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Verdi's *Aroldo* (1857) shares a dubious distinction with *Stiffelio* (1850), the opera on which it is based. They are the only Verdi operas written after *Luisa Miller* which do not have at least a peripheral place in the repertory. Although it is widely conceded that both scores contain much that is musically valuable, they remain the stepchildren of Verdi's middle period.

Why have they been neglected? Facile explanations, drawn from the critical literature, include the following: the subject matter of *Stiffelio* was unpalatable to the opera-going public of the mid-nineteenth century and its score was too uneven to compel twentieth-century revival; *Aroldo*, which sought to ameliorate the realism of *Stiffelio* by providing it with a medieval backdrop, constituted only an unsuccessful cosmetic reworking of the earlier work and hence died a similar death.¹ The chief problem with this criticism is that it assumes an essential artistic identity or oneness of *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo* which does not in fact exist. *Aroldo* involved far more than a minor retouching of *Stiffelio*. Though Verdi undertook the project anticipating only modest musical changes to accommodate a new subject, *Aroldo* ultimately took on a life of its own. In the end it became not so much a *rifacimento* as a "quasi nuova opera," as Verdi on one occasion described it.² Examination of the two scores reveals the extent of the changes. The short second and third acts of *Aroldo* do indeed correspond closely to Act II and

Act III, Scene 1 of *Stiffelio*. Act IV, however, is completely new, and Act I, which is by far the longest act and contains the vital musical and dramatic expository material, is fundamentally changed. Though it retains the general sequence of events of *Stiffelio* and incorporates some passages of the earlier work wholesale, 809 of the 1196 measures are either completely new or wholly recomposed.³

Surely, then, *Aroldo* and *Stiffelio* must be considered to some extent independent artistic entities; it cannot be assumed that the works succeed or fail for the same reasons. The years between *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo* were after all an extraordinarily rich period for Verdi, in which he composed *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*, *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, and the first version of *Simon Boccanegra*. With these works under his belt, the composer of *Aroldo* was scarcely the same person as the composer of *Stiffelio*. In many respects *Aroldo* is richer and more mature; it reflects the direction of Verdi's compositional and dramaturgical thought in the 1850s. It was also a work on which he lavished great attention; furthermore, evidence suggests that he directed the shaping of the librettistic as well as the musical events of *Aroldo* to an extraordinary extent.

Any discussion of *Aroldo* must take *Stiffelio* as its point of departure. The subject of *Stiffelio* is one of the most daring undertaken by Verdi; in its contemporaneity and its frank treatment of adultery, it even sur-

¹Was the public in fact offended by the subject matter of *Stiffelio*, or did it simply find the opera less attractive than *Rigoletto*, *Traviata*, and other middle-period works? One hesitates to assert either view with complete confidence. There is no doubt, however, that the subject matter was condemned by the censor; Verdi's irritation at having to accommodate the censor is amply documented. Critics have been kinder in the main to *Stiffelio* than to *Aroldo*, seeing in the former a dramatic integrity lacking in the latter. Deprecation of *Aroldo* has been virtually a critical con-

stant from the time of Basevi.

²Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Ricordi, 1959), II, 372.

³More specifically, the *Coro d'Introduzione* and Mina's *Scena e preghiera* are entirely new; all but 13 bars of the *Scena e cavatina* of *Aroldo* is new. The *Scene e duetto* of Stankar and Mina is essentially the same as the parallel scene of *Stiffelio*. The *Finale* is the most complex interweaving of old and new; according to my analysis, 450 of its 587 measures are new or significantly altered.

passes in boldness his later, more celebrated essay in bourgeois realism, *La traviata*. The story can be recounted for the present purpose in a few sentences. Stiffelio (tenor), an evangelical Protestant minister, returns from a proselytizing mission to find that his wife has been seduced by Raffaele (tenor), a houseguest. Stiffelio's honor is avenged when his father-in-law Stankar (baritone) kills Raffaele. After first offering Lina a divorce, Stiffelio magnanimously and publicly forgives her from the pulpit in the opera's spectacular closing scene.

