

16 Verdi criticism

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The earliest Verdi criticism, chronicling the successes and failures of his first operas, appeared in music journals, at first on the Italian peninsula and eventually throughout Europe and the Americas.¹ *La gazzetta musicale di Milano* held a particularly important position as the house journal of Verdi's principal publisher, Ricordi. As early as 1846, the *Gazzetta* reprinted a series of reviews by B. Bermani, hailing the young composer – who at the time had written only half a dozen operas – as a major figure who stood out among his contemporaries through his “exquisite taste, an untiring elegance, and [a] marvelous instinct... for effect.” During the following decade, Florentine music critic Abramo Basevi wrote an extensive series of articles about Verdi's operas, which he collected and republished in 1859 as *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*. Basevi's detailed and systematic discussion of the early and middle operas (through *Aroldo*) has exerted considerable influence on modern Verdi criticism.² Notably, Basevi was the first critic to suggest two different styles or “maniere” in the composer's works, with *Luisa Miller* as the decisive turning point.

Verdi enjoyed a reputation as the undisputed living master of Italian opera during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and during this period the quantity of critical writings about his music continued to expand prodigiously. New and fertile territory for music criticism included such diverse topics as his changing musical style, historical position, and the relationship of his music and aesthetic ideals to those of Richard Wagner and the new *verismo* composers.³ These topics engendered lively debate that was not always favorable to Verdi, since many critics, particularly outside Italy, held fast to the belief that Wagnerian aesthetics were intellectually superior to the “popular entertainment” of Italian opera.

Overall, modern Verdi scholarship has only begun to scratch the surface in assessing the scope, content, and significance of music criticism from nineteenth-century periodical literature. The journals themselves are scarce and not well indexed. Both problems are gradually being addressed through the ongoing publications of *RIPM*, the *Répertoire internationale de la presse musicale*.⁴ In the meantime, published anthologies, such as Marcello Conati's exemplary *Interviste e incontri con Verdi* (1980), have made some nineteenth-century journalistic criticism more widely available to modern readers, while other studies have provided preliminary assessments of

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the reception of Verdi's music during the Ottocento in specific geographic regions.⁵ Fabrizio Della Seta's "Gli esordi della critica verdiana" (2000) provides a useful overview of this area of scholarship at the end of the twentieth century and makes a strong case for the need for more intensive research in this area in the future. Della Seta's article points to Alberto Mazzucato as a central figure deserving more scrutiny and analyzes Mazzucato's use of the term "quadro" in his critical writings.

Biographical studies of Verdi began, like the criticism of his works, in nineteenth-century periodicals. French music critic Arthur Pougin penned the most widely circulated of these early accounts, which was initially serialized in several European music journals. Pougin later issued his work as a monograph (1881), with additional material contributed by Giacomo Caponi writing under the pen name Folchetto. Pougin's anecdotal approach proved popular, as witnessed by a series of successive works in the same vein.⁶ Over the course of time, however, biographical episodes have been shown to be colored, if not factually inaccurate. It is now clear that Verdi himself was an active instigator in this process, shaping the view of himself as a self-made genius, who rose to greatness despite the obstacles of poverty, illiteracy, and jealous machinations and who, through his music, shaped the soul of the modern Italian nation. This bias pervades the composer's statements to Michele Lessona that formed the basis for a chapter in his *Volere è potere* (1869), a moralizing collection of inspirational biographies. It also colors Verdi's autobiographical reminiscences, recorded by Giulio Ricordi and published in the sixth chapter of Pougin's *Vita aneddotica*.⁷ Neither the degree of hyperbole nor the composer's active participation in this process is unique to Verdi among nineteenth-century composers. Nevertheless, much of later twentieth-century Verdi biography, starting particularly with Frank Walker's *The Man Verdi* (1962), has taken as a major goal the weeding out of romanticized legends from his life story.

