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A Sketch Fragment for IL TROVATORE

Jesse Rosenberg

A partial leaf evidently torn from Verdi's continuity draft for *Il Trovatore* is located in the *Museo Teatrale* attached to La Scala, Milan. It contains an early working-out of the scene in Act IV in which Leonora reveals to Manrico that she has poisoned herself. On the assumption that the paper is of the same type (twenty-four staves) as that found in the page from the *Trovatore* sketch reproduced in facsimile in Carlo Gatti's *Verdi nelle Immagini*,¹ we are left with roughly the right two-thirds of the width of the recto and the lower two-thirds of the height, for a total of somewhat less than half of the original leaf (example 1). The margins of the fragment have been closely cropped, and eight staves seem to be missing from the top of the page. On the fragment a small, illegible portion of the Leonora's text is visible for the lowest of these, which forms part of a four-stave system. This would leave seven staves unaccounted for, perhaps grouped into two systems. The verso, with its nine bottom staves left blank, shows roughly the first two measures of each of two systems (example 2). The upper is itself fragmentary: only the text and some of the pitches of the Count's line "Ah volle me deludere e [per costui morir]" are legible.

With such slight evidence, any remarks regarding the relation of this fragment to the rest of the opera or its witness to the work's origins must be highly circumspect. What follows is intended mainly as a description of the contents of the document and its principal divergencies from the corresponding portions of the completed score. For convenience, all musical references are to the current Ricordi piano-vocal score (plate no. 109460).

In the sketch, the key scheme for this passage is e to E, i.e. from a minor key to its parallel major, whereas in the score it moves from c to E-flat--minor to relative major. It was probably this change in key that necessitated the alteration of Leonora's line at her words "Senti, la mano è gelo" (Example 3). Had the soprano doubled the violin figure in unison in the new key of c

minor as she had in the sketch in e minor, the range would have been uncomfortably low. By beginning her linear descent from the fifth rather than the third scale degree, Verdi allowed the soprano's tessitura for the passage to remain the same. The alteration also permitted the use of the affective augmented second between f-sharp and e-flat.

Verdi effected the modulation from c to E-flat by substituting the relatively neutral octave for the key-defining fifth at Manrico's outburst "Che festi oh [sic] cielo!" (example 4). The change of tonal center sets Leonora's final lyric passage ("Prima che d'altri vivere/io volli tua morir") in greater relief. The last measure of this third system on the recto side reveals what appears to be a set of three settings of Leonora's words "Prima che d'altri [vivere]". This measure is not, then, part of a system at all in the accepted definition of the word. The version on the lowest staff, taken down a half-step, is identical to that of the finished score (372/II/1), but only the measures missing from the fragment could tell us whether Verdi's setting of Leonora's line was completely developed at this stage. The other two versions begin with a continuation of the dominant harmony of Manrico's descending fifth. In this respect the final version is preferable, as the tonic opening for her confession nicely suggests the firmness of her resolve. The three versions demonstrate a steady progression, with the second, crossed-out version virtually the same as the first in melodic contour, yet prefiguring the scansion of the last.

It is worth noting that the highest and earliest of the three settings may be read in the treble as well as the soprano clef with perfectly satisfactory results (though not as beautiful, in my opinion). We might expect the E major key signature to settle the question, but the evident haste with which it was written limits its usefulness in this regard. Often when Verdi writes a sharp with only one horizontal stroke instead of the usual two, it is the upper one which is

Example 1

la morte
 senza la morte
 già
 ma che s'altri
 non è la morte
 non è un angelo
 non è un

17037

Recto of a sketch fragment for *Il Trovatore*, Act IV, finale ultima. Exx. 1 and 2 reproduced with the kind permission of the Museo Teatrale alla Scala.

Example 2

The image shows a fragment of handwritten musical notation on aged, yellowed paper. The fragment is roughly rectangular with irregular, torn edges. It features two staves of music. The first staff has a treble clef and contains several notes with stems, some of which are handwritten in ink. Below the notes, there is some faint, handwritten text that appears to be lyrics or performance instructions. The second staff also has a treble clef and contains more notes and stems. The paper is heavily stained and discolored, particularly along the right edge. At the bottom of the fragment, there is a circular library stamp with a decorative border. The stamp contains the word "MUS" in large, bold, capital letters on the left, and the number "216" in the center.

Verso of the sketch fragment.

