

INTEGRATION OF TEXT FORMS  
AND MUSICAL FORMS  
IN VERDI'S EARLY OPERAS

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A DISSERTATION  
PRESENTED TO THE  
FACULTY OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE  
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE BY THE  
DEPARTMENT OF

MUSIC

August, 1975

clearly misdated.<sup>1</sup> There are perils in working with fragmentary evidence. But these letters raise substantive issues about the structure of the operas which must be dealt with. Additional evidence will throw new light on the issues discussed in this dissertation, either strengthening or changing the conclusions. But the presently published letters, fragmentary though they be, present a sufficient body of evidence to make a good start.

III. An introduction to Italian prosody and prosodic terminology, with special reference to Verdi's libretti

The poetic techniques of Italian opera libretti of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century are simple. This section introduces the basic concepts of Italian prosody and the terminology Verdi uses to deal with these concepts. It does not delve into more subtleties than are necessary for an understanding of

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<sup>1</sup>The most famous collection of correspondence of Verdi with a librettist, that with Ghislanzoni about *Aida*, has been in print since 1913 with the letters out of order. The first person to note this fact in print is Philip Gossett (Gossett 1973b, p. 639; Gossett details a proposed correct order in Gossett 1974, pp. 297-300). This fact is indicative not only of the problems of the printed sources of these letters, but also of the lack of careful consideration from which they have suffered, once published. Gossett's review is the best survey available of the most important publications of Verdi's letters, and the best discussion of the problems connected with the published letters.



ii. Dialefe (iato) (English: diaeresis, hiatus) -- the vowels are separated and count as two syllables:

Poi | altri qui volto                      6 syllables  
(Un Ballo in Maschera, II)

Hiatus is rare in Verdi's libretti.

b. Adjacent vowels in the same word

i. Sineresi (English: synaeresis) -- the vowels are elided and count as one syllable:

Tacea la notte placida                      8 syllables  
(Il Trovatore, I)

NB. Synaeresis does not occur at the end of a line if the first of the two vowels is accented:

Diletto del cor mib! ...                      7 syllables  
(La Traviata, III)

Synaeresis cannot occur between a, e or o and an accented vowel, as in the name Aida.

ii. Dieresi (English: diaeresis) -- the vowels are separated and count as two syllables:

È pura, söave quest'aura gentile,                      12 syllables  
Pur meno è söave, men pura di te.                      11 syllables  
(Luisa Miller, I)

Diaeresis never occurs:

(1). when an i serves only to indicate the soft pronunciation of a preceding consonant (e.g., giallo, bacio);

(2). when an i is descended from a Latin l (e.g., fiore [florem], ampio [amplum]);

(3). when a diphthong ie or uo is the development of a Latin e or o (e.g., piede [pedem], dieci [decem], uomo [homo]);

(4). when i is pronounced as j (reietto) or u as w (guerra), in which case the i or the u has the value of a consonant.

B. Line endings: tronco, piano, sdrucchiolo

Line endings in Italian poetry are of three types, all reckoned from the last accented syllable:

1. The norm is considered to be parola piana, that is, one unaccented syllable follows the last accent of the line:

Bella figlia dell'amóre  
(Ricoletto, III)

Two other possibilities are reckoned as modifications of the normal parola piana:

2. abbreviated: parola tronca, that is, the last accented syllable concludes the line:

Caro nome che il mio cor  
(Ricoletto, I)

3. stretched: parola sdrucchiola, that is, two unaccented syllables follow the last accent of the line:

La donna è móbile  
(Ricoletto, III)

In referring to the syllable count of Italian verse, one always counts as though the line were piano. Thus, all four lines of the following example are seven syllable lines, although the first and third lines are sdrucchiolo, stretched to eight syllables, and the fourth line is tronco, abbreviated to six:

Ma se fraterno vínculo  
Stringer non vuoi tu méco,  
Ezio ritorna ad éssere  
Di Roma arbasciator.  
(Attila, P)

### C. Accent patterns: line length

To each line length in Italian poetry corresponds one or more characteristic patterns of accent placement. Thus, not any group of eight syllables ending in a parola piana constitutes a proper eight-syllable line: the accents must be correctly located.