Verdi's death in 1901 and the centenary of his birth only twelve years later prompted a new burst of scholarly activity, including an interest in assessing both the entirety of his work and his historical position. This new focus can be seen in Luigi Torchi's "L'opera di Giuseppe Verdi e i suoi caratteri principali," a feature article in the 1901 commemorative issue of *La rivista musicale italiana*, as well as in monographs such as Oreste Boni's *Giuseppe Verdi: L'uomo, le opere, l'artista* (1901) and the *Biographie critique* (1905) by Camille Bellaigue, a close personal friend of the composer and music critic for the influential *Revue des deux mondes* in Paris. Interest in Verdi as a historical figure at the dawn of the twentieth century also led to the first publication of primary source materials, particularly correspondence and iconographies, and reference materials, such as bibliographies. Luigi Torri published the first major bibliography on Verdi in the 1901 commemorative

issue of *La rivista musicale italiana*. Even though he excluded many articles from “familiar” periodicals, such as the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* and *L'illustrazione italiana*, Torri's bibliography boasts roughly 250 items concerning Verdi's life and nearly 100 critical assessments of his compositions. These numbers more than doubled in Carlo Vanbianchi's 1913 revision of this bibliography. A sixty-eight-page bio-bibliography by Stefano Lottici, now extremely rare, also appeared in 1913 in commemoration of the centenary of the composer's birth.⁸

While snippets of Verdi's prolific correspondence had appeared in periodicals since the late nineteenth century, the pioneering publication in this field was *I copialettere*, a hefty 759-page volume issued in 1913 by Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio. It contained drafts, copies, and summaries of some of the composer's correspondence from his “letter books,” supplemented by a large number of letters and documents from other sources. Although flawed by omissions, fragmentary reproductions, suppressed passages, errors in transcription, and inaccurate ordering, *I copialettere* represents a major milestone in Verdi research. In the following decades, the four volumes of *Carteggi verdiani* edited by Luzio (1935–47) provided an additional 1,300 pages of correspondence, documents, and essays. Other documentary collections, published both in periodicals and as monographs, usually focused on a particular correspondent or group of correspondents, or, in later years, on a particular opera. Most of these publications continued to be marred to a greater or lesser extent, however, by the same editorial problems as the *Copialettere*.

Giuseppe Bocca's “Verdi e la caricatura” of 1901 offered the first major iconographic study of Verdi's life and career. It reproduced caricatures and drawings, some of the composer and some drawn by Verdi himself, as well as set and costume designs from a number of his operas. Twelve years later, Gino Monaldi issued his *Saggio di iconografia verdiana*, the first full-length iconographic study of the composer. It emphasized illustrations of scenography, costume designs, and early interpreters, but also incorporated portraits and caricatures of the composer, his family, and associates. No other full-length iconography appeared until 1941, when Carlo Gatti published *Verdi nelle immagini*, an important volume that included facsimile reproductions of selected pages from the composer's working drafts.

In addition to a continuation of the Verdi–Wagner controversy during the early decades of the twentieth century, a new debate emerged over the merits of Verdi's middle- and late-period works.⁹ Supporters of the earlier works lauded their directness, clarity, and tunefulness, accusing the composer of becoming tainted with “Wagnerism” in his later years. Their opponents viewed Verdi's career as a creative ascent from a somewhat crude vigor in his early works to the pinnacle of sophistication in the final operas.

Alfredo Parente identified this debate and the related question of stylistic integrity as the central problem of Verdi criticism in his probing essay of 1933, “Il problema della critica verdiana.” This controversy continued to engage critics during most of the twentieth century, leading to a recent new appraisal by Gilles de Van in his *Verdi: Un théâtre en musique* (1992, published in English as *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music*, 1998). De Van argues that the composer's dramaturgical principles were cohesive across his entire career. Individual works, however, drew on the contrasting poles of melodrama and music drama in various proportions, with a general trend toward music drama in his later works.