Example 3

Sen - ti la ma - no é ge - lo ma

Sketch: recto, system II

Sen - ti la ma - no é ge - lo... ma

P.V. score: 370/III/3-371/II/1

Example 4

L Pri - ma che d'al - tri

M Che - fe - stio cie - lo (crossed out)

Sketch: recto, III

L Pri - ma che d'al - tri

M Che fe - stio cie - lo

Annotations: 5th, 8ve, Common tone

P.V. score: 370/III/2-IV/1

notated. (Two such sharp signs appear in the second complete measure of *recto*, system II.) Assuming an absolute consistency in this practice, the second and fourth sharps of the key signature make more sense when read in the treble clef than in the soprano. In this interpretation the first two settings would share not only the same general contour, but most of the same pitches as well. That the highest setting would be the only music for Leonora in the treble clef on either side of the fragment is not in itself sufficient cause for dismissing this interpretation, since Verdi's published sketches contain many instances of sudden clef-changes not notated explicitly.²

Altogether blander in the sketch than in the score is the setting of Manrico's words "Ed io quest'angelo osava male[*dir*]" (example 5). The sketch lacks both the dissonance on the downbeat and the dissonant leap to the seventh of the V⁷ chord, at the word "angelo" which in the final version binds it strongly to Leonora's "Prima che d'altri vivere", both lovers rising to a climactic high A-flat.

The torn upper edge of the fragment obscures much of the pitch-content and precise rhythm of the Count's line "Ah volle me deludere e [per costui morir]", but the text shows that this was spread out over at least three full measures. The fragmentary nature of the document also leaves unanswered the question of whether this earlier setting was the Count's solo line--in which case it would be three times the length of the corresponding passage in the final version (371/I)--or his supporting line in the ensuing trio, where it would more nearly approximate the dimensions as found in the finished score (372/III/1).

The second system of the verso contains a line for Leonora, "[...]*tanta ahime, Manrico, addio*", which does not appear in the finished opera at all, an indication that the sketch antedates the final lines Verdi himself wrote for the scene and entered directly on to the last page of Cammarano's holograph libretto. The expressive flattening of the sixth on the word "addio" did, however, find its way into the score (372/II/4). Rhythmically the line as notated

Example 5

Sketch: *recto*, IV

ed io quest' an - ge - lo _____ o - sa - va ma - le

Più mosso

in - sa - no ed io que - st' an - ge - lo _____ o - sa - va ma - le - dir

P.v. score: 371/I-II/1

in the sketch makes little sense unless we assume a 12/8 or eighth-note triplet rhythm for the first three beats of the measure.

Manrico's "Leonora!" on the same system is clearly not analogous to the same cry in the score (375/II/1-2) since it seems to lead to a reprise of Leonora's "Prima che d'altri". As in the sketched version of his line "Che festi oh cielo!" noted above, the pitches of "Leonora!" suggest dominant harmony, presumably continued in the opening of Leonora's reprise. In the opera as we know it, Verdi, of course, retained the idea of bringing back Leonora's "Prima che d'altri vivere" following an outburst from Manrico, but with the melody on the bottom stave of recto, system III. The pitch for the first syllable of "prima" on system II of the verso points to the first of the three versions of the earlier setting of the text. Interestingly, that pitch has been shortened to an eighth note. Perhaps Verdi had intended the repetition of this line to be characterized by an effect of gasping for breath. [Editor's note: Did the idea for the definitive melody come to Verdi as he was writing out this portion of the sketch? If so, he may have

turned the page over and tried writing it out below the other versions. Having decided he preferred this newer melody, he may have stopped sketching at this point and torn the fragment from the draft.]

In view of the changed key scheme of the final version (from minor-parallel major to minor-relative major), we may hazard a guess as to why Verdi originally chose E minor for the beginning of this passage. Assuming that the preceding trio, with its reprise of Azucena's "Ai nostri monti", was in G major in the sketch, as it remained in the score,³ Leonora's final B would have provided a common tone with the beginning of the violin figure at the *allegro assai mosso* of the final scene (example 6).

Modulations to third-related keys via common tones do occur elsewhere in *Il Trovatore*.⁴ If Verdi's sketch did contain such a transition, it is possible that he found it innappropriately smooth for such a crucial moment in the drama. Treating the G major trio as a dominant to the following impetuous c minor passage helped significantly to propel the act towards its tragic ending.

NOTES

1. Milan, 1941, p. 186.
2. See, for example, the page from the *Traviata* sketch in Gatti, *op. cit.*, p. 64, where the tenor line in the *brindisi* (second system from the bottom) begins in the treble clef and ends in the tenor clef.
3. That this is a reasonable assumption is suggested by a reading of Pierluigi Petrobelli's analysis in "Per un'esegesi della struttura drammatica del 'Trovatore'", *Atti del 3.º congresso internazionale di studi verdiani* (Parma, 1974, 387-400), Eng. trans. in *Music Analysis* 1:2 (1982, 129-41).
4. Examples include the motion from C major to e minor via common tone E (first act trio, 57/I-II) and two modulations in the gypsy chorus: e minor to G major via common tone B (78/V-79/I) and a minor to C major via common tone E (81/II-III).

