

'Repatriating' *Falstaff*: Boito, Verdi and Shakespeare (in Translation)¹

Denise Gallo

Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC

In 1946, W.H. Auden began a series of weekly lectures on Shakespeare's plays at New York's New School for Social Research. Arriving at *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he pronounced it 'a very dull play indeed'. Nevertheless, he allowed, 'We can be grateful for its having been written, because it provided the occasion of Verdi's *Falstaff*, a very great operatic masterpiece'. Having nothing to say about *The Merry Wives*, he played a recording of the opera for the duration of the class.²

Auden hardly stood alone in his opinion that this comedy was no expression of Shakespeare's usual genius. Less than a century after the first editions of *The Merry Wives* were published in the early 1600s, John Dennis prefaced his adaptation of the play, titled *The Comical Gallant, or the Amours of Sir John Falstaffe*, with the declaration that Shakespeare's original was 'not so Despicable as to be Incapable of Improvement' nor 'so admirable, as not to stand in need of any'.³ Although subsequent criticism continued to strike at weaknesses in the work as a whole, the majority of negative rhetoric focused more and more on its characterization of Falstaff. William Hazlitt's disappointment was palpable when he wrote that, although *The Merry Wives* was 'a very amusing play', he would have liked it much better 'if any one else had been the hero of it, instead of Falstaff', therein robbed of the wit, eloquence and 'intellectual ascendancy' he exhibited in the First and Second Parts of *Henry IV*. Contrasting Falstaff's self-inflicted dishonour with the

¹ Portions of this article were read at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society in Los Angeles in 2006 and will be published in a chapter of *The Dramatic Word: Verdi's Libretti from Source to Stage* (London: Toccata Press, forthcoming).

² Arthur C. Kirsch reconstructed Auden's lectures from notes of students who had taken the course, among them Alan Ansen, who became Auden's secretary. For Auden's dismissal of *The Merry Wives*, see Kirsch's *Lectures on Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002): 124.

³ Dennis is credited with introducing the thespian legend that the comedy had been dashed off at the whim of Elizabeth I: 'This Comedy was written at her Command, and by her direction, and she was so eager to see it Acted, that she commanded It to be finished in fourteen days; and was afterwards, as Tradition tells us, very well pleas'd at the Representation' (see the preface of Dennis's *The Comical Gallant, or the Amours of Sir John Falstaffe* (London: A. Baldwin, 1702)). This account later appeared in the first modern edition of Shakespeare's plays, edited by Nicholas Rowe (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1709), and in Charles Gildon's *Remarks on the Works of Shakespeare* (London: Printed for E. Curll and E. Sanger), a spurious addition to the 1710 edition of Rowe. In his commentary on Falstaff's character, William Hazlitt wrote: 'We could have been contented if Shakespear [*sic*] had not been "commanded to shew the knight in love"'. See his *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, 2nd ed. (London: Taylor & Hessey, 1818): 328–30.

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'unconscious indignities' suffered by Don Quixote, Hazlitt claimed that nothing the latter had suffered could match 'the contamination of the buck-basket, the disguise of the fat woman of Brentford, and the horns of Herne the hunter'.⁴ A century later, Arthur Quiller-Couch echoed Hazlitt: this knight simply was not the same 'unimitated' and 'inimitable' man of the *Henriad*. 'Our Falstaff', he wrote defensively of Prince Hal's companion, would never have stooped to intrigues with the Windsor wives.⁵ For Oscar James Campbell, Falstaff suffered a 'humiliating metamorphosis' when he was 'more or less violently forced' into a play of little merit.⁶

Severe judgments of Shakespeare's play migrated into commentaries on Verdi's opera. Julian Budden condemned the comedy as 'untidy' and 'ill-focused', its protagonist a 'pale reflection of his former self'.⁷ Calling *The Merry Wives* 'a second-rate comedy' in which Falstaff was 'scarcely recognizable', Hans Busch viewed the knight as an old fool bested by 'a few spirited provincial women'.⁸ Gary Schmidgall not only blamed the Bard for demeaning 'the charismatic "hill of flesh" of the *Henry* plays', but also took him to task for weakening the play's very structure by 'condoning radical liberties' in the creation of the 1,600-line Quarto, 'a drastic, often confused truncation of the full 2,700 lines' of the Folio: 'A play that could be cut by forty percent and survive', wrote Schmidgall, 'could hardly be called "well made"'.⁹ Here Schmidgall reiterated the commonly cited but erroneous history of these editions. The Quarto, published in 1602 with 18 scenes but no division into acts, was not trimmed from the five-act Folio text; rather the Folio, published some seven years after the playwright's death in 1616, expanded the Quarto with accretions from dubious sources with no true authority. Furthermore, although Shakespeare was known to have taken care with editions of his poetry, there is no evidence that he ever had a hand in later versions of his plays or in their publication.¹⁰

⁴ Hazlitt, *ibid*.

⁵ *Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1917): 124.

⁶ 'The Italianate Background of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', in *Essays and Studies in English and Comparative Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1932): 81–117, 104.

⁷ *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. 3: From Don Carlos to Falstaff*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 420.

⁸ *Verdi's Falstaff in Letters and Contemporary Reviews* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997): xxvii.

⁹ *Shakespeare and Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 321–2. Both the Quarto and Folio texts take their names from a printing format: a quarto is folded twice, producing eight printed pages while a folio is folded in half, allowing for four. Some 21 plays were printed as individual Quartos, some even during Shakespeare's lifetime. The First Folio, published in 1623 as *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, contained 36 plays.

¹⁰ Shakespeare reportedly condemned pirated versions of his theatrical works but did nothing to protect them. Published in 1602 and again in 1619 without his intervention, the Quarto was entitled *A Most pleasaunt/ and excellent conceited Co- / medie, of Syr John Falstaffe, and the / merrie Wives of Windsor. / Entermixed with sundrie / variable and pleasing humors, of Syr Hugh / the Welch Knight, Justice Shallow, and his / wise Cousin M. Slender. / With the swaggering vaine of Auncient / Pistoll, and Corporall Nym*, suggesting a plot involving Falstaff and the wives that incorporated episodes featuring the other characters. This title adds credence to the theory that the Quarto represented a loosely constructed play allowing the addition or deletion of stage business. For early discussions of the publishing history of Shakespeare's works, see W.A. Neilson and A.H. Thorndike's *The Facts About*

For much of the last century, critics generally maintained, along with Auden, that the best use made of Shakespeare's flawed play was Verdi's opera.¹¹ Although the composer received the lion's share of praise for his musical setting, special credit for improvements to the original went to Arrigo Boito. Specifically, the librettist was acclaimed for taking its mundane prose dialogue, bettering it with lines from the *Henriad*,¹² and then embellishing it with allusions to masterpieces of Renaissance Italian literature. He also has been praised for remedying Shakespeare by removing the unsuitable Quickly from the role of Queen of the Fairies and bestowing it more appropriately on Nannetta, Anne Page's operatic counterpart. Perhaps most significant, Boito has been heralded for actually besting the Bard by writing a sonnet, 'Dal labbro il canto estasiato vola', for the aria Fenton sings at the opening of the second part of Act III.¹³ In addition to marvelling at the unorthodox use of such a verse, scholars – both in literature and music history – have cited its text as an example of the librettist's extraordinary grasp of Shakespeare's poetic idiom, likening it to 'If I profane with my unworthiest hand', the sonnet embedded in the lovers' dialogue in Act I, scene v of *Romeo and Juliet*. Doubtless one must acknowledge Boito's genius in crafting *Falstaff's* rich libretto, but an examination of the earliest published editions of the play and, more important, of contemporary nineteenth-century translations consulted by both composer and librettist revises the narrative of the libretto's conception and design.

Shakespeare (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913): 136; and Peter Augustin Daniel's introduction to William Griggs' photo-lithographic facsimile of the 1602 Quarto of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (London: W. Griggs, 1888): v–xix.

¹¹ Just shy of 30 years after the premiere of *Falstaff*, George van Santvoord, editor of the 1922 Yale *Shakespeare* edition of *The Merry Wives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), noted operas based on the comedy, citing Michael Balfe's *Falstaff* (1838) and Otto Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (1849). He then concluded, 'The greatest of the operatic versions of the play is Verdi's *Falstaff*' (125). Pre-dating Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Sir John in Love* by two years, his list nevertheless failed to include Antonio Salieri's *Falstaff* (1799).

¹² Verdi and Boito's correspondence during the planning stages of *Falstaff* confirms that both were familiar with the knight's every appearance in Shakespeare: 'Before reading your sketch', Verdi wrote to Boito on 6 July 1889, 'I wanted to reread the *Merry Wives*, the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V ...*'. ('Prima di leggere il vostro schizzo ho voluto rileggere le *Allegre Comari*, le due parti dell' *Enrico IV*, e l'*Enrico V ...*.) Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's. William Weaver's translations of Verdi and Boito's letters may be found in *The Verdi–Boito Correspondence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), originally published as *Carteggio Verdi–Boito*, ed. Marcello Conati and Mario Medici (Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1978). The Italian texts of correspondence throughout the present article are transcribed from the latter. Although Falstaff does not appear in *Henry V*, his death is described in Act II, scene iii by Pistol's wife, the Hostess. Further to Boito's reliance on Shakespeare, James Hepokoski has suggested that some lines in the libretto may have been inspired by *The Comedy of Errors* and *As You Like It*. For a comprehensive discussion of Boito's borrowings, see Hepokoski's *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 33–4.

¹³ For discussions of the sonnet, see Emanuele Senici, "'Se potissimo tornare da capo': A Response to Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon", in *Verdi 2001: Proceedings of the International Conference, Parma–New York–New Haven, 24 January–1 February 2001*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Marco Marica, 2 vols consecutively paginated (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2003): 937–43, and idem, 'Verdi's *Falstaff* at Italy's Fin de Siècle', *The Musical Quarterly* 85 (2001): 274–310.