While Verdi's musicological fortunes generally waxed stronger in the early decades of the twentieth century, the popularity of his operas waned in some locations, particularly in Germany and England. For the most part, however, they never fell into total disfavor. The New York Metropolitan Opera, for example, staged productions of *Aida* every season from 1898 to 1945! Works from the trio of middle-period favorites (*Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, and *La traviata*) frequently dominated its playbills during the 1910s and 1920s, but the Met also mounted productions of *Forza* from 1918 to 1923, *Don Carlos* from 1920 to 1923, and *Ernani* from 1921 to 1924 and again in the 1928–29 season.¹⁰ A renewed interest in Verdi's music, often called the “Verdi Renaissance,” started in Germany in the mid-1920s and eventually spread to other countries, particularly England.¹¹ A major figure in this revival was Franz Werfel, whose historical novel *Verdi: Roman der Oper* (1923) quickly spread through many editions and translations. Werfel's edition of Verdi's correspondence soon followed (1926), the first major collection of Verdi's letters to be published in German. 1932 saw a significant new German biography by Herbert Gerigk, and new biographies were published in English by Francis Toye and Dyneley Hussey in 1930 and 1940 respectively. Italian musicologist Carlo Gatti prepared the most significant new biography from this period (1931). Longer and more detailed than earlier accounts, Gatti incorporated information from primary source materials preserved at Sant'Agata that had previously been unavailable to researchers. A quarter century later, Franco Abbiati also gained access to privileged materials, which he integrated into his mammoth four-volume biography that totaled well over 3,000 pages (1959). Less carefully prepared than Gatti's account, Abbiati tacitly abridged many documents, and his study includes both faulty transcriptions and factual misstatements. Nevertheless, it remained the standard Verdi biography in Italian for several decades. Another Italian scholar, Massimo Mila, offered thoughtful new critical discussions of Verdi's music starting with *Il melodramma di Verdi* (1933) and culminating many years later in two books that collected, updated, and amplified his earlier critical writings. *La giovinezza di Verdi* (1974, rev. 1978)

presents a particularly welcome emphasis on the composer's early life and career, while *L'arte di Verdi* (1980) is broader in scope and includes a valuable bibliography with useful references to "older" periodical articles from the early and middle part of the century.¹²

The 1960s saw the beginning of a new age for Verdi in both musicological studies and performance. Traditional biases against Italian opera as being simplistic, formulaic, and void of substance gradually began to break down. New investigations of Italian opera and its composers laid important historical and cultural background for Verdi scholars, who began an intensive period of self-examination and reevaluation and established priorities for future work. Elvidio Surian's "Lo stato attuale degli studi verdiani" (1977), an appraisal of Verdi research up to the mid-1970s, includes a topically organized bibliographic essay that offers an excellent overview of important publications that appeared from 1960 to 1975.

Without a doubt, the central events marking the start of this new period of Verdi criticism were the founding of two national institutes for the study of Verdi, one in Italy and one in America. The institutes provided the stimulus, either directly or indirectly, for most important initiatives in Verdi research and criticism during the final decades of the twentieth century: international congresses, many new publications devoted to Verdi and his music, source-critical editions of Verdi's music and his correspondence, important new doctoral dissertations about Verdi, and more frequent performances of all of Verdi's operas, even his most obscure ones.

Verdi scholars and enthusiasts established the Istituto di Studi Verdiani in 1960 with headquarters in Parma (the name changed to L'Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdi during the 1980s to reflect official sponsorship by the Italian government). Among its major initiatives were the dissemination of Verdi research through a series of international congresses and publications, including conference reports, the *Quaderni*, and the *Bollettini*. In 1982, *Studi verdiani* superseded the *Bollettini*, offering scholarly articles on all areas of Verdi's life, work, and legacy. Since 1983, the Parma Institute, together with the Rotary Club of Parma, has sponsored a biennial international competition that allows researchers to pursue studies at the Institute and publish their results in a special series. The wide range of creative new directions in the winning proposals attests to the vitality of current Verdi scholarship (see table 16.1).