The source was a play entitled *Le Pasteur*, by two minor French playwrights Emile Souvestre and Eugène Bourgeois. *Le Pasteur* had its premiere in February of 1849, and was thus little more than a year old when Piave adapted it for Verdi. One is perhaps surprised to discover that the subject was recommended by Piave,⁴ the unconventional nature of the drama does not jibe with the librettist's reputation (perhaps undeserved) as an unimaginative journeyman. The libretto is on the whole admirably done: Piave treats his source with considerable respect and even retains some passages in almost literal translation. But in the inevitable process of abridgment much of the exposition was omitted. The characters of the spoken drama are carefully and realistically drawn: Lina is a jaded housewife, Stiffelio an affectionate but distracted husband, and Stankar a gruff curmudgeon. The character of Raphael, the seducer, has a particularly modern stamp: he is a self-avowed pleasure seeker and a philosophy student who espouses what the twentieth century calls behavioral psychology. Even the minor characters are individually sketched: Dorotea is a flighty socialite and Federico is, in Budden's phrase, an "Austrian Bertie Wooster."⁵ But in the libretto, individuality of character is diminished and timeless operatic "types" emerge; only the title character is given a rounded portrayal. The sophisticated, almost suburban tone of the original is lost. And the mitigating circumstances

surrounding Lina's infidelity are completely omitted.

The story, thus stripped to its essence, was hardly of a sort to appeal to an Italian middle-class audience. The hero was, after all, a dignified cuckold, and was thus a fundamentally unsettling character, even an anomaly, to many Italians. He was also, as many commentators have observed, a married clergyman, and hence foreign to the experience of most Catholic opera-goers. And *Stiffelio* suffered from censorship problems from the outset. Faced with the potentially explosive combination of adultery and the church, the censors were even more fastidious than usual, and the textual changes they decreed worked to the detriment of the drama.

It would be a mistake, however, to attribute its failure solely to the subject matter and the censors. It must be acknowledged that Verdi's score, despite its intermittent beauties, was not ideally suited to this subject matter. The world evoked by Souvestre's play was the real world of the nineteenth century, but in its operatic adaptation we are constantly made aware of the fundamentally anti-realistic conventions of *primo Ottocento* Italian opera. Verdi still speaks too often in the voice of Rossini, or even Meyerbeer, to be completely convincing in what was essentially an intimate domestic drama. In fact, it is tempting to speculate that Verdi was consciously or unconsciously influenced by Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* in his conception of the character of Stiffelio. Meyerbeer's opera had appeared the previous year (1849) and his John of Leiden, like Verdi's Stiffelio, is cast as a dramatic tenor. And Verdi's score is not without passages which might be labelled "Meyerbeerian"; the choral finale of Act I, for example, is strongly reminiscent of the chorus of *patineurs* in *Le Prophète*. I am not suggesting that the appearance of Meyerbeer's influence in an opera by Verdi is in itself lamentable; I would rather propose that the musico-dramatic formulas which sustained Meyerbeer in his depiction of a Reformation fanatic were

⁴Abbiati, II, 48.

⁵Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, I, (London, 1973), 452.

not useful or appropriate in the depiction of Souvestre's contemporary clergyman. For all its boldness of conception, *Stiffelio* was not yet free of the conventions of early nineteenth-century opera to the degree necessary to deal with the emergent realism of Souvestre's play. Perhaps for this reason it is not fully satisfying as music drama; nor does the score itself have that unifying color (or *tinta*, to use Verdi's word) that marks the ensuing operas of the 1850s.

I advance this summary judgment of *Stiffelio* only as a prelude to a fuller discussion of *Aroldo*. Almost from the moment that it became apparent that *Stiffelio* would not become a repertory staple, Verdi contemplated the possibility of revising it. The gestation of *Aroldo* was longer and more arduous than is commonly supposed: it occupied Verdi off and on for over five years. A reader of the correspondence pertaining to *Aroldo*, is struck by the tenacity with which Verdi prosecuted the matter; he refused to let it drop from sight even as he pursued a series of exciting new enterprises. His determination to remake *Stiffelio* was prompted from within; no impresario appears to have encouraged it. Indeed Piave had to be hectored repeatedly by the composer to supply the new verses. This correspondence belies the view that the work was a minor undertaking. Verdi first broached the subject with the impresario Lanari. Writing from Sant'Agata on 26 April 1852, he suggested that the opera could be refitted for the fall season:

It's not impossible that I'll be able to come to Bologna in the fall to put on *Stiffelio* as the second opera of the season, redoing the last act and adjusting all those things I think necessary.⁶

The proposal evidently fell through, but in the summer of 1854 Verdi renewed the idea. A letter to Cesare de Sanctis of 6 July

1854 is significant for two reasons: Verdi here recorded his opinion that *Stiffelio*'s failure was due to its subject, and he indicated that he had already sought to conscript Piave to rework the libretto:

Among my operas that are not making the rounds, some are abandoned because the subjects misfired; but there are two of them I would like not forgotten: *Stiffelio* and *Battaglia di Legnano*. On the matter of *Stiffelio*, I've already written to Piave.⁷

But the usually deferential Piave, heavily involved with other tasks at the Fenice, did not respond at once. In an impatient letter from late October 1854, Verdi assumes the half-bantering, half-scolding tone he so often used with the poet:

Mr. Conniving Rascal [Signor Ludro], if you gave some thought to me, at this moment I could be working on *Stiffelio*! Why haven't you ever thought to find me another subject for this music? Reply to me immediately whether you have time to work on it. It is a matter that concerns me greatly. Reply to me here immediately!⁸

Shortly thereafter an exasperated Piave complained to Tito Ricordi:

And Verdi? Oh my God I'm furious because even if he should come to embrace me in person I'll not be able to contract myself for the *Stiffelio* arrangement.⁹

He apparently conveyed the same sentiment to Verdi, doubtless in more restrained terms. Verdi's response on 25 November 1855 appears in the copialettere. His willingness to accommodate Piave's schedule in order to advance the *Stiffelio* project is noteworthy:

⁶Abbiati, II, 164. All excerpts from the correspondence of Verdi and Piave are, as here, from sources printed in Italian. Translation by the editors.

⁷Alessandro Luzio, ed., *Carteggi Verdiani* (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1935), I, 250.

⁸Abbiati, II, 279.

⁹Piave to Verdi, 18 November 1855. Unpublished letter on film in the Verdi Archive of the American Institute for Verdi Studies.

E Verdi? Oh mio Dio sono rabbioso perchè se anche andrà a darmi un bacio non potrò firmarmi sulla riduzione di *Stiffelio*.

I've received your two letters. I foresaw clearly that you would not be able to come to me, but it's not impossible that I may be able to come to Venice. The proposal to come and stage *Vespri* might suit me, if it would not impede the arrangement of *Stiffelio*. Why couldn't they both be given in Venice? . . . I would come to Venice early, we would put on *Vespri*, and for the final opera of the season the reworked *Stiffelio*.¹⁰

By February 1856 Verdi had persuaded Piave to come to Busseto to work on the revision. In a letter to Tito Ricordi of 17 February 1856, he suggested that only minor musical retouching would be necessary:

Any day now Piave will come to Busseto specifically to adjust *Stiffelio*: that is to say, to find another, completely new subject and one that might be possible for our censors. It will be necessary to change the dénouement, and then to do some new pieces, some patches here and there, some recitatives etc. etc. as the subject will require.¹¹

The composer's pupil Muzio, however, had correctly divined that the revision would be more extensive. On 21 February 1856 he wrote to Ricordi:

. . . Verdi (inter nos) wants to redo it [*Stiffelio*] completely and Piave is actually coming to Busseto . . . for this purpose.¹²

Piave had not yet arrived in early March, and on the tenth of the month Verdi wrote to prod him along. The letter contains one significant piece of information: Piave had already proposed a medieval setting for the revised version. Verdi, however, disliked the idea:

I believe you will soon be free and come at once to Busseto. Before leaving, how-

ever, get all the material necessary to make the changes in *Stiffelio* . . . I've already told you that I don't like making *Stiffelio* into a Crusader. Something newer and more stimulating. Reflect on it.¹³

Piave finally arrived at Busseto at the end of March. As work began, Verdi continued to foresee a quick makeover and optimistically predicted that the task would be done within a month.¹⁴ But Piave left in mid-May without completing the new verses. He had however persuaded Verdi to accept his idea about the new setting. He apparently sent Verdi a complete draft of the revised libretto before the end of July. On July 31, Verdi acknowledged its receipt and offered critical commentary:

I've received the poetry for *Stiffelio* and it would do if there were not here and there some useless half-lines and whole lines, some superfluities, some *ah's*, *ih's*, and *oh's* for scansion.¹⁴

He also offered specific advice about the first entrance of the soprano, who had been renamed Mina:

It seems to me necessary that Mina should say in her first recitative that a banquet is being given to celebrate the arrival of her husband, and that she cannot take part in the general rejoicing. "I have hell in my heart! And remorse!"¹⁵

Clearly he was already at work "sculpting" the opening scene and apparently made numerous further suggestions via the post. Abbiati reports that Piave was bombarded with comments and reproaches (*osservazioni e rimproveri*) concerning the new libretto.¹⁶

The actual work of recomposing *Stiffelio* proceeded slowly. In a letter of 2 September 1856 to the impresario Torelli, Verdi acknowledged for the first time that the revision was to be a substantial one, though

¹⁰G. Cesari, A. Luzio, eds., *I Copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Bologna: Forni, 1913), 183-4.

¹¹*Copialettere*, 185.

¹²Abbiati, II, 348.

¹³*Ibid.*, 368.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 354.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 368.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 368.

he still entertained the hope of producing the opera during the fall:

The work on the revised *Stiffelio* is longer and more arduous than I thought, and therefore it is not yet finished. The subject has been changed. *Stiffelio* is no longer a priest, and to find a dénouement it was necessary to add a final act (therefore there are four) and necessarily to change, leave out, to add numbers and recitatives also in the other three. However it will be finished quite soon, and will probably be performed at Bologna in autumn under my direction.¹⁷

However, the fall production did not occur. In the last months of 1856 Verdi became involved with *Simon Boccanegra*. Working with dispatch, he composed it and directed the first production in March 1857 before completing *Aroldo*. Abbiati tells us that he did not complete the last act until summer 1857.¹⁸

Aroldo finally had its premiere in August 1857 in Rimini. The production was overseen—scrupulously, we are told¹⁹—by Verdi himself and was brilliantly conducted by Angelo Mariani. According to contemporary reports, the first performance was very successful; indeed, according to the conductor it created a *furor*. But enthusiasm for *Aroldo* quickly waned. Basevi's influential study of Verdi's works appeared shortly after *Aroldo*'s premiere and set the tone for much subsequent commentary. The opera was little more than a reheating of *Stiffelio*, wrote Basevi, and the librettistic changes had weakened, not strengthened, the work.

But though Basevi's observation of *Aroldo*'s dramatic implausibilities is difficult to gainsay, it does not follow that it should be dismissed as a warmed-over *Stiffelio*. As we have seen, almost half of *Aroldo* was new, and some of the new music was splendid. And Verdi oversaw the revision in both its librettistic and musical elements with almost Wagnerian compre-

hensiveness. Act I in particular offers a revealing look into the workshop of the maturing music dramatist.

Let us begin with the libretto. It is difficult not to agree with critics from Basevi onward who have concluded that *Aroldo*'s chief defect is its Gothic setting. To sum up the new story line briefly: *Aroldo*, an English crusader at the turn of the thirteenth century, returns home from Palestine with his companion and spiritual mentor Briano. As in *Stiffelio*, he discovers that his wife, now called Mina, has been unfaithful to him with Godvino, the re-named Raffaele. Egberto, Mina's father, avenges the family honor by killing Godvino, but *Aroldo* insists upon a divorce. The church scene of *Stiffelio* is replaced with a new act set on the banks of Loch Lomond, where *Aroldo* and Briano have retired to live in monastic seclusion. By chance Mina and Egberto seek shelter during a storm at the hut of *Aroldo*, and here in the closing moments of the opera a reconciliation occurs.