The Shakespeare Verdi and Boito Knew

Verdi's wife, Giuseppina Strepponi, was able to read English, but the composer was not. Therefore, although Verdi claimed to have enjoyed Shakespeare from his 'earliest youth', his understanding came solely from translations.¹⁴ Of the contemporary Italian editions, Verdi owned those by Carlo Rusconi and Giulio Carcano, which, as Andrew Porter has noted, may still be found where the composer always kept them: at his bedside.¹⁵ Rusconi's *Teatro completo di Shakespeare tradotto dall'originale inglese in prosa italiana* saw nearly a dozen editions. Rather than exact reprintings, though, Rusconi continued to revise his earlier attempts. In the case of *The Merry Wives*, the title alone went through three iterations: *Le allegre comari di Windsor* (1838, 1841 and 1858 editions), *Le allegre femmine di Windsor* (1853) and *Le allegre spose di Windsor* (1878). 'Comari' translates variously, implying a close friendship or familial (albeit not blood) relationship. The second refers to the characters as 'femmine' or 'women', while the last uses 'spose' or 'wives', a literal translation of the Shakespeare. Another of Rusconi's earnest efforts to respect the Shakespearean source is seen in his decision to modify early versions in order to replicate some of the play's linguistic humour. In the first three editions, the Welshman Evans speaks in proper Italian: 'Pace ve ne prego! Intendiamoci: vi sono tre arbitri a questo litigio: una è messer Page, *fidelicet*, mister Page; poi io stesso, *fidelicet*, io stesso; il terzo è finalmente la mia ostessa della Giarrettiera'. By 1878, Rusconi had opted to mimic Shakespeare's mockery of Evans's accent: 'Pace, prego! Fetete, appiamo tre ciutici per lite; uno Pace, *fitelicet*, mister Page; poi io, *fitelicet* io; poi mia ostessa Ciarrettiera'.¹⁶ It proved impossible, though, for Rusconi to be completely accurate in the imposing task of translating idiomatic Elizabethan

¹⁴ See Verdi's letter to Léon Escudier of 28 April 1865, cited in *Verdi's 'Macbeth': A Sourcebook*, ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984): 119 (cited in part in n. 27 below); the entire text of the letter may also be found in *Giuseppe Verdi: Lettere, 1835–1900*, ed. Michele Porzio (Milan: Mondadori, 2000): 166.

¹⁵ Another translator was Michele Leoni. In addition to a collected edition published between 1819 and 1822 as *Tragedie di Shakespeare*, the following plays appeared as individual volumes: *Julius Caesar* (1881 and 1815), *Romeo and Juliet* (1814), *Hamlet* (1814), *Richard III* (1815), *The Tempest* (1815), *Macbeth* (1815), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1818) and *Othello* (1814, 1823 and 1825). Leoni did not translate *The Merry Wives*; given his penchant for translating into poetry, he must have ignored it because its text is primarily in prose. In addition to Rusconi and Carcano, William Weaver noted that Verdi also owned an illustrated Shakespeare in English, edited by Charles Knight (1852), as well as François-Victor Hugo's translations, whose importance to *Falstaff* will be explored shortly. For discussions of the translators, see Weaver's 'Verdi, Shakespeare, and the Libretto' (144–8); Francesco Degrada's 'Observations of the Genesis of Verdi's *Macbeth*' (156–73); and Andrew Porter's 'Verdi and the Italian Translations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*' (351–5), in *Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook*. Specific references to the translations of Shakespeare used for *Falstaff* may also be found in Hepokoski, *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff*.

¹⁶ Evans, called Sir Hugh in the 1602 Quarto, has the following speech in Act I, scene i: 'The matter is pud [put] to arbitrarmts. The first man is M. Page, videlicet [fidelicet], M. Page. The second is my selfe, videlicet my selfe. And the third and last man, is mine host of the gartyr'. In the Folio text, the character, then called Evans, says: 'Peace, I pray you: now let vs vnderstand: there is three Vmpires in this matter, as I vnderstand; that is, Master Page (fidelicet Master Page,) & there is my selfe, (fidelicet my selfe) and the three party is (lastly, and finally) mine Host of the Garter'. Most modern translations render the speech, with its linguistic mockery of the Welsh Evans, as found the Quarto.

English into Italian, as is reflected vividly in his annotations. When in the Latin lesson in Act IV, scene i Quickly misunderstands 'pulcher' for 'polecats' – a slang term for harlots – Rusconi reproduces the word as 'poulcats' and translates it as 'parola che significa piccoli gatti' – 'a word meaning little cats'.¹⁷ Moreover, it is clear that his translations were guided by the principles of semantics rather than linguistics. In the preface to his 1838 edition, he rationalized the decision to translate Shakespeare into prose, a task made easier in *The Merry Wives* by the preponderance of prose dialogue. Because English and Italian were such disparate tongues, he feared that he would be unable to approach the meaning in poetry or, worse yet, would fail in any attempt to duplicate the beauty of the sounds of Shakespeare's language. Rusconi's inclusion in his 1853 edition of a translation – clearly based on Giovanni Gherardini's rendering – of an essay by German Shakespeare translator August Wilhelm von Schlegel seems to go even one step farther – *justifying* Shakespeare's own decision to eschew poetry in this play: 'Of all of Shakespeare's works, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the one that most approaches the genre of pure comedy. This play is grounded completely in the portrayal of ancient English customs Almost all of the characters are comic; and the dialogue, except for two brief loves scenes, is always in prose'.¹⁸ Schlegel's likening of the plot to 'Molières Schule der Frauen' (*L'École des femmes*) perhaps suggests why, for the second edition, Rusconi translated the title as *Le allegre femmine*.¹⁹ Rusconi's stated mission, then, was to render as completely as possible the author's meaning while 'Italianizing' each word, or as he wrote, 'italianizzarlo'.

The other translator whose work Verdi knew was his friend Giulio Carcano. The volumes in his *Opere di Shakspeare [sic]*, published between 1843 and 1852, were followed by illustrated editions in 1875 and 1882, and translations published as the *Teatro scelto* in 1858, 1860 and 1887. Carcano's versions of Shakespearean plays, rendered into poetry, were routinely employed for performances. Italian editions of *Otello*, for example, were published in association with 1866 and 1875 productions at Paris's Théâtre Italien, and his translation of *Macbeth* was issued to coincide with its stage debuts in Paris, Madrid and London. In homage to Goldoni's comic classic *Le donne di buon umore*, Carcano titled his edition *Le donne allegre di Windsor (The Merry Women of Windsor)*. Just as Rusconi attempted to 'Italianize' his translations, Carcano claimed to 'dar veste italiana' ('adorn [the words] in Italian') but still craft a text that was worthy of a masterful work of

¹⁷ See Rusconi's *Teatro Completo di Shakspeare [sic] voltata in prosa italiana*, Vol. VI (Torino: Cugini Pomba e Comp. Editori, 1852–53): 51, n. 1.

¹⁸ Schlegel's essay on Shakespeare was published in Volume 2 of his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1809). The original text reads: 'Unter allen Stücken Shakspeares nähert sich dieses am meisten der Gattung des reinen Lustspiels: es spielt ganz in damaligen englischen Sitten ... fast alle Charaktere sind komisch, und der Dialog, ein paar kurze Liebesscenen ausgenommen, ist in Prosa geschrieben' (284). Rusconi seems to have borrowed liberally from Gherardini's translation of Schlegel, *Corso di letteratura drammatica* (Milan: Giusti, 1817), making only minor changes. For example, Rusconi translated the above-cited passage as follows (Gherardini's choice of words appears in braces): 'Fra tutte le opere di Shakspeare [sic], *Le Allegre Femmine di Windsor* {*Le donne di buon umori di Windsor*} è quella che più s'accosta al genere della pura commedia. Questo dramma si fonda {volge} interamente sulla dipintura degli antichi costumi inglesi Quasi tutti i caratteri sono comici; e il dialogo, tranne due scene d'amore brevissime, è sempre in prosa' (73–4).

¹⁹ Gherardini referred to Molière's play by the original French title.

literature. So, for *The Merry Wives*, he strictly avoided any imitation of dialects or accents. In his depiction of Evans, for example, he specifically stated that he rejected the character's 'affettazione ridicola' ('ridiculous affectation') of substituting 'p' for 'b'. Many of the language jokes such as Quickly's outrageous mispronunciations were dismissed as 'scherzi, bisticci, e idiotismi, pressochè intraducibili' ('untranslatable jokes and idiocies').

Boito had access to the same translations used by Verdi but had definite preferences. While working on *Otello*, in a letter to Verdi he explained an uncharacteristic change of heart toward Rusconi's efforts. His rationale for opting in that instance to use Rusconi is telling, for not only did it justify this choice but it also allowed him to sermonize on the roles he and Verdi played in adapting a translated source for an opera. A translator, the librettist opined, had a duty to reproduce the original strictly; hence, the translator was 'a slave'. The adapter, or 'illustratore', who transformed the work into a different art form, was 'free'.²⁰ Despite this anomalous agreement to employ an 'adulterated' text, though, Boito preferred working with a source that he deemed far more accurate, the French translations of Victor Hugo's son, François-Victor. Indeed, scholars have commented that the librettist's ample notations in his copies of Hugo demonstrate intense study. Published as *Les Oeuvres Complètes de W. Shakespeare* between 1859 and 1866 (with a second edition issued between 1864 and 1873), Hugo's translations also featured extensive commentaries.²¹ The 1873

²⁰ The letter, written on 10 May 1886, boldly indicates how Boito was willing to rationalize using what he considered a bad translation, a point Verdi, in correspondence Boito had received that day, had called to his attention as (in Boito's words) a 'caso di coscienza' (a case of conscience): 'What I am about to say seems blasphemous. I prefer Rusconi's phrase. It expresses important things that the text [Shakespeare] does not, reveals Jago's evil soul, Otello's good faith and announces to all who hear it a sinister tragedy. Because we had to give up the marvellous scenes that take place in Venice, in which these sentiments are expressed, Rusconi's phrase becomes truly useful. My opinion is to save it as it is translated. That doesn't alter the fact that Rusconi was wrong to adulterate Shakespeare's idea. The fidelity of a translator must be truly scrupulous but those who transform a translated work into their own art form may, in my opinion, be less scrupulous. He who translates has an obligation not to change the literal meaning of the words; the mission of one who artistically transforms it is to preserve its spirit. The former is a slave, the latter is free. Rusconi's phrase is not faithful [to Shakespeare's text], that is a fault of the translator, but it fits well enough into the spirit of the tragedy and the adapter must take full advantage of it. Proceeding with that rationale, we arrive at the following result: *By adopting Rusconi's wrong, we are right*'. ('Quella che sto per scrivere pare una bestemmia. Preferisco la frase di Rusconi. Esprime maggiori cose che non esprima il testo, rivela il male animo di Jago, la buona fede d'Otello ed annuncia a chi l'ode tutta una tragedia di insidie. Per noi che abbiamo dovuto rinunciare alle mirabili scene che hanno luogo a Venezia, dove sono accennati quei sentimenti, la frase del Rusconi torna utilissima. Il mio parere è di conservarla come ce la dà il traduttore. Ciò non toglie che il Rusconi abbia avuto torto d'adulterare un pensiero di Shakespeare. La fedeltà d'un traduttore dev'essere assai scrupolosa, ma la fedeltà di chi illustra colla propria arte l'opera d'un'arte diversa può, a parer mio, essere meno scrupolosa. Chi traduce ha il dovere di non mutare la lettera: chi illustra ha la missione d'interpretare lo spirito. L'una è schiavo, l'altro è libero. La frase di Rusconi è infedele, questo è un torto per un traduttore, ma entra assai bene nello spirito della tragedia e di questa virtù l'illustratore deve fare il proprio vantaggio. Procedendo con codesto ragionamento arriviamo al seguente risultato: *Noi adottando il torto di Rusconi abbiamo ragione*'.) *Carteggio Verdi-Boito*, Vol. 1, 104.