In the mid-1970s, the American Institute for Verdi Studies was founded with headquarters at New York University. Its main publication was an annual newsletter (at first called the *AIVS Newsletter*, but later the *Verdi Newsletter* and most recently the *Verdi Forum*). Over the next decades, the American Institute sponsored conferences, international congresses, lectures, and summer seminars for college teachers, as well as performances

Table 16.1 Winners of the Premio Internazionale Rotary Club di Parma “Giuseppe Verdi”

| Year | Author | Title | Published |
|------|---------------------------|--|-----------|
| 1983 | Markus Engelhardt | <i>Verdi und Andere: “Un giorno di regno,” “Ernani,” “Attila,” “Il corsaro” in Mehrfachvertonungen</i> | 1992 |
| 1985 | Roger Parker | <i>“Arpa d’or dei fatidici vati”: The Verdian Patriotic Chorus in the 1840s</i> | 1997 |
| 1987 | Marco Beghelli | <i>Atti performativi nella drammaturgia verdiana</i> (the tentative title for the published volume is <i>La retorica del rituale nel melodramma ottocentesco</i>) | |
| 1989 | Knud Arne Jürgensen | <i>The Verdi Ballets</i> | 1995 |
| 1991 | Roberta Montemorra Marvin | <i>Verdi the Student – Verdi the Teacher</i> | |
| 1993 | Dino Rizzo | <i>Verdi filarmonico e maestro dei Filarmonici bussetani</i> | |
| 1995 | Olga Jesurum | <i>Le scenografie verdiane tra due secoli: “ieri e oggi”</i> | |
| 1997 | Damien Colas | <i>Verdi et le rythme de la langue française, des “Vêpres siciliennes” à “Don Carlos”</i> | |
| 1999 | Gloria Staffieri | <i>Il “grand opéra” di Meyerbeer e la produzione verdiana degli anni ‘40–‘50: Le tentazioni europee del melodramma italiano di metà Ottocento</i> | |
| 2001 | Alessandro Di Profio | <i>Verdi al Théâtre Lirique di Parigi (1863–1869): “Rigoletto,” “Violetta,” “Macbeth,” “Le bal masqué”</i> | |

of little-known works and early versions of works that Verdi later revised, such as *Macbeth* and *Forza*. Several of these conferences produced important publications: the 1977 conference in Danville, Kentucky, engendered *Verdi’s “Macbeth”: A Sourcebook*, edited by David Rosen and Andrew Porter (1984), while the 1993 conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland, led to a significant new volume entitled *Verdi’s Middle Period*, edited by Martin Chusid (1997).

Both Institutes have made their greatest contribution to Verdi scholarship through systematically gathering and cataloging primary source materials, including printed and manuscript scores and parts, librettos, letters, and other documents, as well as secondary materials such as books and monographs, periodicals, and sound recordings. The assembly, organization, and evaluation of this material allowed Verdi studies to leap forward by initiating the publication of complete scholarly, source-critical editions of both the composer’s music and his correspondence. This venture was particularly daunting in the case of the music: orchestral scores for a half-dozen operas had either never been published or could only be rented by opera houses, and available editions were full of errors and inconsistencies. As scholars laid plans to start the critical editions, two important reference works appeared: Martin Chusid’s *A Catalog of Verdi’s Operas* (1974) and Cecil Hopkinson’s *A Bibliography of the Works of Giuseppe Verdi, 1813–1901* (1973–78). These volumes provide crucial information about autograph manuscripts and early editions of Verdi’s music respectively, and together they offer much information that will be found in a definitive thematic catalog, which has yet to be prepared.

