, 1991), pp. 180-92.

⁵⁵ For an argument supporting the inclusion of the cabaletta, see Gabriele Baldini, *The Story of Giuseppe Verdi: 'Oberto' to 'Un ballo in maschera*, ed. Roger Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 217-18. Abramo Basevi, the great Verdi critic who was also the composer's contemporary, found the cabaletta a letdown; see Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi (1859)*, ed. Ugo Piovano (Milan: Rugginente, 2001), p. 285. For a measured view of the issue, see Philip Gossett, "Verdi's Ideas on Interpreting His Operas," *Verdi 2001*, 1:401, and Gossett, *Divas and Scholars*, p. 264. Verdi himself omitted the cabaletta from the Paris version of the opera.

⁵⁶ For an analysis of some techniques that Verdi employs to create what I call forward thrust, see the section entitled "Tension" in Gilles de

Van, *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music*, trans. Gilda Roberts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 120-27.

⁵⁷ See Roger Parker, *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 183-86. From a study of Verdi's sketches, Parker concludes that Verdi worked out the melody before he had received the text from Emanuele Bardare, who finished the libretto after Cammarano's death. The aria had not been included in Cammarano's initial scenario for the opera (*Carteggio Verdi-Cammarano*, p. 187).

⁵⁸ Menon and Levitin, "The Rewards of Music Listening: Response and Physiological Connectivity of the Mesolimbic System," *Neuroimage* 28 (2005): 175-84.

⁵⁹ Paul Moor, "Horsing Around with a Classic," *International Herald Tribune*, April 3, 1996,
http://www.iht.com/articles/1996/04/03/berlin.t_0.php

⁶⁰ Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁶¹ García Gutiérrez turned the prose passages into verse for a production in 1851 at the Teatro Español. Verdi and Cammarano used the earlier, mixed version.

⁶² On the development of the Verdi mezzo, see Robinson, *Opera and Ideas*, pp. 174-77.

⁶³ *Carteggio Verdi-Cammarano*, p. 190.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 2:68.