²¹ Michele Girardi has demonstrated Boito's use of Hugo's translations of the Henry plays in the creation of the character of Falstaff in 'Fonti francesi del *Falstaff*: Alcuni aspetti

edition of *Les Joyeuses épouses de Windsor* included an essay that not only traced the history of the play and its early editions but attempted to justify Falstaff's actions in this play with episodes in the *Henriad*. Hugo's claim that the Folio was the definitive work 'retouched' or revised by Shakespeare himself illustrates the tradition of confusion and error surrounding its authenticity.²² Boito also owned three English editions of Shakespeare, but apparently made limited use of them, his skills in that language being little beyond some sense of its pronunciation.²³ Far beyond listing the contents of their bookshelves, a discussion of Verdi's and Boito's Shakespearean libraries has greater significance in the genesis of *Falstaff* than scholarship traditionally has admitted. An examination of these texts demonstrates that it was not simply Shakespeare but rather these translations that crafted much of the libretto. Furthermore, each translator's commentary provided Verdi and Boito with enough essential details to distance Shakespeare from their work in favour of true 'Italian' sources.

Falstaff's 'clear Tuscan' Source

Even though French music critic Camille Bellaigue had not attended the premiere of *Falstaff*, he ventured an initial impression of the work after examining the score Verdi had sent to him. Basing his comments on a complete reading of only the first scene and a glimpse at what followed, he praised the composer for a 'dazzling' opera; furthermore, he deemed *Falstaff* a 'chef d'oeuvre du génie latin', a masterpiece of Latin genius that could unite French and Italian audiences – oft at odds in their adjudication of the musical stage – by their common cultural ancestry.²⁴ Boito agreed in a response to Bellaigue on 16 February 1893:

In your letter you touch, with admirable clairvoyance and the subtle pointing of your finger, the very essence of the work. You say: *Here is the true lyric drama (or comedy), modern and Latin*. But what you cannot imagine is the immense intellectual joy this Latin lyric comedy produces on stage. It is a real outburst of grace, power, and gaiety. By the miracle of sounds, Shakespeare's dazzling farce is returned to its clear Tuscan source of 'Ser Giovanni Fiorentino'.²⁵

di drammaturgia musicale', in *Arrigo Boito*, ed. Giovanni Morelli (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1994): 395–430.

²² '... l'oeuvre définitivement retouchée par le maître'. See *Oeuvres complètes de W. Shakespeare*, Tome 14, *Les Farces*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Pagnerre, 1873): 12.

²³ See James Hepokoski's *Giuseppe Verdi: Otello* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 24. Federica Riva, Music Librarian of the Conservatorio di Musica 'Arrigo Boito', Parma, graciously provided a list of Boito's Shakespeare editions housed in that library's collections. Among them are two editions of the Hugo translations, one 16-volume set published in Paris by Lemerre (1873) and the other a 15-volume second edition published in Paris by Pagnerre (1865–73). The three English editions are *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Leipzig: Baumgartner, 1854); *The Works of Shakespeare*, reprinted from the early edition (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1883); and the 13 volumes of *The Handy Volume Shakespeare* (London: Bradbury, Agnew & Co, n.d.). A first edition of the Pagnerre Hugo translation, with annotations in Boito's hand, is housed in the Museo Teatrale della Scala.

²⁴ See Bellaigue's letter to Verdi written on 12 February 1893 in *Carteggio Verdi-Boito*, Vol. 2, 302. A translation appears in Busch, *Verdi's Falstaff in Letters and Contemporary Reviews*, 361.

²⁵ 'Dans votre lettre vous touchez avec une admirable clairvoyance, et du fin bout de votre doigt, à l'essence même de l'oeuvre. Vous dites: *Voilà le vrai drame (ou la comédie)*

After extolling Bellaigue for discerning *Falstaff's* Romance origins, Boito clearly indicated that the work's true source, Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il pecorone*, was Tuscan (that is, Italian). Shakespeare's role is diminished to having merely recognized the potential in the comedy, then borrowing and exploiting it for *The Merry Wives*. With intense enthusiasm, Boito stressed the repatriation of the story through the 'miracle' of Verdi's music (that is, Italian music). Verdi re-emphasized the tale's heritage in an interview with journalist Jules Huret for *Le Figaro* the following year:

'Do you know what *Falstaff* is?' [Verdi] said. 'It is nothing other than an ancient Italian comedy, written in a very ancient language long before Shakespeare! Shakespeare took the material and added the character of Falstaff, who in the original comedy was a mere village braggart Boito wanted to return to the original source, and translated directly from the ancient Italian language, which was far from easy'.²⁶

On the surface, Verdi's suggestion that Shakespeare pilfered the plot and inserted Falstaff into it seems harsh and indeed peculiar, given his reverence for the playwright.²⁷ Just as striking as his comments about Shakespeare are Verdi's descriptions of Fiorentino's protagonist as a 'village braggart' and of Boito's imposing task of translating the story's 'ancient language', both of which suggest that the composer himself either was not familiar with Fiorentino's work or that he had chosen to misrepresent it.

Roger Parker has noted that these 'remarkable efforts' to insist on *Falstaff's* Italian antecedents are indicative of Verdi's final period when his writings demonstrated a 'preoccupation with ... the ethnic purity of his national culture'.²⁸ Even the *persona* Verdi created for himself, Italy's gentleman farmer/man of the arts, was part of a crusade against the foreign influences he perceived as a challenge to the heritage of Italian music and a threat to its future. In the composer's later years, he became 'a staunchly conservative cultural nationalist'; thus, *Falstaff* needed to be proclaimed Italian since it had become for Verdi 'a kind of manifesto, an ideological statement, an attempt to influence the story of

lyrique, moderne et latin. Mais ce que vous ne pouvez pas vous imaginer, c'est l'immense joie intellectuelle que cette comédie lyrique latine, produit sur la scène. C'est un vrai débordement de grâce, de force et de gaîté. L'éclatante farce de Shakespeare est reconduite par le miracle des sons, à sa claire source toscane de "Ser Giovanni Fiorentino". See *Lettere di Arrigo Boito*, ed. Raffaello De Rensis (Rome: Società Editrice di 'Novissima', 1932): 317. Although this letter has previously been dated April 1894, De Rensis notes that dating erroneously links the letter to the premiere of *Falstaff* that month at the Opéra-Comique.

²⁶ From 'Deux interviews – Giuseppe Verdi', *Le Figaro*, 5 April 1894, cited here in Richard Stokes's translation from *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, ed. Marcello Conati (London: Victor Gollanz, Ltd, 1984): 258 (originally published in Italian as *Interviste e incontri con Verdi* (Milan: Edizioni il Formichiere: 1980).

²⁷ Thirty years earlier (28 April 1865), Verdi had expressed this esteem while defending the French revision of his opera *Macbeth* to Escudier: when a reviewer criticized Verdi's comprehension of the source play, the composer responded that to say 'that I don't know, don't understand, and don't feel Shaspeare [sic] – no, by God, no. He is a favorite poet of mine, whom I have had in my hands from my earliest youth, and whom I read and reread constantly'; cited from *Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 119.

²⁸ See 'Falstaff and Verdi's Final Narratives', in *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): 100–125, 102.

Italian opera'.²⁹ Boito also had sufficient motive for emphasizing the native origin of his libretto since, in addition to compositional activities that involved him in the musical stage and its politics, his literary career placed him in the midst of the post-Unification campaign to develop a shared national culture, part of which depended on the glorification of an 'Italian' language. Defining their heritage through masterpieces such as the *Decamerone* and *La divina commedia*, literati had urged that this common tongue be crafted from 'antiche glorie' of written rather than spoken language.³⁰ These efforts paralleled chauvinistic attempts to reject foreign musical influences. The chief source of the opera, however, was all too obvious. Disregarding Verdi's crusade to credit *Il pecorone*, French reviewers gave sole credit to Shakespeare after *Falstaff's* premiere on 18 April 1894 at the Opéra-Comique.³¹ No matter how the composer and librettist worked to promote an Italian source for *Falstaff*, it was the Shakespearean connection that would draw attention and garner them praise, especially because, in the opinion of critics and scholars, they had succeeded in salvaging the character of Sir John from a weak reincarnation in *The Merry Wives*. Had the reviewers known about *Il pecorone* – a distinct possibility if they had read the essay in Hugo's translation of the play – they would have recognized it as little more than a minor literary footnote.

Il pecorone was written in 1378, slightly a quarter of a century after the *Decamerone*, the collection of *novelle* that clearly influenced its format and structure. It was not published until 1558, however, at which time its author, referred to as 'Ser Giovanni' in manuscript sources, was given the appellation 'Fiorentino', recognizing him as a native of Florence.³² The narrators of the tales are a nun named Saturnina, whose reputed beauty prompted another Florentine, Aurette, to enter the monastery in Dovadola to be near her. The two fall in love and arrange to spend time together, entertaining each other daily with the stories that constitute *Il pecorone*. Saturnina's first rendering, the second story of the first day, is about a young student named Bucciolo (or Bucciolo), who, having completed his studies in canon law, seeks further instruction from his master in a new subject. Together, they agree upon the science of winning the love of a woman. Each day, Bucciolo is assigned a task; when he completes

²⁹ Ibid., 111. See also Senici's two discussions, cited in n. 13 above.

³⁰ Mario Pozzi, *Lingua e cultura del Cinquecento*, Vol. 7 of *Quaderni del Circolo filologico-linguistico padovano* (Padua: Liviana, 1975): 223–5. The precursor to this linguistic movement was Alessandro Manzoni, whose *I promessi sposi* was recognized as the first work of modern literature in a unified Italian language. Manzoni's own writings on the implementation of Tuscan as the dialect of choice included *Sulla lingua italiana* (1846) and *Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla* (1868). Of course, Verdi's dedication of his *Messa da Requiem* to Manzoni eloquently speaks to the composer's admiration for his compatriot's place in Italian cultural history.

³¹ On 23 April 1894, *Le Temps* reported the sources for *Falstaff* as 'les Joyeuses Commères de Windsor et les scènes de la tragédie d'Henri IV ...'. In addition, the unnamed reviewer deemed that 'a good portion of the success belongs to Shakespeare' ('une bonne part du succès appartient à Shakespeare'). For more of this review, see *La réception de Verdi en France: Anthologie de la Presse 1845–1894*, ed. Hervé Gartioux (Weisberg: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2001): 391–3.