The *Works of Giuseppe Verdi* (WGV), co-published by the University of Chicago Press and Casa Ricordi, began with the publication of *Rigoletto* in 1983; by the beginning of the Verdi commemorative year 2001, editions of nine operas and the Requiem had been issued. This source-critical edition follows a “middle-of-the-road” editorial philosophy, intended to present a text based on a primary source that is clear and easy to read for both performers and scholars.¹³ Many volumes rely on the composer’s autograph score as the primary source. In his later operas, however, Verdi often made revisions in proofs for the printed orchestral score and parts after completing the autograph score; for these works, therefore, the first printed full score typically supersedes the autograph score as the primary source. In the case of *Don Carlos*, where the composer made numerous excisions and revisions during rehearsals preceding the premiere, the editor has opted to reconstruct the version presented at the first performance as the primary source.¹⁴ The WGV provides references to alternative readings from qualified secondary sources, corrects errors that crept into earlier editions, and standardizes discrepancies from part to part in such areas as articulation, rhythm, and dynamics. Each volume contains a historical introduction and a discussion of editorial issues relating to that particular work, published in both English and Italian, and a critical commentary, published as a separate volume in English alone.

The need for authoritative source-critical editions of Verdi’s correspondence was a task equal in importance to the musical scores, for the composer’s voluminous exchange of letters contains invaluable insights relating to the genesis and aesthetic conception of his works, compositional process, performance practice, reception, and business transactions with theatres, publishers, and others. Mario Medici and Marcello Conati issued the Verdi–Boito correspondence in 1978 as the first complete letter exchange to be published in a source-critical edition. A multi-volume edition of the Verdi–Ricordi correspondence started in 1988, and editions of correspondence with other significant figures, such as librettists Salvatore Cammarano and Antonio Somma and the French music publisher Escudier, have recently been or soon will be published.

The 1970s initiated a marked increase in both the quantity and the quality of Verdi dissertations, and in many cases their authors subsequently became leading authorities on their topic. These include, among others, David Lawton’s investigation of tonality and drama in early Verdi (Berkeley, 1973), David Rosen’s examination of the source materials for the Requiem (Berkeley, 1976), James Hepokoski’s analysis of the autograph score of *Falstaff* (Harvard, 1979), and Roger Parker’s study of Verdi’s early career (London, 1981). This trend has continued in recent years with important new dissertations on individual works – for example, Roberta

Montemorra Marvin's investigation of the genesis and reception of *I masnadieri* (Brandeis, 1992) – as well as dissertations that focus on broader historical or analytical issues: Markus Engelhardt's examination of choruses in Verdi's early operas (Würzburg, 1986), Elizabeth Hudson's investigation of narrative in Verdi's dramaturgy (Cornell, 1993), Teresa Klier's analysis of Verdi's orchestration (Würzburg, 1995), David Gable's inquiry into mode mixture and lyric form (Chicago, 1997), and Andreas Giger's analysis of the role of French influences on the development of Verdi's melodic style (Indiana, 1999). This stream of new research by doctoral students provides solid evidence of a rising new generation of Verdi scholars. A similar trend, especially during the last decade, can be seen in *tesi di laurea* from Italian universities.

During the last two decades, the musicological literature on Verdi has grown by leaps and bounds, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Nowhere can this be better seen than in the ongoing bibliographies published by Marcello Conati in each issue of *Studi verdiani*. These annual bibliographies have sometimes featured well over 200 items, encompassing books, articles, theses and dissertations, and scholarly essays written for performances. For researchers who need more detailed information about the most significant secondary literature, I have provided a selective annotated bibliography of more than 1,000 sources published to ca. 1993 in my *Giuseppe Verdi: A Guide to Research* (1998). The *Verdi Handbuch*, an important new reference work edited by Anselm Gerhard and Uwe Schweikert, appeared in 2001. Short chapters cover a broad range of topics, including individual works, convention and innovation in Verdi's work (including a discussion of librettos, versification, voice and role types, compositional process, visual aspects, and performance practice), and reception. Each chapter includes a substantial bibliography, supplemented by a more general, selective bibliography at the end of the volume.