Every line length has an accent fixed on the penultimate syllable in the normative piano form of the line. This accent is called the accento commune -- it is common to all lines. Other accents, whose location varies according to the length of the line, I term secondary accents (this is not standard Italian terminology).

Lines may be divided into two large groups: those with even syllable count, and those of uneven syllable count. Those of even syllable count have a fixed accent pattern, while those with uneven syllable count (with the exception of the three syllable line) have a movable pattern of accents.

#### 1. Lines of even syllable count are:

a. Bisillabo: 2 syllables; one accent on the first syllable. This line is not used in Verdi's libretti.

b. Quadrisillabo (or Quaternario): four syllables; one accent, on the third syllable:

Tu sei bélla,

Tu sei bélla!

Pazzarélla,

Che fai tú?

(Giovanna d'Arco, P)

This line length is used only twice in Verdi's libretti; in both cases the choppy effect arising from the frequent rhymes --

presumably the reason this line is avoided elsewhere -- seems aimed at a grotesque characterization: in Giovanna d'Arco for a Chorus of Evil Spirits, and in Macbeth, III, for a Witches' Chorus ("E voi spirti / Negri e candidi;" Ricordi ed. pp. 188-192).

c. Senario: six syllables; two accents, on the second and fifth syllables:

Dall'Álpi a Caríddi  
 Echéggi vittória!  
 Vittória rispónda  
 L'Adriáco al Tirreno:  
 (La Battaglia di Lernano, IV)

d. Ottonario: eight syllables; two accents, on the third and seventh syllables:

Tu, puníscimi, o Signóre,  
 Se t'offési, e paga io sóno,  
 Ma de' bárbari al furóre  
 Non lasciármí in abbandóno.  
 (Luisa Miller, II)

e. Decasillabo: ten syllables, with three accents, on the third, sixth and ninth syllables:

Va, pensíero, sull'ali doráte;  
 Va, ti pósa sui clívi, sui cólli,  
 Ove olézzano tépide e mólli  
 L'aure dólci del súolo natál!  
 (Mabucco, III)

2. Lines of uneven syllable count are:

a. Trisillabo (or Ternario): three syllables; one accent, on the second syllable. Although of uneven syllable count,

it has a fixed accent pattern. This line length is used only in two brief passages in Act III of Falstaff:

Dr. Cajus, Ford:	Cialtrón!
Hardolfo, Pistola:	Poltrón!
Dr. Cajus, Ford:	Chiottrón!
Hardolfo, Pistola:	Fanción!
Dr. Cajus, Ford:	Peón!
Hardolfo, Pistola:	Briccón!

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Gli Uomini:	Caprón!
	Scrocón!
Falstaff:	Spaccón!
	Perdón!

b. Quinario: five syllables; two accents, on the fourth and either of the first two syllables:

Si cólmi il cálice  
 Di víno elétto;  
 Násca il dilétto,  
 Muóia il dolór.  
 (Macbeth, II)

c. Settenario: seven syllables; two accents, on the sixth and one of the first four syllables:

A quell'aspétto un frémito  
 Per ómi fibra io sénto!  
 Egli è scopérto, e spénto  
 Sul pátrio suol cadrà.  
 (Oberto, I)

d. Novenario: nine syllables; three accents. One accent is fixed on the eighth syllable, the other two appear most often on the fifth, and second or third syllables. This line



3. Double lines: Italian poetry also makes use of four types of double line: quinario doppio, senario doppio, settenario doppio, and ottonario doppio. Each half of the double line is independent, so there can be no elision between the halves, and synaeresis cannot occur at the end of the half-line. Either half, moreover, may be sdrucciolo, piano, or tronco. Thus, a quinario doppio may contain up to twelve syllables. Quinario doppio and senario doppio are quite common in these libretti:

a. Quinario doppio:

Il maledetto -- non ha fratelli...  
 Non v'ha mortale -- che a lui favelli!  
 Ovunque sorge -- duro lamento  
 All'empie precchie -- lo porta il vento.  
 (Mabucco, II)

b. Senario doppio

Gli arredi festivi -- giù cadano infranti,  
 Il popol di Giuda -- di lutto s'ammanti!  
 Ministro dell'ira -- del Nume sdegnato  
 Il rege d'Assiria -- su noi già piombò!  
 (Mabucco, I)

c. Settenario doppio is much less common, found only twice in the libretti through La Traviata, although it is used more in the later libretti. Its first occurrence is in Il Trovatore, II:

Condotta all'era in ceppi -- al suo destin tremendo!  
 Col figlio sulle braccia, -- io la seguia piangendo,  
 Infine ad essa un varco -- tentai, ma invano aprirmi...  
 Invan tentò la misera -- fermarsi e benedirmi!

Its second appearance is in the card scene in La Traviata, II.

d. There is only one example of ottonario doppio in all Verdi's libretti:

Di Provenza il mar, il suol -- chi dal cor ti cancellò?  
Al natio fulgente sol -- qual destino ti furò?  
(La Traviata, II)

As discussed below, however, the arrangement of this text as ottonario doppio is puzzling to me.

e. Distinction of single lines and double lines.

As Lippmann points out, there is not necessarily a difference in the melodic rhythm produced by single and double lines.<sup>1</sup> The main difference between the two seems to be frequency of rhyme. In double lines, rhymes come half as frequently as in single lines: e.g., four rhymes in four lines of settenario doppio, compared to eight rhymes in the equivalent length of eight lines of settenario. In Verdi's one suggestion for the use of double lines in a libretto, rhyme was the factor he pointed to:

Se adoperando il settenario la rima vien troppo  
frequente, perchè non si serve del settenario doppio  
come nel trovatore?

Condotta ell'era in ceppi al suo destin tremendo,  
Col figlio sulle braccia io la seguia piangendo;  
ecc. ecc. . . . .<sup>2</sup>

If, when you use settenario, the rhyme comes too often, why not make use of settenario doppio as in Il Trovatore?

<sup>1</sup>Lippmann 1972b, pp. 274-275.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ghislanzoni of Martedì, Copialettere p. 659. Gossett assigns the fuller date of 22 October 1870. Gossett 1974, p. 298.

Most puzzling in this respect is "Di Provenza il mar, il suol," from Act II of La Traviata. Here every half line rhymes, and the arrangement on the page of the lines as ottonario doppio instead of simple ottonario seems capricious, especially when one considers that the arrangement on the page creates a unique example, in all Verdi's Italian libretti, of ottonario doppio.<sup>1</sup> I have no solution to this particular puzzle.

Frequency of rhyme also marks the difference between pairs of short lines which are not recognized as double lines (bisillabo, trisillabo, quadrisillabo) and longer lines which may be rhythmically equivalent. For example, a pair of quadrisillabi piani are rhythmically equivalent to an ottonario piano, but rhyme (R) will occur twice as often in quadrisillabo:

<u>quadrisillabo</u> :	v v / v	v v / v	R	v v / v	v v / v	R
<u>ottonario</u> :	v v / v	v v / v	R	v v / v	v v / v	

In cases where a recognized double line (doppio quinario, doppio senario, doppio settenario, doppio ottonario) has the same number of syllables and frequency of rhyme as a longer single line, one can always distinguish on the basis of accent pattern. For example, both quinario doppio and decasillabo can have ten syllables, but the accent patterns are quite distinct:

<u>quinario doppio</u> :	v v } - v v	v v } - v v
<u>decasillabo</u> :	v v / v v	v v - v v

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<sup>1</sup>The text is printed as ottonario doppio in all the libretti I have seen.