³² Although Ser Giovanni's identity remains unknown, one significant biographical detail can be gleaned from his introduction to *Il pecorone*: as a result of the *ciompi* uprising in July of 1378, he lived as an exile in Dovadola, some 93 kilometres to the north-east of Florence. That he was an exile, however, associates him with the *Signoria* or with other powerful guilds temporarily ousted by the *ciompi*, who themselves were ejected by the end of August. Thus, Fiorentino's stay in Dovadola may have been rather short.

it, he dutifully returns to his teacher to report the outcome. The maestro soon discerns that the subject of the experiment is his own wife, so, to trap the two lovers, he follows Bucciolo to his next tryst. His quick-witted wife thwarts him by hiding her suitor beneath a mound of laundry, foreshadowing Falstaff's similar concealment from the jealous Ford in both the stage play and the opera.

Enzo Esposito's edition of *Il pecorone*, based on an early copyist's manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, presents this relevant episode as follows:

La donna era al fuoco e sedevasi con Bucciolo, e sentendo bussare l'uscio, subitamente si pensò che fosse il marito, e prese Bucciolo e nascoselo sotto u [sic] monte di panni di bucato, i quali non erano ancora rasciutti, e per lo tempo gli avea ragunati in su una tavola appiè d'una finestra.³³

The same passage in the 1565 edition more closely reflects the orthography of the Florentine dialect:

La donna era à sedere al fuoco con Bucciolo & sentendo bussar l'uscio subitamente si pensò che fosse il maestro, & presse Bucciolo, & nascoselo sotto un monte di panni di buccato, i quali non erano anchora rasciutti, & per lo tempo gli haveva ragunati in su una tavola a pie d'una finestra.³⁴

Esposito has modernized some of the spelling, but the ample annotations in his edition suggest that he has maintained the vocabulary and grammatical context of the Florentine codex. Although the teacher in the first excerpt is referred to as 'il marito' and in the second as 'il maestro', no major linguistic or narrative changes distinguish the two passages. More significant, their proximity to modern Italian belies Verdi's assertion that Boito's task of translating an 'ancient Italian language' was difficult.

The popularity of *Il pecorone* resulted in the publication of numerous editions up through the last century. Esposito cautions, however, that it was frequently emended to suit subsequent audiences.³⁵ There is no evidence that in any of the

³³ 'The woman was seated at the hearth with Bucciolo and hearing knocking at the door immediately thought that it was her husband, and took Bucciolo and hid him under a pile of laundry, which was still not dry, and which she had for the time being put on a table at the foot of a window'. Ms. II, IV, 139 (Magliabechiano VI. 38) served as the primary basis for Esposito's edition. See *Ser Giovanni, Il Pecorone*, Vol. I of *Classici italiani minori* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1974): 27.

³⁴ *Il pecorone di Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, nel quale si contengono cinquanta novelle antiche, belle d'invention et di stile* ([Florence]: In Vinegia, appresso Domenico Farri, 1565). Since Esposito lists the two editions together (see his introduction on xlii), one may assume that this one is identical to the 1560 edition by the same publisher.

³⁵ Esposito notes two other copyists' manuscripts of *Il pecorone*, both of which he also consulted for his edition: Codex 85 at the Biblioteca dell'Archivio Storico Civico e Trivulziana, Milan, and Codex Rediano 161 at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence. According to Pina Robuschi Romagnoli, Ser Giovanni's original manuscript was the source of Magliabechiano VI. 38 and Codex 85; Rediano was most likely a copy of Magliabechiano manuscript. See her article 'Ancora sulla struttura del *Pecorone*', in *Studi in onore di Alberto Chiari* (Brescia: Paideia Editore, 1973): 1067–91. Esposito lists other editions published in 1630, 1650, 1740, 1793, 1795, 1804, 1815, 1830, 1832, 1833, 1853, 1866, 1879, 1910 and 1944 (see his introduction, xlii–xlv). The work also was translated and published outside of Italy.

later editions the student was transformed into Verdi's 'village braggart'. As characterized, Bucciolo shares the confidential details of his affair only with his master. Armed with a conscience, he is dismayed that his actions provoked his master's madness and institutionalization (in reality, an outcome engineered by the maestro's wife as a means to save her reputation).

As Marcello Conati has indicated, Verdi exaggerated the importance of *Il pecorone* in the genesis of *Falstaff*.³⁶ In fact, Verdi's and Boito's actual familiarity with the work is questionable; they would not have had to have even seen it because every translator had begun to identify *Il pecorone* as Shakespeare's source. Rusconi noted, 'certain episodes were perhaps suggested to the author from an old translation of the *Pecorone* of Ser Giovanni Fiorentino or from the *Piacevoli notti* of Straparola'.³⁷ As it happens, Rusconi himself would have read of this connection in a footnote in Gherardini's translation of the Schlegel essay: 'In *Il pecorone* by ser Giovanni Fiorentino (Day 1, novella 2), one reads a tale that has many points of comparison with the central intrigue in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*'.³⁸

Carcano, too, notes that one of the tales 'del nostro ser Giovanni Fiorentino' inspired Shakespeare, his claiming the author as 'our ser Giovanni' foreshadowing Verdi and Boito's nationalistic ownership of the source for their opera.³⁹ The most substantial commentary on *Il pecorone*, however, is found in Hugo's introductory essay to *Les Joyeuses épouses de Windsor*. Noting that Shakespeare borrowed the situation of the lover and the jealous husband from Fiorentino's 'roman italien', Hugo recounted the plot in detail. Hugo's awareness of the influence Fiorentino had on Shakespeare is further underscored in the appendix to the volume with *Le Marchand de Venise* in which an entire translation of that play's source, the tale of Giannetto from *Il pecorone*, appears.⁴⁰ Thus, it is entirely possible – indeed highly likely – that Boito read only Hugo's summary of Bucciolo's tale, in turn passing the details on to Verdi. This third-hand knowledge would explain the composer's lack of familiarity with its language and main character. As it happens, Hugo may also have supplied Boito with information for *Otello* as well. The librettist claimed in a letter to Verdi that he had studied the source of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Cinzio Giraldi's 1565 *De gli Hecatommithi*. Hugo had included a translation of the relevant section of that work in the appendix to *La tragédie d'Othello, Le More de Venise*.⁴¹ In the end, though, it is not enough to

³⁶ *Interviste e incontri*, 253–4, n. 15; *Interviews and Encounters*, 263–4, n. 16.

³⁷ 'Alcuni incidenti furono forse suggeriti all'autore da un'antica traduzione del *Pecorone* di Ser Giovanni Fiorentino o dalle *Piacevoli Notti* dello [Giovanni] Straparola'. This note appears in later editions of Rusconi in comments beneath the list of characters; see, for example, *Allegre sponse du Windsor, commedia in cinque atti voltata in prosa italiana di C. Rusconi*, 11th ed. (Roma: Forzana e C., 1878): n.p.

³⁸ 'Nel *Pecorone* di ser Giovanni Fiorentino (gior 1, nov. 2.), leggesi una storiella che ha molta analogia coll'intrigo principale delle *Donne di buon umori di Windsor*' (n. 1, 263). Schlegel does not mention this source.

³⁹ See the *Nota critica* in the 10th edition of Carcano's *Opere di Shakspeare [sic]* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1881): 9.

⁴⁰ Bucciolo's tale is summarized in the Introduction to *Les Farces, Oeuvres complètes de W. Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., Tome 14 (Paris: Pagnerre, 1873): 33–4. 'Les Aventures de Gianetto' is found in Tome 8: 426–8. Before his translation, Hugo notes that *Il pecorone* was first published in Milan in 1558. An English translation appeared in 1755; an abbreviated French translation was published in 1836. Hugo proclaims that his is the first complete version to be published in France.

⁴¹ In Boito's letter to Verdi, 16 May 1886, he suggested that he had done research into the historical source 'dell'*Otello* di Schakespeare [sic]': Cinzio Giraldi's *Ecatomiti*. See letter

demonstrate that the Shakespearean translations Verdi and Boito used provided them with the prototypes on which they would design their campaign to market *Falstaff* as Italian; each source also offered an outline of the play that featured all the 'improvements' for which Boito has long been given credit.

Nannetta as Regina delle Fate

In his study of Verdi's operas, Vincent Godefroy extolled Boito's 'poetic fancy' for making Nannetta rather than Quickly the Queen of the Fairies, a role to which the latter has traditionally been assigned in the play.⁴² Budden waxed eloquent on the matter: 'All praise to Boito for not having followed Shakespeare in making [Quickly] play the Fairy Queen in the last act'.⁴³ The editions of *The Merry Wives* with which these authors were familiar featured Quickly in this odd transformation – but this was not always the casting, especially in some of the early editions. The Quarto did indeed name Quickly to this exalted role: 'Enter Sir Hugh like a Satyre, and boyes drest like Fayries, mistresse Quickly, like the Queene of Fayries' and, throughout the rest of the scene, the Queen's speeches are assigned to 'Quic'. The Folio, however, was vague, its inconsistent abbreviations creating confusion. After the simple direction '[Enter Fairies]', the first speech is assigned to 'Qui', presumably Quickly. However, the next speech given to this same character is preceded by 'Qu', an abbreviation that might just as reasonably have been for Queen. In short, although the Quarto clearly indicated that Quickly takes the role, the Folio's unclear rubrics left the question of who played the queen up to interpretation.

The notion of transforming a character as socially base as Quickly into a metaphor for the reigning monarch has long troubled scholars and editors, especially those who subscribed to Dennis's legend that the play had been requested by Elizabeth herself.⁴⁴ In addition, placing Quickly in this role clearly changes the plan set in motion in the fourth act by Mistress Page (at Act IV, scene iv, lines 51–53 and Act IV, scene iv, line 77) and Fenton (at Act IV, scene vi, line 21), who both state that Anne should play the Queen. In his 1882 edition of the play, William J. Rolfe addressed some of the suppositions that editors still cite today.⁴⁵ Taken from the tradition of the corrupt Quarto, the stage directions, according to some scholars, actually were not references to *characters* but to the *actors* playing those roles. This would suggest that the first line, assigned to 'Quic', would have been delivered by the actor who had just finished playing Quickly; as Queen, his lines then bore the designation 'Qu'. Rolfe went on to propose that when the play was later revised, this scene was rewritten and expanded, and the part of the

73 in *Carteggio Verdi–Boito*, Vol. 1, 101–2. For Hugo's translation, see *Oeuvres complètes de W. Shakespeare*, Tome 5/2: 443–58,

⁴² *The Dramatic Genius of Verdi: Studies of Selected Operas*, Vol. 2 (New York: St Martin's Press, 1977): 319.

⁴³ *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 431.

⁴⁴ See n. 3 above.