The preceding chapters in this *Companion* illustrate the main areas of current research about Verdi and summarize recent thinking by scholars in each of those areas. Among biographies and surveys of his life and works, Julian Budden's *The Operas of Verdi*, first published between 1973 and 1981, has become the standard survey of Verdi's operas in English for musical connoisseurs, as well as an important point of departure by researchers probing more deeply into issues of musical style. Budden has also provided a concise single-volume generalist biography in the *Master Musician* series. John Rosselli's *Verdi*, published in 2000, deftly interweaves biography with historical and cultural issues such as the changing conception of the opera composer as an artist, the shift toward performing repertory works rather than new or recent operas, new publishing practices, and issues regarding copyright and censorship. Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, author of the biographical

chapter in this *Companion*, has furnished the most imposing new biography (1993), encompassing nearly 1,000 pages. Her volume amasses a plethora of new details culled from archives or little-known sources about Verdi's life and business affairs, particularly during his early years. A richly illustrated but scarcer volume by the same author, *Verdi: Il grande gentleman del Piacentino* (1992), reproduces in Italian translation Hercules Cavalli's 1867 biography of the composer, now extremely rare. Two recent winners of the Parma Rotary Club Prize will soon publish valuable studies that focus on Verdi's early life and career: *Verdi the Student – Verdi the Teacher* by Roberta Montemorra Marvin and *Verdi filarmonico e maestro dei Filarmonici bussetani* by Dino Rizzo. Several important studies have focused on Verdi's cultural milieu, among them David Kimbell's *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism* (1981), Marzio Pieri's lavishly illustrated *Verdi: L'immaginario dell'ottocento* (1981), and Daniele Tomasini's splendid *La cultura umanistica e letteraria di Giuseppe Verdi* (1997). As shown in the second and third chapters of this *Companion*, Verdi's cultural, musical, and political milieu offers particularly fertile ground for future study.

An even greater explosion has occurred among historical and analytical studies devoted to individual works, fueled in part by preparations for the complete critical edition of the music. Significant milestones include the *Bollettini* issued by the Parma Institute, each volume of which devotes hundreds of pages to a single opera: *Ballo, Forza, Rigoletto*, and *Ernani*. The Institute's *Quaderni* offer more modest contributions, mostly on lesser-known works: *Il corsaro, Jérusalem, Stiffelio*, the Mass for Rossini, and *Aida*. Several international congresses have focused on individual operas, including *Don Carlos, Les vêpres siciliennes, Simon Boccanegra, Ernani*, and *Stiffelio*. While Verdi's operas have dominated both performances and critical studies of his music, during the last decades researchers have turned more frequently to his non-operatic compositions (see chapter 10 of this *Companion*). The Requiem has commanded the most attention, primarily due to the fine research of David Rosen. With little published about other non-operatic compositions, this area will remain an important and fruitful field for scholars in the future.

Analysis has been one of the most rapidly growing and influential areas of Verdi research in recent years, and the four chapters in this volume devoted to case studies of representative operas illustrate the wide variety of approaches that have been taken. Investigations of normative expectations in Ottocento opera as a whole have laid an important foundation for analytical studies of Verdi's music, and the chapters by Scott Balthazar and Emanuele Senici in this *Companion* provide an excellent overview of research in this area. Harold Powers's influential article from 1987, "La solita forma' and the 'Uses of Convention,'" outlined a methodology for a historical approach to

analysis based on the writings of Abramo Basevi and nineteenth-century versification practices. Pierluigi Petrobelli, director of the Parma Institute, has proposed a comprehensive analytical methodology based on mutual interaction among the “systems” of dramatic action, verbal organization, and music.¹⁵ Coupling this approach with historical evidence from Verdi’s writings, he has argued that musico-dramatic unity, embracing all of the constituent elements of opera, was as significant to Verdi as it was to Wagner.¹⁶ Other analytical approaches have focused on tonality, sonority, Schenkerian analysis, and semiotics.¹⁷