Virtually no one either in Verdi's time or since has found the *Aroldo* libretto to be completely satisfactory. Verdi's letter to Piave of 10 March, 1856, cited above, leaves no doubt that the responsibility for the new subject was the librettist's. It is to Verdi's credit that he instinctively disliked the idea, and to his debit that he eventually accepted it. Abbiati reports that the inspiration for the new setting was found in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings*.²⁰ But this relic of English romanticism reveals less of a correlation with *Aroldo* than one might expect: the epoch and the dramatic situation are different, and in fact only a few proper names are common to both (*Harold-Aroldo*, *Godwin-Godvino*, etc.) Budden suggests that the literary ancestry of the libretto is more complex. Piave apparently also drew inspiration from Sir Walter Scott's *The Betrothed*. The story here has at least a vague parallel with *Aroldo*: a crusader returns home to find his betrothed involved with another man. Budden further suggests that

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 340-1.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 418-9.

¹⁹Girolamo Bottoni, *Giuseppe Verdi a Rimini*,

Rimini, 1913.

²⁰Abbiati, II, 354.

the character Briano is based on Scott's hermit Brian from *The Lady of the Lake*; this may account for the otherwise inexplicable setting of the last act.²¹

It is simple to identify the flaws of the libretto. It was clearly an error to try to soften the grim realism of *Stiffelio* by providing it with the trappings of Scott romanticism. And the conflict at the heart of *Stiffelio*, i.e., Stiffelio's battle with the conflicting tugs of Christian charity and revenge, is sadly weakened when the central figure is a warrior and not a clergyman. I would like, however, to advance two further observations about the libretto: (1) If one looks beyond the implausibilities caused by the change of epoch, one finds that the revised libretto is often superior in its exposition of the dramatic situation. (2) Much of the new libretto was written—literally—by Verdi himself. The evidence for this lies in the manuscript libretto of *Aroldo* at Sant'Agata.²² This remarkable 75-page document contains Piave's first draft—in all likelihood the draft he sent to Verdi in the summer of 1856.²³ But also elaborate annotations and even entire interleaved pages in the composer's hand. It reveals that the most successful part of the opera—the re-shaped Act I—was a sort of Italian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, dramatically conceived, written, and composed by Verdi.

Comparison with Act I of *Stiffelio* reveals Verdi's growth as an artist. Simple examination of the divisions of the two scores into numbers prompts the first observation: *Stiffelio*'s Act I consists of eleven numbers, while *Aroldo*'s has only five. The difference is striking: *Stiffelio* can only be heard as a string of *pezzi*, some good, some routine; in *Aroldo*, the composer hides the seams between the numbers and invites the listener to submerge himself in the flow of the drama.

The two opening scenes offer markedly different solutions to the problem of concise exposition of a complex dramatic situation. After a rather perfunctory Sinfonia (also used with minor changes in *Aroldo*²⁴), *Stiffelio* begins with an arresting and original arioso for the old minister Jorg. But the dark mood is quickly dispelled: principals and chorus soon enter to the accompaniment of unusually frivolous festive music. A minor character emerges to ask Stiffelio, apropos of nothing, if he has spoken with the boatman, Walter. In a *racconto*, Stiffelio explains that Walter has described to him a guilty assignation which he witnessed. Asides from Lina and Raffaele reveal that they are the secret lovers. Stiffelio refuses to examine the packet left behind by the fleeing Raffaele, preferring to consign it to the flames. A septet ensues in which the principals offer their individual comments on the situation. The guests withdraw, and Stiffelio and Lina are left alone. In some of the most effective music of the act, Lina reminisces about the early days of their love, while Stiffelio dourly describes the sinfulness of the greater world from which he has just returned. In the course of the duet, Stiffelio notices that Lina no longer wears her wedding ring. This offers the pretext for a rather conventional cabaletta in which Stiffelio expresses his suspicion and anger. He is then summoned by Stankar to join the assembled guests, leaving Lina alone to express her remorse in a *preghiera*.

The problem with this exposition is that it seeks to do too much: it tries to present us with the totality of the dramatic situation immediately. The septet is particularly misplaced: it is akin to a Rossinian "ensemble of perplexity" of the sort that takes place before the final unravelling of a plot. But in *Stiffelio* it constitutes our first introduction to most of the principal characters;

²¹Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (London 1979), II.

²²The present study was conducted using a microfilm of the original in the Verdi Archive of the AIVS.