## D. Rhyme

1. Rhyme is defined, for Italian poetry, as identity of sound between two words, beginning at the accented syllable. Rhyme is generally found at the end of the line; if it occurs elsewhere, it is called rimamezzo. Rhymes are termed sdrucchiola, piana or tronca according to the type of word making the rhyme. Different timbres of the same vowel (open and closed e or o) are regarded as identical for the purpose of rhyme.

2. There are virtually unlimited possibilities for combining rhymes into patterns. Some of the more common patterns of Italian poetry have been given names:

<u>rima baciata:</u> (kissing rhyme)	aa bb cc .. .. .
<u>rima alternata:</u> (alternating rhyme)	ab ab cd cd .. .. .
<u>rima incrociata:</u> (crossed rhyme)	ab ba cd dc .. .. .
<u>rima incatenata:</u> (chained rhyme)	aba bcb cdc ... ..

3. Because there is a relative paucity of sdrucchiolo words in the Italian language, sdrucchiolo lines are often left unrhymed in regular rhyme patterns, but are always paired as part of the pattern.

## E. Strophe and meter

1. Strophe may be defined as a number of lines grouped by type of line and rhyme scheme. There is a virtually unlimited

number of strophic constructions which could be thought up. Strophes are therefore generally referred to only by the number of lines they contain, with further particulars to be specified in each case. The common terms are:

distico -- two lines

terzina -- three lines

quartina -- four lines

sestina -- six lines

ottava -- eight lines

2. A standard grouping of strophes is called a metro. There are a large number of metri which are formally defined and named, and many more which are less common. Few of these have any relationship to Verdi's libretti. It is important to realize, however, that metro in Italian has a normal meaning different from the common meaning of the English meter. Metro normally does not refer to the rhythm of individual lines, which is the common meaning of meter. The normal Italian term for the rhythm of the lines is ritmo. Verdi's use of the term metro is not always consistent, however; he uses it in both senses. One must be careful to determine which meaning of the term is being used. For example, when Verdi writes to Piave about the last act of Macbeth (in the 1846 version) --

essendomi provato a fare il primo Coro non mi riesce grandioso anche perché il metro è troppo breve. Quindi mi farai il piacere di fare quattro strofette di versi ottonarij.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter of 22 December 1846, Abbiati I, p. 675.

Having tried to write the first Chorus I did not succeed in making it grand enough, because the metro is too short. Thus you will do me the favor of writing four strofette of ottonario lines.

-- he is not complaining about the shortness of the lines of the text, but about the fact that there are too few lines. He wanted the text extended to four strofette (short strophes; in the final version they are quartine). Presumably the original draft had fewer than sixteen lines.

On the other hand, Verdi also requests, for the same chorus, "quel metro che vorrai ad eccezione del decasillabo" -- "whatever metro you want except for decasillabo."<sup>1</sup> Here he is asking for a different line length, using metro in the common English sense of meter.

#### F. Versi lirici / versi sciolti

1. Lines grouped in strophes are called versi lirici. Strophes which contain lines of varying syllable count are called polimetro.

2. Lines which are grouped neither in fixed strophes, nor by rhyme, are called versi sciolti. Normally, the lines of versi sciolti are endecasillabo and settenario.

3. The purpose of versi sciolti in this repertoire is to allow the poet as much rhythmic freedom as possible: rhymes do not have to be found, fixed schemes of line lengths do not have to be filled out. The use of endecasillabo and settenario, rhythmically the most flexible lines of Italian poetry, adds to the rhythmic freedom.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Piave of 10 December 1846, Abbiati I, p. 668.

G. The setting of lines with an odd number of syllables as lyric melodies

In lyric melodies on quinario, settenario and endecasillabo lines, the flexible interior rhythmic structure of the poetic line is often matched by a flexible placement of the word/line accent relative to the musical accent. The secondary accents, whose placement can vary from line to line, are not always placed in accented positions in the music. (The accento commune, however, which is fixed within the line, is correspondingly fixed to an accented position in the music, virtually always the downbeat of a measure.) In practice, the most common result of this flexibility is that unaccented syllables at the beginning of the line are set as downbeats, the accented syllable following on a weak beat:

Andante mosso 3/8

Parigi, o cara, / noi lasceremo,  
La vita uniti / trascorreremo...