Many scholars have scrutinized Verdi’s dramaturgy and issues relating to his librettos and their sources in recent years. Especially significant are the contributions of Gilles de Van, whose writings have elucidated many aspects of Verdi’s dramaturgy and aesthetics. Other areas of exploration have included narrative techniques, the interplay of tragic and comic elements (both in individual works and in the operas as a whole), the influence of French and wider European culture, the relationship of the composer to his librettists, performance gestures in operatic staging, and linguistic features of the librettos.¹⁸ A specialist in the last field, Daniela Goldin Folena, has made a particularly valuable contribution with her “Lessico melodrammatico verdiano” (1995), which evaluates the meaning of terms such as “soggetto,” “argomento,” “dramma,” “programma,” “schizzo,” “selva,” “poesia,” “versi,” and “situazione” that the composer used in reference to his own creative process. Feminist approaches to Verdi’s dramaturgy date at least as far back as A. G. Corrieri’s “Le donne nelle opere di G. Verdi,” published in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* in 1895. Feminism has lately been seen in studies related to individual female characters, such as Elizabeth Hudson’s “Gilda Seduced: A Tale Untold” (1992–93), and in broader surveys, such as dissertations examining Verdi’s writing for lower women’s voices (Naomi Andre, Harvard, 1996) and heroines’ deaths in Verdi’s operas (Michal Grover, Brandeis, 1997). A wide range of more general studies exploring feminism in Ottocento opera have also touched on Verdi.

The composer’s working methods have been an important area of recent inquiry (see chapter 15 of this *Companion*), despite the fact that the earliest layer of primary source material – Verdi’s sketches and continuity drafts – have largely remained unavailable to scholars. A notable exception is *Rigoletto*, for which a facsimile of Verdi’s early working manuscript was published in 1951. During the 1990s, Verdi’s heirs released autograph sketch materials for *Stiffelio*, *La traviata*, and *Un ballo in maschera*. In each case, these materials provided editors of the critical edition with invaluable new information. Materials for *Stiffelio* helped resolve many questions that could not be answered by the autograph full score, which the composer

cannibalized when he revised the work as *Aroldo*. The *Traviata* materials surprised researchers by showing that Verdi did not always prepare a continuity draft of the entire work, as had been assumed from materials for *Rigoletto* and *Stiffelio*: in this case, he worked in smaller, discrete units, generally individual numbers. The Parma Institute and Casa Ricordi have launched a new facsimile series with the sketches for *Traviata*, published with a transcription, critical apparatus, and commentary by Fabrizio Della Seta (2000). A second volume, featuring the composer's drafts for *Un ballo in maschera*, is in preparation. The Institute also published in cooperation with La Scala facsimiles and transcriptions of all Verdi autograph manuscripts (except the Requiem) conserved at the Museo Teatrale alla Scala (2000).

Performance practice studies have also flourished, particularly in the realm of staging and scenography. Researchers have examined a wide variety of archival sources, including engravings in contemporary periodicals, and sketches and paintings by scenery and costume designers. Sources habitually overlooked by scholars until the 1970s were the staging manuals (*disposizioni sceniche* or *livrets de mise-en-scène*) prepared under the direction of the composer for premiere productions of most of his later operas. Michaela Peterseil has provided the most thorough overview of these sources to date, including a comprehensive catalog of all of Ricordi's staging manuals and their known locations, in her article "Die 'Disposizioni sceniche' des Verlags Ricordi: ihre Publikation und ihr Zielpublikum" (1997).