²³Piave's draft of the opening scene does not reflect Verdi's instructions concerning Mina's en-

try outlined in the letter of 31 July 1856 cited above. This helps to establish the date.

²⁴Budden is right, I think, in feeling that the Sinfonia is more appropriate to *Aroldo* than to *Stiffelio*; it has a certain martial stolidity which suggests the crusader more than the man of the cloth.

Table I

Aroldo libretto, Act 1, Scene 2

(Verdi's draft)

Mina entra dalla destra agitatissima
Ceil! ch'io respiri!—del convito il gaudio
[~~Ah-ch'io mi calma alquanto! Del convito~~]
la comun gioja e le spumanti tazze
Che del mio sposo plaudono al ritorno
Supplizio eran per me! . . . temo che in volto
Mi si legga il rimorso in cor sepolto!
Rimprovero mi sembra fin l'amore
Che in Aroldo poneva quel pio vegliardo!
Ferito ei lo raccolse ad Ascalona
[~~Ad Ascalona presso ei lo raccolse~~]
[~~Di sue ferite il frate e più spirito~~]
La vita gli servo
[~~Ei lo guaria!~~] qui lo seguiva? ed io?
Io sciagurata che feci? [Ma egli vien . . .]
2 versi agittarsi
2 versi inginocchioni
Salvami gran dio
Pietà pietà

(Final version)

Mina agitata, dalla destra
Ciel, ch'io respiri! Il gaudio del convitto,
Onde si plaude al reduce mio sposo,
Supplizio eran per me! . . . che feci mai!
Qual fantasima ovunque il mio delitto
M'appar! . . . mi lacera il rimorso! . . . temo
Che ognun mi legga a lettere di fuoco
Scolpita in fronte la parola: *Colpa!* . . .

Salvami tu, gran Dio! . . .
Tu che leggi in core
E sai l'angoscia, e il pentimento mio! . . .
Egli viene! . . .

we have been presented with no musical or dramatic information to make us *care* about the situation. The effect is to evoke the unreal world of bel canto opera, not to explore the psychological implications of the situation.

Aroldo's opening sequence is completely different and much stronger. The first number is in a sense regressive; instead of Jorg's arioso we hear a rather trite drinking chorus from the assembled guests offstage. A banquet celebrates the return of Aroldo from Palestine, and the guests toast their host with conventional sentiments and harmonies. I suggest, however, that Verdi is here being intentionally banal. The introductory chorus is simply a continuation of the bland D-major world depicted in the overture, and it provides a magnificent backdrop for the ensuing *Scena e preghiera* of Mina. Mina appears onstage alone after the conclusion of the chorus. She is highly agitated and soliloquizes that the guests' high spirits threw into sharp relief her own feelings of guilt and remorse. The musical atmosphere is utterly changed: we are plunged into a chromatic, turbulent, minor world that evokes Mina's distress in graphic fashion. The harmonic materials are not unusual: Verdi relies on the diminished seventh to make his point. But the dramatic conflict has been vividly painted in the music; we understand and care about Mina's anguish and recognize how estranged she is from the stolid, squarish world of Aroldo. The conclusion of the scene is a transfiguring moment: the prayer is one of the most magnificent pages of music in middle-period Verdi. The music is sublime in its irregularity; though it begins with a four-measure phrase, it then soars in what seems to be one long breath to the end. The prayer is harmonically ingenious as well. Though it is in D-major, it is preceded by a major triad on the leading tone. The shifting of tonal planes has a magical effect. Elsewhere Verdi avoids harmonic conventionality by proceeding twice from a major chord on III to the dominant seventh, ignoring the usual secondary dominant implications of major III. In these subtle ways, he moves beyond the harmonic predictability of bel canto and approaches the

more purely expressive world of the psychologically realistic music drama.

One of the most impressive aspects of this opening is that both the conception and execution are Verdi's own. The letter to Piave in which he suggests that Mina's distress in the opening recitative be placed against the backdrop of a celebration indicates that the dramatic germ of the scene was his. And the Sant'Agata libretto reveals that he actually took the matter into his own hands and in effect wrote the text. Table 1 is a transcription of Verdi's text side by side with Piave's final version. I have attempted to present Verdi's page as accurately as possible, retaining his spellings, punctuation, and placement. Where cancellations are legible, I have included them. It is apparent that Piave served as editor, not as librettist. All the dramatic images and most of the key words are Verdi's. (Piave's decision not to include the unclear reference to *quel pio vegliardo*—Briano—was probably a wise one, however.) Even the text of the prayer itself is sketched: Verdi requests, in smaller writing, two kneeling (*inginocchiati*) verses with the words "Salvami, gran dio, Pietà, pietà." See Table I, opposite.