⁴⁵ See, for example, the textual notes by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine to *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in *The New Folger Library Shakespeare* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004) and those by Giorgio Melchiori in the *Arden Shakespeare* edition (Walton-on-Thames: EMEA, 2000).

Queen was given more appropriately to Anne Page.⁴⁶ Not all of the play's editors assumed this practice, however. In many versions, Quickly remained Queen. In others that followed the Folio, there appears to be no Queen at all, for Sir Hugh is directed to enter as a Satyr, followed only by 'Quickly, and others, drest like Fairies'.⁴⁷ What is significant in a discussion of *Falstaff* is that this confusion found in English editions did not migrate freely into German, French and Italian translations of Shakespeare; indeed, in all of the editions that Verdi and Boito owned and employed, Anne Page always was designated as Queen:

Rusconi: (Entra sir Ugo Evans vestito da satiro; mistress Quickly e Pistol; Anna Page in abito da regina delle fate ...)

Carcano: Entrano SIR UGO EVANS, travestito da Satiro; la COMARE QUICKLY e PISTOL; ANNA PAGE, travestita da Regina delle Fate... .

Hugo: Entrent Sir HUGH EVANS, déguisé en satyre; PISTOLET, représentant Hobgoblin; ANNE PAGE, vêtue comme la reine des Fées... .

Hugo's famed predecessor, François Guizot, also directed that Anne was to be 'reine des fées' in his translation, and Schlegel followed this tradition as well, with Anne entering 'als Feenkönigin'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, in all of the English editions that Boito owned,⁴⁹ Anne is Queen. Thus, just as it is possible to question Verdi and Boito's first-hand knowledge of *Il pecorone*, one may safely conclude that neither ever knew this scene with any other disposition of characters.

Romeo and Juliet and Boito's Sonnet

Although Shakespeare had marginalized the romance of Fenton and Nannetta's literary ancestors in *The Merry Wives*, Boito chose to celebrate their love, making it the opera's only significant subplot. The flurry of letters between him and Verdi in early July 1889 demonstrates their concern for precisely how the couple should be depicted musically. Initially, both agreed on a *duettino*, but, on 12 July, Boito urged a departure from such convention:

Their love pleases me, it works to make the whole comedy more fresh and substantial. That love must always enliven everything so much so that I would almost like to eliminate the two lovers' duet –

In every scene in which they are together that love is present in its own way.

⁴⁶ This explanation, Rolfe claimed, was introduced into *Merry Wives* editions as early as the 1790 text published by Edmund Malone. See his *Shakespeare's Comedy of the Merry Wives of Windsor* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1882): 164, n. 34. Mowat, Werstine and Melchiori also subscribe to this theory. In addition, Rolfe noted, the direction 'Qu' was used for speeches assigned to Titania, the Fairy Queen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

⁴⁷ One such version, published in 1733, was edited by Lewis Theobald. See Vol. 1 of *The Works of Shakespeare: In Seven Volumes, Collated with the Oldest Copies, and Corrected; With NOTES, Explanatory and Critical* (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, J. Tonson, F. Clay, W. Feales, and R. Wellington): 301.

⁴⁸ Guizot's translation appears in Vol. VI of his *Oeuvres Complètes de Shakspeare* [sic] (Paris: Didier et C^e 1862). Schlegel's translation is *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*, Vol. 7 of *Shakespeares Werke, übersetzt von Schlegel und Tieck* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1867).

⁴⁹ See n. 23 above for Boito's English editions of Shakespeare.

It's there in the second part of Act 1.
 In the second part of Act 2.
 In the first and second parts of the third [act].
 And therefore it's unnecessary to have them sing together in a real duet.

In fact, he continued, their part would be 'even more effective without it' because their love would be like sugar on a cake, sprinkled throughout so as not to dominate but rather to 'freshen and tie together the entire comedy'.⁵⁰ Boito also expressed reservations about including another traditional number: an aria for Fenton. This concession, he wrote, would only 'give the tenor a solo, and that is bad. Do we want to cut it?'⁵¹ Of course, Fenton *did* get an aria: 'Dal labbro il canto estasiato vola'. Written in the form and style of a Petrarchan sonnet, it is perhaps the libretto's greatest curiosity. Some scholarship has suggested that, even though Boito employed a *Trecento* literary form, his true inspiration was the sonnet 'If I profane with my unworthiest hand' in *Romeo and Juliet*.⁵² Given Boito's slim knowledge of English, however, it is questionable that he would have been able to recognize this sonnet within the context of a dramatic dialogue, another claim that begs credence after turning to the translations he knew and used.

Set in iambic pentameter, a Shakespearean sonnet is constructed of three quatrains and a final couplet following the rhyme scheme *abab cdcd efef gg*. More complex, the Petrarchan sonnet has two major sections, the *ottavo* (eight lines) and the *sestetto* (six lines), that in turn are further divided, the *ottavo* into two *quartine* (four lines) and the *sestetto* in two *terzine* (three lines). Set throughout in *endecasillabi*, poetic lines of eleven syllables with the stress on the tenth, the *ottavo's* rhyme scheme is always *abba abba*. The *sestetto's* pattern may vary, but the most common is *cde cde*, the one employed by Boito. Another final element is critical to an understanding of a Petrarch sonnet and, as will be demonstrated, of Verdi's setting of Fenton's aria: the *volta* or 'turn', a line at or near the beginning of the *sestetto* reflecting a dynamic shift in thought, image or tone from the *ottavo*. Although the earliest published examples of Italian sonnets appeared as single units of text in which the only suggestion of a break between sections was the capitalization of the first letter of the initial word of the *sestetto*, by the thirteenth century, sonnets were arranged so that their four sections were perceived as 'distinct members or organs'.⁵³ Therefore, it is significant that Fenton's aria

⁵⁰ 'Quel loro amore mi piace, serve a far più fresca e più solida tutta la commedia. Quell'amore la deve vivificar tutta e tanto e sempre per modo che vorrei quasi quasi eliminare il duetto dei due innamorati – In ogni scena d'insieme quell'amore è presente a modo suo.

È presente nella II^a parte del 1^o Atto.

Nella II^a parte del 2^o atto

Nella I^a e II^a parte del terzo.

È quindi inutile di farli cantare insieme da soli in un vero duetto. La loro parte, anche senza il duetto, sarà efficacissima [*sic*]; sarà anzi più efficace senza Vorrei come si cospargere di zucchero una torta cospargere con quel gajo amore tutta la commedia [*sic*] senza radunarlo in un punto'. See *Carteggio Verdi–Boito*, Vol. 1, 150.

⁵¹ 'Certo la canzone di Fenton è appiccicata per dare un assolo al tenore e questo è male. Vogliamo toglierla?' (7 July 1887). *Carteggio Verdi–Boito*, Vol. 1, 145.

⁵² See, for example, Wolfgang Osthoff's 'Il sonetto nel *Falstaff* di Verdi', translated by Lorenzo Bianconi in *Il melodramma italiano dell' Ottocento: Studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1997): 157–86; and Hepokoski, *Giuseppe Verdi, Falstaff*, 30.

⁵³ Charles Tomlinson, *The Sonnet: Its Origins, Structure, and Place in Poetry with Original Translations from the Sonnets of Dante, Petrarch, etc., and Remarks on the Art of Translating* (London: John Murray, 1874; reprint, Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Press, 1970): 29.

appeared in just that fashion in the libretto published for the 1893 premiere, its *quartine* and *terzine* divided by the requisite lines present within the texts of published sonnets. With such typographical accuracy, its form could hardly have been mistaken or overlooked (Fig. 1).

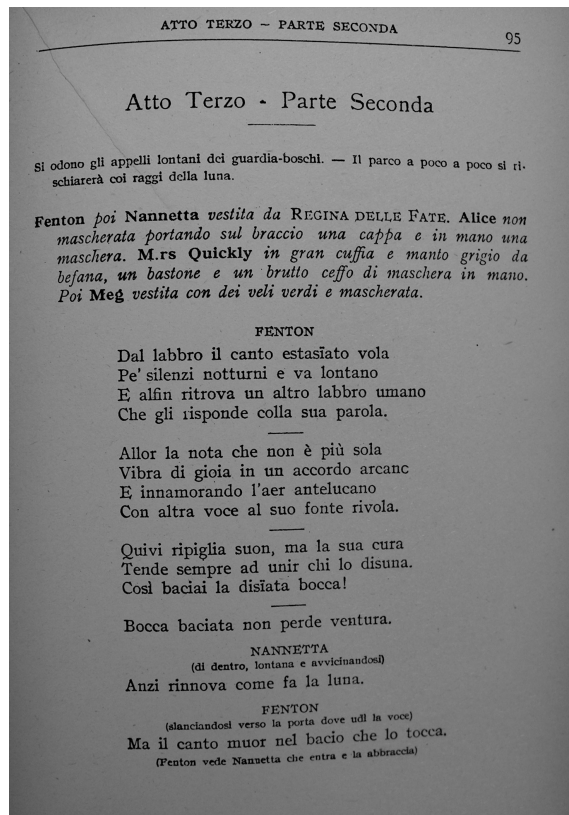


Fig. 1 The text of Fenton's aria as it appeared in the libretto for the 1893 premiere of *Falstaff* (Courtesy of The Music Division, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC)

Shakespeare, on the other hand, nestled his sonnet, here italicized, within an intricate exchange.

Romeo: *If I profane with my unworhiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.*

Juliet: *Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch.
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.*

Romeo: *Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?*

Juliet: Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

Romeo: Oh then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.
They pray: grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

Juliet: Saints do move, though grant for prayers' sake.

Romeo: Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged.

Juliet: Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

Romeo: Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged!
Give me my sin again.

Juliet: You kiss by th' book.⁵⁴

Romeo speaks the first quatrain and Juliet the next. Each then has a single line, which is followed by two lines spoken by Romeo. The final couplet is shared between the two lovers, but, although the sonnet proper ends with the word 'take', Romeo's dialogue continues on into another quatrain shared with Juliet. Sometimes in performance, actors are directed to conclude the sonnet with a kiss; that rubric, however, is a modern accretion, as is the full stop that punctuates the sonnet's end.⁵⁵ While it would be difficult for an audience to recognize the form aurally – unless it was delivered with painstaking clarity – readers *might* be able to identify it within a textual passage were they gifted with an excellent command of English poetic forms. It is clear from the translations Boito used that he himself never saw this speech as a sonnet therein.

Hugo transformed the sonnet into prose dialogue:

Roméo, prenant la main de Juliette.

– Si j'ai profané avec mon indigne main – cette
chasse sacrée, je suis prêt à une douce pénitence: –
permettez à mes lèvres, comme à deux pèlerins rougis-
sants, – d'effacer ce grossier attouchement par un
tender baiser.