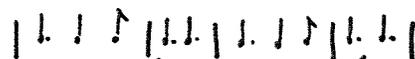
(doppio  
quinario)

De' corsi affanni / compenso avrai,  
La tua salute / rifiorirà.  
(La Traviata, III)

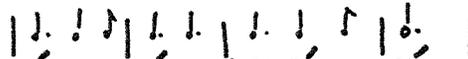
Andante 3/8

Deserto sulla terra,  
Col rio destino in guerra  
(Il Trovatore, I)

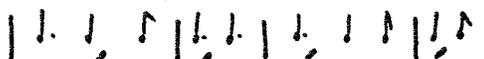
Andantino 6/8



Celéste Aída, / fôrma divina,



Místico sérto / di lúce e fior:

(doppio  
quinario)


Del mio pensiero / tú sei regina,



Tú di mia vita / sei lo splendor.  
(Aída, I)

A basic purpose of this flexibility of coordination between word/line accent and musical accent is undoubtedly to accommodate varying patterns of word/line accent in the poetry within a single rhythmic pattern in the melody.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the fact that this practice continues through Aída, when Verdi had ample opportunity to have the poetic rhythm adjusted to correspond squarely to his musical rhythm, suggests a more positive musical purpose for this technique than mere convenience in preserving a regular rhythmic pattern in a melody. Moreover, there is at least one case where the placing of word/line accents on weak musical positions does not serve the purpose of any simple, repetitive melodic rhythm:

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<sup>1</sup> This reason has been suggested by Friedrich Lippmann, Lippmann 1972b, pp. 278, 322.

Andante mosso 6/8


  
 O cieli az-zurri, o dolci aure nati-ve, 4,7,10


  
 Dove se-re-no il mio mattin bril-lo, 4,8,10


  
 O verdi colli, o profumate rive, 4,6,10


  
 O patria mia, mai piu ti rive-dro. 4,6,10

(Aida, III,1)

Here, the second accent of each line (whose position within the line varies) is always set on a weak beat, not following any repetitive rhythm in the melody, but, I believe, to keep the melody from becoming rhythmically too settled: the tension between word/line accent and musical accent helps to give the melody a marvelously elusive quality. In some other cases -- but by no means all -- I believe one can similarly say that the placing of the word/line accent on a weak beat serves as a device to urge the melody on through the tension between text accent and musical accent. (I believe this to be the case, for example, in the quinario and settenario examples quoted above.)

At the very least, the continuation of this practice through Aida indicates that Verdi did not regard such settings as "faulty declamation" to be expunged from his operas. Furthermore, there is evidence that when a lack of coordination of word/line and musical accent did offend his ear, he eliminated it. Concerning the Duke's "Possente amor mi chiama" in Act II of Ricciolto (Ricordi ed. pp. 143-151), a quick tune with a pronounced upbeat

rhythm, he wrote:

Infine bisognerebbe che la Cabaletta avesse gli accenti eguali perché (e a ciò signori poeti dovrete badare) io non posso fare

Corrò  
Volò  
Quandò etc...

Quindi aggruata da fare cadere l'accento sulla seconda.<sup>1</sup>

Finally it will be necessary that the Cabaletta have the accents on the even syllables because (and you poets should pay attention to this) I cannot write

Corrò  
Volò  
Quandò etc...

Therefore adjust it so that the accent falls on the second [syllable].

Verdi's assertion that he could not write "Corrò, Volò, Quandò etc..." is not meant as a general statement, but rather refers to this specific piece, where pronounced upbeat in the music demand upbeat beginnings in the poetic lines:

Allegro 4/4

Possente amor mi chiama,  
Vo-lar io deggio a lei; etc.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to Piave of 14 January 1851, Abbiati II, pp. 97-98.