In 1994, the Parma Institute sponsored an international congress devoted to issues of staging and scenography. Essays in the congress report, *La realizzazione scenica dello spettacolo verdiano* (1996), cover subjects such as Verdi's work as scenographer, the influence of French and Italian traditions on staging, staging practices at several individual theatres, assessments of major scenographic designers associated with Verdi's operas, and issues relating to theatrical lighting, costuming, and ballet. In the first essay, "L'esperienza teatrale verdiana e la sua proiezione sulla scena," Pierluigi Petrobelli passionately argues that the visual aspect of Verdi's operas was as important to his conception of a work as the aural aspect. Two essays in the report adopt a practical tone, suggesting ways in which modern producers can utilize historical information about staging and choreography in contemporary productions.¹⁹ More recently, Marcello Conati has provided further evidence for the primacy of Verdi's visual conception of his operas in "Prima le scene, poi la musica" (2000), which focuses on the first version of *Simon Boccanegra*.

William Weaver's *Verdi: A Documentary Study*, published in 1977 and reissued in several translations, was the first important iconographic study of the later twentieth century. It was in the 1990s, however, that Verdi iconography truly blossomed. Foremost among these is the beautifully

illustrated catalog that accompanied a traveling exhibition sponsored by Parma Institute entitled “*Sorgete! Ombre serene!*”: *L’aspetto visivo dello spettacolo verdiano* (1996). During the 1990s, the Ricordi firm led an important initiative in this area with a series entitled *Musica e spettacolo*. Sumptuously illustrated volumes on *Otello*, *Simon Boccanegra*, and *Un ballo in maschera* each include facsimile reproductions of the staging manuals, color reproductions of set and costume designs from important early productions, and engravings first published in nineteenth-century periodicals. An additional volume on *Un ballo in maschera* is in preparation.²⁰

Scholars have begun to probe more deeply into issues of performance practice involving the solo voice, the chorus, and the orchestra. Topics have included singing technique, style, and ornamentation; the size, makeup, and function of the chorus; the size and seating arrangement of the orchestra; the practice of using the *primo violino* as a dual performer-conductor in Verdi’s early operas and the gradual transition to a baton-wielding conductor in the later ones; the adoption of standardized pitch; the types of individual instruments used (particularly in the low brass); and stage bands.²¹ These studies will no doubt exercise a significant influence on performances in years to come. John Eliot Gardiner has already released a recording of the Requiem and the *Quattro pezzi sacri* with the Monteverdi Choir and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique using historical instruments and performance techniques.

Recent studies that challenge conventional thinking provide a significant indication that at the beginning of the twenty-first century Verdi criticism has reached an important new plateau. For example, several authors have questioned the traditional notion that Verdi’s contemporaries read overt political interpretations into his early operas. Roger Parker has proposed that the true political significance of the early operas came not at their premieres but retrospectively, at the end of the nineteenth century, as nostalgic reminiscences of political struggle.²² In his “*Ottocento Opera as Cultural Drama*” (1997), James Hepokoski has challenged the traditional analytical goal of searching for unity or coherence, suggesting that issues of heterogeneity and inner tension might be equally or more important in understanding Verdi’s operas. Fabrizio Della Seta (1994) has proposed that the composer may have intended the term “*parola scenica*” to express a particular idea at a specific moment to his librettist, Antonio Ghislanzoni, rather than as a general principle, as it has often been interpreted. He suggests incorporating conventional thinking about *parola scenica* into a broader conception of *musica scenica*. These and other revisionary studies will no doubt exert a powerful influence on future Verdi criticism by stimulating debate and establishing new paradigms.

Pierluigi Petrobelli recently referred to the many live and recorded performances of Verdi's music that emerged during the last decades of the twentieth century, noting the extremely varied cultural contexts in which this phenomenon occurred.²³ At the same time, musicological activity has rivaled the complexity and energy of a Verdian *stretta* as researchers have opened new avenues of investigation, reassessing and challenging traditional thinking about the composer and his music. Both branches of activity testify to the richness and vitality of Verdi's music and his lasting legacy as a cultural icon. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the future of Verdi studies shines brightly indeed.