Juliette

– Bon pèlerin, vous êtes trop sévère pour votre main
– qui n'a fait preuve en ceci que d'une respectueuse
dévotion. – Les saintes même ont des mains que peu-
vent toucher les mains des pèlerins; – et cette étreinte
est un pieux baiser.

⁵⁴ This excerpt from Act I, scene v reflects lines 104–22 in the Folger Shakespeare Library's edition of the play, edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992): 57–8. (Note: line numbers will often vary among editions).

⁵⁵ The Quarto text ends in a comma; a period follows Romeo's last line. In the Folio, the sonnet ends with a colon and, as in the Quarto, Romeo's next line with a period. In his edition of 1709, Rowe introduced a stage direction not present in either the Quarto or Folio: that Romeo and Juliet kiss after the sonnet's final line, in essence breaking it off from Romeo's continuing dialogue. Some other modern editions place the kiss after the word 'purged'. For more on this topic, see Lukas Erne's edition of *The First Quarto of Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Early Quartos series of The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 72.

Roméo

– Les saintes n'ont-elles pas des lèvres, et les pèlerins aussi?

Juliette

– Oui, pèlerin, des lèvres vouées à la prière.

Roméo

– Oh! alors, chère sainte, que les lèvres fassent ce que font les mains. – Elles te prient; exauce-les, de peur que leur foi ne se change en désespoir.

Juliette

– Les saintes restent immobiles, tout en exauçant les prières.

Roméo

– Restez donc immobile, tandis que je recueillerai l'effet de ma prière.

Il l'embrasse sur la bouche.

– Vos lèvres ont effacé le péché des miennes.⁵⁶

It was Hugo's edition that Boito used exclusively when, after initiating work on the *Falstaff* libretto in 1889, he began a translation of the play for Eleonora Duse to perform.⁵⁷ Completing only the first act before turning his attentions back to Verdi's opera, he rendered the passage into an unremarkable prose dialogue:

Romeo: Se ho profanato con indegna mano questa mano santa, sono pronto a patir penitenza. Vogliate permettere alle mie labbra di cancellare quel ruvido contatto con un devoto bacio.

Giulietta: Buon pellegrino siete assai severo per la vostra mano. La vostra mano diede prova di religioso ardore e null'altro. (*Qui la musica cessa.*) Le sante stesse hanno delle mani che possono esser toccate dai pellegrini e questa stretta è già un bacio.

Romeo: Ma le sante hanno anche delle labbra e i pellegrini anche.

Giulietta: Sì, pellegrino – hanno labbra consacrate alla preghiera.

Romeo: Ah! Dunque, santa mia dolce, facciano le labbra ciò che fanno le mani. Esse ti pregano, esaudile presto per tema che la loro fede si muti in disperazione.

Giulietta: Le sante restano immobile pur esaudendo le preci.

Romeo: Restate immobile dunque mentre io raccolgo il premio della preghiera. (*Le bacia la bocca.*) Le labbra vostre hanno cancellato il peccato delle mie.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See *Roméo et Juliette* in Hugo's *Oeuvres*, Tome VII, 271–2. Because this and subsequent examples so closely follow the meaning of the original passage, they will not be translated. Rather, their inclusion here is solely to demonstrate that none of the translators 'imitated' Shakespeare by crafting the text into sonnet form.

⁵⁷ See Laura Vazzoler's commentary in *Due Copioni da Shakespeare per Eleonora Duse* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1984): 17.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

Had Boito perchance looked at Carcano's rendering, he would have seen the passage set as poetry but in 19 lines of unrhymed *endecasillabi*:

- Romeo: Se l'indegna mia man codesto santo
 Tesor profana, ne faranno ammenda
 Söave i labbri miei [*sic*]; simlí a due
 Timidi pellegrini il rude tocco
 Con un tenero bacio ammolliranno.
- Giulietta: Buon pellegrin, voi fate torto a questa
 Vostra mano che in ciò devoti e degni
 Atti mostrava; poichè i santi han mano
 Che può toccar la man del pellegrino;
 E il giunger palma a palma è del palmiero
 Il sacro bacio.
- Romeo: E non han labbra al paro
 Il santo ed il palmier?
- Giulietta: Sì, pellegrino:
 Ma labbra use [*sic*] al pregar.
- Romeo: Dunque, o mia santa,
 Facciano i labbri ciò che fan le mani.
 Pregan essi tu adempi il pregar loro;
 Nè la mia fe disperi.
- Giulietta: Immoti stanno
 Nel dar le grazie a chi li prega i santi.
- Romeo: Immota adunque sta, finchè l'effetto
 Io non ottenga della mia preghiera. –
 Così lavan le tue dalle mie labbra
 Ogni peccato.⁵⁹

Finally, although some passages in Boito's English editions of Shakespeare bear his annotations, none of the three versions of *Romeo and Juliet* bears any markings that would indicate that he had taken any special note of this passage at all.⁶⁰

Boito and the Petrarchan 'Voice'

Although it may appear that Boito's decision to share the sonnet's final lines between Fenton and Nannetta mirrors the sonnet in *Romeo and Juliet*, it actually indicates his emulation of a Petrarchan model by exploiting the possibilities of poetic 'voice'. 'Voice' generally refers to the speaker in a work of literature. In poetry, one such 'voice', the poet-*persona*, is identified either as the writer or as a narrator through whom the writer speaks; in a love poem, this speaker is identified as the love-*persona*. These *personae* may speak in the objective third person or the subjective first. In love sonnets, however, both *personae* may be present, only to merge seamlessly into one 'voice' before the sonnet's end. Obviously, the

⁵⁹ See Carcano's *Giulietta/Romeo/Tragedia/di/Guglielmo Shakspeare* (Milan: Giacomo Pirola, 1847): 50–52.

⁶⁰ Dott.ssa Riva confirmed in an e-mail dated 25 March 2009 that all of Boito's copies of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Conservatorio di musica 'A. Boito' were without marks or annotations.

presence of a speaker implies an audience who hears him, but one characteristic that set even the earliest sonnets apart from other contemporary verse was their introspective nature. Especially in love sonnets, the *persona* is working out emotion in what Petrarch translator David Young has termed 'self-address'.⁶¹ Although the love-*persona* may invoke someone by name, such reference is only rhetorical, the focus of the sonnet being the speaker and his unique situation.⁶² Hence, the sonnet's audience is not addressed directly but rather 'overhears' the speaker. This concept of indirect address seems akin to what Emanuele Senici has suggested about the blurred 'distinction between stage music and unheard music' and the ambiguous nature of Fenton's song.⁶³

To appreciate better how Boito's exploitation of poetic 'voice' enriches the opera, one must temporarily decontextualize the sonnet, disassociating it from the libretto and the score and reading it rather as poem. Boito's poet-*persona* thus becomes a disembodied, genderless narrator who embarks on a description of a song that travels through the night air, only to find 'un altro labbro umano' that responds in kind. The first quatrain, then, reflects *three* unique voices – the poet-*persona*'s and two others whose music this narrator describes. As Senici has noted, the sonnet is 'an extended description of the act of singing'.⁶⁴ However, the metaphor is even richer, for by stressing that both are human voices engaged in song, Boito has begun a duet. On a figurative level, the two are united through their music-making even though their bodies are separated by distance – just as the voices of two singers would merge even if they themselves were apart on- or offstage. The 'three' voices continue until the *volta*, that moment of 'linguistic self-centering'.⁶⁵ As Boito shifts from third to first person, the poet-*persona* merges with the voice of the first singer to create a single entity, a love-*persona* who assumes the narration: 'Cosi baciai la disiata bocca' ('So I kissed the desired mouth'). Here, too, Boito makes a shift in figurative language: 'labbro', which had through metonymy woven together the images of the music's human creator and the mouth as an organ of song, is now replaced with 'bocca', which foreshadows the lovers' kiss. When the sonnet is sung, of course, the 'third' voice emerges to become a *persona* as well, meriting the sonnet's penultimate line. So, in the final *terzina*, the aria's audience actually 'hears' the duet.

With his skilful exploitation of voice within a Petrarchan setting, Boito gave Verdi both an aria *and* a duet; for his part, Verdi's musical setting respected and preserved the allusion. Most likely coached by Boito in the structure of a Petrarchan sonnet, the composer obviously took great pains to respect the form in his musical setting.

Just as lines set apart the sonnet's sections in the libretto, Verdi carefully divided them with rests (see the annotated excerpt of the aria's score in Ex. 1, pp. 32–4), derived from the 1893 Ricordi piano-vocal edition, at the end of this article). The separation between the two major sections logically warranted the longest break, created by placing a quaver and a crotchet rest in the final measure of the *ottavo*

⁶¹ Young's comments on understanding Petrarch and 'voice' may be found in *The Poetry of Petrarch* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004): ix–xxv.

⁶² Jennifer Petrie, *The Augustan Poets, the Italian Tradition and the Canzoniere* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press: 1983): 32.

⁶³ Senici, 'Falstaff at Italy's Fin de Siècle', 291.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of this concept, see Sandra Bermann, *The Sonnet Over Time: A Study in the Sonnets of Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Baudelaire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988): 3.

after 'rivola' followed by a minim rest before 'Quivi', the start of the *sestetto*. The smaller poetic units are separated by shorter rests, the *quartine* by a minim and a quaver rest between 'parola' and 'Allor' and the *terzine* by two crotchet rests between 'bocca' and 'Bocca'. Within each section, there are, at most, quaver rests – if any – between the poetic lines. The only exception occurs in the middle of the first *terzina*'s initial line: 'Quivi ripiglia suon, ma la sua cura' where a crotchet and a quaver rest set apart 'suon' and 'ma'; with these rests, Verdi respected the comma between the words, the sonnet's only internal punctuation.

Several other points in the composer's setting demonstrate his adherence to the sonnet's structure. In the *ottavo*, Verdi chose an anacrusis of three quavers for lines 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7; the rhythmic patterns of lines 2 and 8, however, differ, for they are driven by the text-painting that highlights 'lontano' and 'rivola' at the end of the line. Reaching the *sestetto* – a new, distinct section – Verdi abandoned the quaver anacrusis for two triplet figures that appear in lines 1 and 2 of the first *terzina* and a single triplet figure in lines 1 and 2 of the second *terzina*. The composer's sensitivity to the sonnet is most obvious in his approach to that critical juncture of dynamic change, the *volta*. In general, this point should occur at or near the beginning of the *sestetto*.⁶⁶ Boito, however, made this critical shift in line 11: 'Così baciai la disīata bocca!' Employing that poetic sleight of hand, 'linguistic self-centering', he switched from third to first person and then further accentuated this sudden merging of *personae* by shifting from present to past tense: 'So I kissed the desired mouth'. For his part, Verdi heralded the moment with a radical change in dynamics. Until this point, the instruments have been playing *pianissimo*; a crescendo beginning at the start of the *volta* climaxes on 'baciai', the very word that signals the shifts in both person and tense. Furthermore, all are directed to perform 'con espressione'. By the end of the line, the original dynamic has returned, remaining in effect until the *forte* on Fenton and Nannetta's final notes signal the abrupt arrival of Alice.