Another example of Verdi as librettist occurs in the first finale. This uses some of the musical material from the first finale of *Stiffelio*, but it is vastly transformed. The *Stiffelio* finale begins with the vacuous choral tune that I labelled Meyerbeerian. It appears again in *Aroldo*, but this time woven into the dramatic fabric and not exposed as a discrete divertissement. Again, its very banality serves a dramatic purpose; the untroubled diatonicism establishes a normal world that serves as a foil for the tortured world into which Mina and then Aroldo have been drawn. The obvious choral tune has a ritornello-like function: between its appearances, the chromatic tragedy is played out.

During the finale, Briano shows Aroldo a compromising letter from Godvino to Mina, concealed in a book. Though Briano identifies the writer incorrectly, the discovery of the letter is vital to the drama: the spark that causes Aroldo to explode. The

Table II

Aroldo libretto, Act 1, Scene 8

(Verdi's draft)

*Deti, Aroldo, Briano, quindi Enrico**Br.* |piano ad Aroldo e rapidamente|

Vedi quel libro?

Ar. Il vedo*Br.* Ivi s'attenta

All'onore.

Ar. Di qui? Di qui?*Br.* Al tuo forse*Ar.* Cielo! parla?*Br.* Uno scritto vi fu ascoso.

[Enrico?]

[Illegible cancelled line; apparently a stage direction.]

Ar. Da qui?*Br.* |indicando Enrico che entra dalla sinistra|

Lo scriva.

Ar. Enrico! . . . Oh inferno*Br.* Or taci . . .*Ar.* rimana quasi fulminato e dice*interottamente fra se*Ah il terrore! [~~le-lacrime~~] di Mina!

Comprendo in tal momento

L'anello! . . . Oh tradimento!

Tutti Verace gaudio-sfavilli intorno

Giammai più splendido-ne arrise il giorno

Di Kent i ^{prodi}figli — crebbon la gloria

[colla vittoria

Plaudiamo e al cantico—piena risponda

De nostri cori—l'eco gioconda! . . .

Plaudiamo unanimi—Premio ad valore

darà 'amore.

(Final version)

Bri. Vedi quel libro?*Aro.* Il vedo.*Bri.* Ivi s'attenta

All'onore . . .

Aro. Di chi? . . .*Bri.* Al tuo forse.*Aro.* Cielo!*Bri.* Vi fu chiuso uno scritto.*Aro.* E chi'l celava?*Bri.* (indicando Enrico) Mira.*Aro.* Enrico! . . . oh inferno! . . .

(con mal represso impeto)

Tutti Per te, della croce possente guerriero

Che tanto di Kenth crescevi l'onor,

Ogn'alma ha qui un voto, costante, sincero:

S'infiorin tuoi giorni di pace, d'amor.

Scena IX

Deti e Mina che al braccio d'Egberto seguito da Godvino entrano dalla sinistra sul finire del canto inchinati dall'interno adunanza

Egb. Eterna vivrà in Kent la memoria
Del glorioso istante
In cui mi è dato accorvi nel mio tetto.
[E il fior di tanti eroi stringermi al petto]
Ma pria di separarci, non vi spiaccia
[Illegibile]
[Del grande] nostro re Cor di Leone
la gesta
[Narrami l'alto imprese] in Palestina.

Coro Aroldo...

Ar. Che si brama?

Coro

l'alte imprese

[Le geste gloriose gli]esponete...

Ar. Ad altri tale onor...

Tutti

En. Oh Aroldo...

Ar. fissandolo voi pure?

En. si.

Ar.

E il vil che tradiva la fede e l'onor
Accerchi

Incalzi a tremendo l'Eterno furor

Se l'ira dall'uomo sfuggire potrà
L'eterna vendetta sul capo gli stà.