Verdi's treatment of the second *terzina*, beginning with the Boccaccian quotation, warrants comment, for it might appear to be the only section in which the composer failed to consider the text. Throughout the aria, the setting had been syllabic, allowing every word to be clearly articulated and understood. This *terzina* begins with Fenton and Nannetta singing rhythmically rhymed lines; Nannetta's is disrupted, however, as her love eagerly enters before she has completed the final word, 'luna'. In turn, the words of the second half of Fenton's line ('nel bacio che lo tocca') are obscured by Nannetta's repetition of the end of the line she has just sung: 'come fa la luna'. Musically, of course, the composer had joined the singers in harmony (just as the voices unite in a metaphoric duet), but this manipulation of the lines eclipses the conclusion of the text. The end of the sonnet and the aria, both closed forms, is effected by an external action: the lovers' kiss, here a necessary rubric rather than an editorial accretion.

Shakespeare as Nationalist, Shakespeare and Nationalism

Verdi and Boito's attempts to distance *Falstaff* from a foreign source might well have been something with which Shakespeare would have sympathized, for, in writing *The Merry Wives*, he himself seems to have been on a nationalistic crusade

⁶⁶ Osthoff labels line 9 as this *caesura*, simply because, in theory, this shift should occur at this point. See 'Il sonetto nel *Falstaff* di Verdi', 172.

to repatriate a stage tradition that had long been heavily dependent on continental archetypes.⁶⁷ Although the play's characters have no English ancestry (ironically, they descend from Italians), they are made inherently so by their speech. Recent scholarship has put more and more emphasis on re-examining language in *The Merry Wives*, interpreting it as an essay on Elizabethan vernacular.⁶⁸ No longer condemning the play's predominantly prose dialogue as uninspired, scholars now suggest that the playwright was experimenting with his audience's everyday idiom, at that juncture blessedly free of systematic grammar and vocabulary. Hence, Shakespeare could manipulate the word 'English' in all possible senses to emphasize the importance his characters (and, by extension, the audience) placed on language as a source of identity. Dialogue is peppered with phrases such as:

- 'to be Englished rightly' (Falstaff, Act I, scene iii, line 44);
- 'here will be an old abusing of God's patience and the King's English' (Quickly, Act I, scene iv, lines 4–5);
- 'Here's a fellow frights English out of his wits' (Page, Act II, scene i, lines 124–125);
- 'Have I lived to stand at the taunt of one that makes fritters of English?' (Falstaff, Act V, scene v, lines 1141–1142).⁶⁹

Foreigners who speak with accents are targeted ruthlessly. The French Caius reaps dialogue that is barely comprehensible at times: 'Vat is you sing? I do not like dese toys. Pray you go and vetch me in my closet *une boîte vert* – a box, a green-box. Do intend vat I speak? A green-a-box' (Act I, scene iv, lines 40–42). Little better are the speeches assigned to Evans, most likely devised to highlight the Welsh impersonations of actor Robert Armin: 'It is petter that friends is the sword, and end it; and there is also another device in my prain, which peradventure prings goot discretion with it' (Act I, scene i, lines 38–40). Even Windsor's own Mistress Quickly's mispronunciations ('fartuous' for 'virtuous' [Act II, scene ii, line 92] and 'speciously' for 'specially' [Act III, scene iv, line 106, and Act IV, scene v, line 104]) are comic examples of English as spoken in ignorance. Furthermore, the Windsorites use words to craft barrages of pointed racial and ethnic slurs that define outsiders: 'base Hungarian wight', 'Base Phrygian Turk', 'Flemish drunkard', 'Ethiopian', and 'Bohemian-Tartar'.⁷⁰ To paraphrase Parker's suggestion that *Falstaff* plays with 'ambiguous, multivalent musical gestures', *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a comedy of multivalent linguistic gestures that express issues of vernacular, community and, most important, nation.⁷¹

⁶⁷ See Laura Gilstrap Musselwhite, 'Falstaff: Nationalism's Tie to Character Formation in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Falstaff*, and *Sir John in Love*', *The Opera Journal* 26/2 (Jun. 1993): 21–33.

⁶⁸ In his book *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1875), Edward Dowden considered analysing the play in terms of language; the significance of this interpretation, however, has been taken seriously only recently.

⁶⁹ Melchiori notes that 'to be Englished rightly' is a pun on the verb 'ingle' or cuddle, here suggesting that Mistress Ford is open to Falstaff's advances. Quickly's phrase, 'the King's English', was current at the time of Elizabeth I.

⁷⁰ For more on this topic, see Rosemary Keg's "'The Adoption of Abominable Terms": The Insults That Shape Windsor's Middle Class', *ELH*, 61/2 (summer 1994): 253–78.

⁷¹ Phrase cited from Parker, 'Falstaff and Verdi's Final Narratives', 124.

During his lifetime, Verdi was catapulted to the ranks of national symbol, promoted in part by the exploitation of his operas and indeed his name during the volatile years of the Risorgimento. On the contrary, it took Shakespeare well over a century after his death to achieve iconic stature, nor was this apotheosis without struggle. Verdi belonged solely to the Italians; even though only one nation could claim Shakespeare the man, his works were embraced as universal. As a result, much like Romantic symphonists cowed in the shadow of Beethoven, nineteenth-century English and continental poets and playwrights viewed Shakespeare as the supreme genius who had expressed the human situation perfectly. As Goethe noted, 'Shakspeare [sic] gives us golden apples in silver dishes. We get, indeed, the silver dishes by studying his works; but, unfortunately, we have only potatoes to put in them'.⁷² This artistic 'anxiety', as Harold Bloom would later term it, led to a search for models who could compete with Shakespeare, thus allowing writers to venture out as creators in their own right.⁷³ Arguments between eighteenth-century Shakespeareans and Miltonists, for example, bore incredible similarities to the so-called 'parallelomania' that pitted Rossini against Bellini in musical commentaries of the *primo Ottocento*.⁷⁴ One of the most visible resonances of this love-hate relationship with Shakespeare arose in Germany where writers, many of them dramatists fighting for presence on the stages where Shakespeare and German adaptations of his works were so often performed, contrived the philosophical backlash known as 'Shakespearomanie'. Decrying the reverence allotted to Shakespeare, writers such as Christian Dietrich Grabbe and Roderich Benedix argued that his works were middle class and overrated. An American reaction to Benedix clearly upheld the other side of the argument: 'What [Benedix] says about the general ignorance of Shakespeare that exists among the Germans is something that he should know better than any foreigner'.⁷⁵

One element with which eighteenth-century Shakespearean commentators traditionally had struggled was his audience. That an indisputably base band of citizenry had been given privilege to an author who, by the time of Dryden and Johnson, held pride of place in the pantheon of English geniuses was intolerable. By the early nineteenth century, however, Shakespeare's works had been subjected to such serious literary dissection that, in most cases, this cultural disability was stripped away or at least ignored.⁷⁶ Hazlitt, for instance, attempted to justify Shakespeare as a man who, though more creative than his audiences

⁷² *Conversations with Goethe, with Eckermann and Soret.*, trans. John Oxenford, rev. ed. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1883): 164.

⁷³ 'The largest truth of literary influence is that it is an irresistible anxiety: Shakespeare will not allow you to bury him, or escape him, or replace him', wrote Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975; 2nd ed., 1997): xviii.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Marchese di San Jacinto's *Osservazione sul merito dei maestri Bellini e Rossini in risposta ad un parallelo tra i medesimi, pubblicato in Palermo* (Bologna: Della Volpe, 1834); and Cavaliere di Ferrer's response, *Rossini et Bellini* (Paris: Éverat, 1836).

⁷⁵ This anonymous commentary on Benedix's writings appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* 34/201 (Jul. 1874): 120. Together, Grabbe's and Benedix's books represent half a century of debate over the presence of Shakespeare in Germany, the former's *Über die Shakespearo-Manie* being published in 1827 and the latter's *Die Shakespearmanie* in 1873.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of later critics' vision of Shakespeare, see Moody E. Prior's 'The Elizabethan Audience and the Plays of Shakespeare', *Modern Philology* 49/2 (Nov. 1951): 101–23, 110.

and many of his peers, was simply representative of his time.⁷⁷ With a little effort, Shakespeare could finally be perceived as a symbol for Britons of *any* era or class – and, like Verdi's, his name soon became a tool for political rhetoric. Chartism, a political reform movement lasting from the late 1830s to roughly a decade later, quickly appropriated Shakespeare to inspire the middle class to subscribe to its agenda. Although the Chartist platform dealt with the composition of Parliament and with suffrage – that is, for all males over 21 – many of its tenets addressed economic and labour issues. Anthony Taylor has explained that the link to literature developed when imprisoned Chartists studied 'inspirational reading matter that drew together the traditional themes valued by reformers'. Although seemingly innocent texts, the works of Shakespeare provided radical thinkers with ideas that 'dignified and elevated the struggle for reform, and provided a historical and constitutional pedigree' for popular politics.⁷⁸ Chartists quoted Shakespeare liberally in speeches, inciting listeners with quotations taken from plays in which characters bravely challenged establishment rule. The *Northern Star*, a Yorkshire newspaper that became the national voice for Chartism, was rife with examples of how the Bard was used as propaganda. On 22 November 1845, a brief news item notified readers of a lecture expounding on: 'Shakespeare; his genius compared with the greatest ancient models, particularly with the Book of Job; his unrivalled knowledge of the human heart; Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Merchant of Venice, &c.' Even Chartist verse linked one of its reigning heroes, John O'Connor, with the Bard: 'Or mighty Shakespeare fam'd for fancy wild, / Should raise thy theme a monument of fame, / Profusely deck'd with sweet Parnassian bays, / To boldly shout the great O'CONNOR'S praise'.⁷⁹ Perhaps the most curious example of how Shakespeare was applied to the daily life of the middle class was in an advertisement for Frampton's Pill of Health: 'a family Restorative which has conferred the most essential benefits upon those who have fortunately had recourse to its health-restoring aid; enabling them to apply to themselves the well-known line from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (Act 2, scene iii) – "Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty"'.⁸⁰

When the Chartists utilized Shakespeare thusly, it helped to create what Anne Janowitz called 'communitarian claims for the unity of class, literary, and national identity under the banner of poetic tradition'.⁸¹ Certainly not as radical

⁷⁷ 'We single out one or two striking instances, say Shakespear [*sic*] or Bacon, which we would fain treat as prodigies, and as a marked contrast to the rudeness and barbarism that surrounded them'. From William Carew Hazlitt's edition of his grandfather's *English Poets* (1818) in *Lectures on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890): 6.