Egb. Eterna vivrà in Kent la memoria
Del glorioso istante
In cui m'è dato accorvi nel mio tetto...
Ed or di re Riccardo alcuno esponga
Le gesta in Palestina.

Coro. Aroldo... a voi... narrate.

Aro. Io?... no...

Di Ricardo

Enr. Al comun desio
V'arrendete...

Aro. Voi pur?...

Enr. Si.

Aro. Si?... Ascoltate.

Vi fu in Palestina tal uomo che indegno
L'onor d'un amico d'insidia fe' segno.
A libro racchiuso fidava uno scritto
Che il calle appianargli doveva al delitto.
Un vecchio, vegliando dell'ospite il lare,
La tresca nefanda giungeva a svelare!...
Il vil, che tradiva la fede, l'onore,
Accerchi tremendo l'eterno furore...
Ma storia simile qui un vate narrò:
Gli stessi suoi detti ripetervi vò...

assembled guests, ignorant of the tempest brewing, hail Aroldo; Egberto and others call upon him to recount his deeds in Palestine. Aroldo, pretending to accede to the wishes of the crowd, sings a menacing arioso in F-minor in which he describes an imaginary blackguard in Palestine whose deeds correspond to those of the seducer in his house.

The text for this entire sequence was essentially written by Verdi. Table 2 presents Verdi's draft for this critical scene opposite Piave's final version. In many of the recitative passages, Verdi's words are retained literally. Only in the extended musical passages for chorus and Aroldo's arioso are Piave's versifying powers required. And even here Verdi provides the dramatic kernel of the librettistic event as well as some of the *parole sceniche*. Consider, for example, Egberto's arioso "Eterna vivrà . . ." (p. 23); Piave's contribution is limited to the refining of the last couplet. See Table II, pp. 16 and 17.

But Verdi's musico-dramatic conception of the scene as a whole, as illuminated by his textual sketches, is perhaps even more interesting than the revelation of the extent of his contributions to the libretto. Verdi is clearly uninterested in a formulaic act finale, i.e., a succession of ensemble set-pieces loosely animated by the dramatic situation. Instead, he seems to be working toward the sort of fluid interweaving of recitative, arioso, and chorus which facilitates psychological fidelity to the evolving dramatic situation. His text provides the opportunity for unforced transition from almost naturalistic conversational passages to arioso to chorus, and the function of the chorus is subtly but distinctly changed (in contrast with the analogous passage of *Stiffelio*): it is no longer essentially scenic and ornamental but is rather a part of an integrated musico-dramatic conception. In short, Verdi here approaches, in his own

fashion, the ideal of music drama which had only recently been tendentially advanced by Wagner: a single creative figure conceives all aspects of the dramatic representation and infuses it with authenticity by sweeping aside the stale clichés and conventions of the *routiniers* of the operatic stage.

Budden, comparing *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo*, writes that "we may sum the matter up by saying that *Aroldo* is better as music; *Stiffelio* as music drama, and leave it at that."²⁵ Let me try to refine that formulation. Agreed, *Aroldo* is stronger musically (although one regrets the loss of the closing scene of *Stiffelio*.) But is *Stiffelio* better as music drama? Insofar as the term implies drama expressed in music, as opposed to the drama contained in the text, I find *Aroldo* superior. A much more cogent and precise drama is carried on in the music of *Aroldo* than in that of *Stiffelio*: the musical characterization is clearer and more consistent, and the affective content of the music is more congruent with the dramatic situation. Verdi increasingly wears the mantle of the music dramatist, i.e., the creator of unified musico-dramatic gestures, not that of the gifted tunesmiths of *bel canto*.

It is only in the most external aspect of the libretto—the setting—that *Aroldo* suffers in the comparison; here Verdi allowed Piave to truckle to his audience's presumed relish for nostalgic medievalism. *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo* present a classic case of composer and librettist working at cross purposes. In *Stiffelio* Piave presented Verdi with a realistic drama that the composer treated as *bel-canto* opera. Ironically, the Verdi who composed *Aroldo* had become a more mature music dramatist, but Piave, alas, had retreated to the cardboard Gothic of the previous generation.

²⁵Budden, II, 358.