⁷⁸ 'Shakespeare and Radicalism: The Uses and Abuses of Shakespeare in Nineteenth-Century Popular Politics', *The Historical Journal* 45/2 (2002): 357–79, 357–8.

⁷⁹ The poem, entitled 'O'Connor's Demonstration', written by John Seety, appeared in the *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* (30 Jul. 1842): 3.

⁸⁰ Published in *Northern Star* (28 Nov. 1845): 2, the advertisement cites a line spoken by the character Adam in an attempt to convince the young Orlando to take him on as his servant. Here it is employed in quite a different way. Frampton's Pill of Health, advertised primarily throughout the *Northern Star's* Yorkshire circulation area, was said to be a cure that removed 'all Obstructions in females' such as headaches, depression, and nerves, while ridding them of pimples and blotches and giving their complexions 'a healthy juvenile bloom'. See Hilary Marland's *Medicine and Society in Wakefield and Huddersfield: 1780–1870* (Cambridge: CUP Archive, 1987): 241.

⁸¹ See Janowitz's *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 96.

as the Chartist goals (which often were accompanied by violent protest) but clearly similar in intent was Boito's insistence on promoting a Tuscan literary heritage for *Falstaff*. Participating in cultural campaigning that spanned most of the *secondo Ottocento*, he – perhaps even more than Verdi – understood the need to dissociate their opera from Shakespeare, who, as far as their purposes were concerned, belonged to another people and nation. In the end, although their efforts have been perceived as remarkable and exaggerated, Verdi and Boito had merely fallen in line with a pan-European movement to debate, define and protect national cultural identities.

Falstaff's 'Repatriation'

The late nineteenth-century writer Dino Mantovani once described the lengths to which Boito would go in his efforts to imitate Classical tropes based on Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. Working for hours on something as mundane as a postcard, the librettist would select and then order his words into phrases worthy of Italy's thirteenth-century masters.⁸² This practice served him well in the creation of *Falstaff's* libretto, for Boito embellished it with vocabulary appropriated from these literary masterworks.⁸³ Although Boito must have revelled in crafting the aria text, Verdi was far less comfortable with the task of setting it. In a letter to Boito dated 6 October 1890, he admitted that 'the sonnet in the third act tormented me; and to pull out this thorn from my brow, I put the second act aside, and beginning with that sonnet, writing down one note after the other I arrived at the end. – It's only a sketch! And who knows how much there will be to do over! We'll see later'.⁸⁴ Verdi seemed delighted and even

⁸² Boito 'era capace di lavorare una giornata intera per scrivere una cartolina postale diversa a tutte le cartoline di questo mondo; egli era maestro di giochi, intrecci e viluppi di parola, e rifà a meraviglia le combinazioni letterali e verbali di cui si compiacevano spesso gli uomini del medioevo, fino a Dante e al Petrarca' – Boito 'was able to work an entire day writing a postcard different from all other postcards in this world; he was a master of word play and put together marvels of letter and word combinations just like those in which medieval men like Dante and Petrarch took pleasure'. Cited by Piero Nardi in *Scapigliatura: da Giuseppe Rovani a Carlo Dossi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1968): 157.

⁸³ Unfortunately, this strategy drew criticism because of the obscurity of the terms. Hepokoski cites a review in *La sera* of 10 February 1893 in which the critic took the librettist to task for his use of 'horrifying' words such as *ciuscherò*, *cerèbro*, *pagliardo*, *sugliardo*, *scanfardo*, *scagnardo*, *falsardo*, *castigatoja*, *crepitacolo*, *assillo*, and *guindolo* (*Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff*, 30). As Hepokoski notes, Andrew Porter has written of the Boccaccian influence on Boito's choice of words, yet not all of these archaic terms can be attributed to the author of the *Decamerone*. The *Vocabulario, grammatica, et orthographia de la lingua volgare, d'Alberto Acharisio da Cento, con espositioni di molti luoghi di Dante, del Petrarca, et del Boccaccio* (1543) helps to identify other terms as 'voci Dantesche' from the *Inferno*; these terms are: *guindolo* (a reel for silk), *ceffare* (to catch by the snout or muzzle), *acciaffare* [*cuffare*] (to snatch with the teeth), *arroncigliare* [*roncigliare*] (to shred, cut, weed out, grapple or take hold of), *cialtrone* (a prattler or babbler), *crepitacolo* (a child's rattle, from *crepire* – to rattle), *falsardo* (an imposter), *galiotta* (a secret pocket or a filching, cheating woman), *gaglioffaria* (a cheating, cunning trick), *malvagia* or *malvasia* (malmsie wine or candy wine), *scanfarda* (an overridden whore or doxie), *scanfardaggine* (a whore's condition or quality), *spilluzzicare* (to pluck out hair by hair, also to pinch here and there).

⁸⁴ 'Mi tormentava il Sonetto del Terz' Atto; e per togliermi questo chiodo dalla testa ho messo da parte il Second' Atto, e cominciando da quel Sonetto, giù giù una nota dopo

relieved that Boito would be at S. Agata in 12 days' time; perhaps the sonnet was one of the topics he wished to discuss. It is tempting to imagine Boito examining the maestro's musical renderings of *ottavi*, *terzine*, *volte*, and the like.

The irony in this narrative, of course, is that Hugo, Carcano, and Rusconi – the translators whose literary mission was to propagate Shakespeare – actually provided Boito and Verdi the perfect 'Tuscan source' necessary to marginalize him and distance him from their opera. This facile 'repatriation' of *Falstaff* attempted to make Fiorentino, an *ignoto*, equal to Dante and Petrarch as symbols of Florence, the heart of post-Risorgimento efforts to concoct a unified 'Italian' culture. If Shakespeare, the poet Verdi had so admired since childhood, fell victim in this effort to serve the greater good of the *patria*, it must have been deemed a small sacrifice. Yet, despite all the composer's and the librettist's efforts, *Falstaff* retained an undeniable bond to its Shakespearean source. Nor did Verdi's 'manifesto' fit neatly into the tradition of Italian opera that he and Boito had hoped to resurrect; rather, *Falstaff* was perceived as modern, almost 'German'. Three hundred years earlier, at the end of another century, Shakespeare had created a play that also did not fit neatly into the contemporary repertory. Unlike the foreign works that dominated stages in *his* world, *The Merry Wives* was about England and the English, mirroring its audiences so they could see (and hear) themselves as they were at that very moment in time. What they witnessed were the workings of an uncomfortable emerging middle class threatened by change: a static, barren community in many ways symbolized by the play's ridiculous protagonist – 'false staff'. Perhaps *fin-de-siècle* Londoners perceived this Windsor with a hint of the same disillusionment that later haunted post-Unification Italians.⁸⁵ In the revised narrative of *Falstaff*, this connection ought not be lost in translation.

l'altra sono arrivato sino alla fine. – Non è che uno sbozzo! E chi sa quanto vi sarà a rifare! Vedremo piú tardi'. *Carteggio Verdi-Boito*, Vol. 1, 176.

⁸⁵ For more on post-Unification disillusionment in Italy, see Parker, 'Falstaff and Verdi's Final Narratives'; and Senici, 'Falstaff at Italy's Fin de Siècle'.

Ex. 1 Annotated excerpt of 'Dal labbro il canto estasiato vola', derived from the 1893 Ricordi piano-vocal edition, pl.no. 96000

FIRST QUARTINA

dolcissimo *dolciss.* *dolciss.*

FENTON

Dal labbro il can-to esta-si-a - to vo - la_ Pei si - len-zi notturni e va lon-ta -

Piano

pp

sempre dolciss.

FEN

E al fin ri-trova un al-tro labbro u - ma-no Che gli ri-spon-de col-lasua pa - ro - la.

Pno.

pp

SECOND QUARTINA

poco più marcata

FEN

Al-lor la no-ta che non è più so - la Vibra di gioia in un accor-do ar -

Pno.

p

FEN

ca - no E inna-mo - ran - do l'aer an-te-lu - ca-no Con al - tra vo - ce _ _ _ _ _ al suo fon-te ri-

Pno.

pp

The image shows a piano-vocal score for a piece titled 'Dal labbro il canto estasiato vola'. It is divided into three systems. The first system is labeled 'FIRST QUARTINA' and features a vocal line for 'FENTON' and a piano accompaniment for 'Piano'. The vocal line is marked 'dolcissimo' and 'dolciss.' and includes lyrics: 'Dal labbro il can-to esta-si-a - to vo - la_ Pei si - len-zi notturni e va lon-ta -'. The piano part is marked 'pp'. The second system is for 'FEN' and includes lyrics: 'E al fin ri-trova un al-tro labbro u - ma-no Che gli ri-spon-de col-lasua pa - ro - la.' The piano part is marked 'pp' and 'sempre dolciss.'. The third system is labeled 'SECOND QUARTINA' and is marked 'poco più marcata'. It features a vocal line for 'FEN' and a piano accompaniment for 'Pno.'. The vocal line includes lyrics: 'Al-lor la no-ta che non è più so - la Vibra di gioia in un accor-do ar -' and 'ca - no E inna-mo - ran - do l'aer an-te-lu - ca-no Con al - tra vo - ce _ _ _ _ _ al suo fon-te ri-'. The piano part is marked 'p' and 'pp'. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, dynamics, and articulation marks.

Ex. 1 continued

dolcissimo **FIRST TERZINA**

FEN vo - - - - la Qui-vi ri-pi-glia

dolcissimo
Pno. *ppp* *p* *p*

FEN suon, ma la sua cu - ra Ten-de sempre ad u - nir chi lo di-su - na

Pno.

VOLTA
con espressione **SECOND TERZINA**

FEN Co-sì ba-ciai la di-si-a-ta boc - ca! Boc ca ba -

Pno. *pp*

NANNETTA (di dentro lontano) (avvicinatosi)

FEN An - zi rin - no - va co-me fa - la

FEN cia - ta non per - de ven - tu - ra.

Pno. *pp* *f*

Ex. 1 concluded

The musical score is set in a key with three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and common time. It consists of three staves: Soprano (N), Female Tenor (FEN), and Piano (Pno.).

Soprano (N): The vocal line begins with the instruction *dolce*. The lyrics are "lu - - - na, co - me fa la lu - na." The melody is characterized by long, sweeping phrases with slurs.

Female Tenor (FEN): The lyrics are "Ma il can-to muor nel ba - cio che lo *f* toc - ca." The melody follows a similar pattern of long, connected notes.

Piano (Pno.): The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of sixteenth-note chords in both hands, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The chords are grouped with slurs and the number "6" is written below the notes, indicating a sixteenth-note figure.