

The Jayne Lecture

Giuseppe Verdi and the
Italian Risorgimento¹

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NOW THAT WE ARE CELEBRATING the 150th anniversary of the formation of the Italian state, it may well be time to look critically again at some of the mythology that accompanied the formation of that state. No one figures more strongly in that mythology than the composer Giuseppe Verdi. In 1906, five years after the composer's death, there was published in Milan, intended for schoolchildren, a book entitled *The Life of Giuseppe Verdi Told to the People*, by G. Bragagnolo and E. Bettazzi. It is a Horatio Alger story, as we would say in America: a young man from a poor family in the provinces makes his way to the big city (Milan), becomes Italy's most important composer, later is considered to be a prosperous farmer, and is fundamentally involved in the dream of Italian independence and the creation of the Italian state.

Such stories were dominant in the nineteenth century, when most biographies provided exemplary lives for a population that supposedly sought models for its own behavior. Already in the first decades of the twentieth century, however, there were strong reactions to such an approach. Associated with what became known as the "new biography" was Lytton Strachey, whose *Eminent Victorians*, written during World War I and published after its conclusion, pricked the images of four "heroes" of the Victorian age, including the redoubtable Florence Nightingale and the adored Cardinal Manning. The demolition of nineteenth-century attitudes was completed a decade later when Strachey's brilliant friend, Virginia Woolf, published a pseudo-biography of

¹Read 12 November 2010.

Vita Sackville-West, calling her entertainment *Orlando*, and endowing her hero/heroine with an extraordinary life of more than three hundred years, during which the protagonist changes gender from a man to a woman. In the process, Woolf makes wry observations about the biographer's art, undermining nineteenth-century concepts of coherence and single-mindedness.

Scholars have recently taken to unraveling myths that grew up around Verdi's relationship to the historical movement for Italian independence and unity known as the Risorgimento, which dominated Italian politics and thought during the first sixty years of the nineteenth century, and continued to accompany the country's dreams and ideals for the rest of the century. We now know that the phrase "Viva Verdi"—with "Verdi" standing for Vittorio Emanuele, Re d'Italia—was invented at the end of 1858, when Italian independence was becoming a reality. Indeed, the phrase could not have appeared earlier, when the idea of a united Italy under the leadership of the king of Savoy was further from realization. Myth-making decreed that the phrase must have accompanied Verdi's path for a longer period. We remain saddled with the belief that the 1840s represented for Verdi his "anni di galera" (galley years), with the phrase used by critics to suggest that his early operas were inferior to his later ones. Yet Verdi's only use of the expression is in a letter of 1858 to his Milanese friend Clarina Maffei, where it refers to *all* his operas through *Un ballo in maschera*: it laments the social circumstances in which Italian composers worked in the mid-nineteenth century, rather than judging aesthetic value.

Similarly, it has been correctly demonstrated that, despite later myth-making, the chorus of Hebrew slaves in Verdi's *Nabucco* (first performed in 1842), "Va pensiero sull'ale dorate," was not repeated at the first performance. (The repeated chorus, "Immenso Jeovah," is found near the end of the opera.) Thus, the alleged *repetition* offers no evidence that the people immediately viewed Verdi as a leader of the Risorgimento. Still, the vision of the Italians as a captive people was a long-standing metaphor, widely available to Verdi's contemporaries, as has been demonstrated by the historian Alberto Banti. Likewise, it has been correctly shown that in the aftermath of a period of relative freedom in 1848, following the so-called "Cinque Giornate" of March 1848, in which the Austrians were temporarily driven from Milan, there was no particular effort in Milan to perform the operas by Verdi, whereas his operas were widely performed after the Austrian return. This Milanese situation, however, cannot be attributed to the hypothesis that Verdi was indifferent to the Risorgimento or that the public was indifferent to his role, for the turn to Verdi operas in both Rome and Naples in the aftermath of the revolutionary movements of 1848

is strong evidence that his works were previously considered dangerous by the authorities.

Verdi was hardly the only composer swept up in the myth-making of the Italian Risorgimento. Gioachino Rossini was considered a conservative figure, with a cozy relationship to the restored monarchs in the post-revolutionary world. Not only was he the composer favored by the Restoration-era monarch in Naples, where his first opera for Naples, *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*, sought to curry favor with the newly restored Ferdinand I of the Two Sicilies, but he was also a close associate of the Austrian statesman Klemens Hensel, prince von Metternich, who explicitly invited him to compose two cantatas for the Congress of Verona in 1822. His relationship with the king of France, Charles X, became legendary. He wrote *Il viaggio a Reims* to fête Charles's coronation in 1825, and Charles became one of his greatest supporters; through the king he received a lifelong pension from the French government. That the fall of the regime in the early 1830s and the consequent change in the administrative structure and personnel at the Opéra was one factor in Rossini's decision to abandon the theater is certain. Had the political shift not occurred, it seems likely he would have written further operas after *Guillaume Tell*.

In 1848 political strife threatened Bologna, where Rossini lived. The composer sought to define himself as a liberal, composing a hymn for the "Guarda Civica" of Bologna; writing a cantata to help celebrate the coronation of Pope Pio IX, who at that point was believed to favor the unification of Italy under papal leadership; and dedicating a chorus in honor of Pio Nono's edict freeing political prisoners. Only a few years later, after the "Cinque Giornate," it became clear to everyone that Pio Nono was committed to foreign domination of a divided Italy. But the demonstrating public in Bologna did not accept Rossini's efforts to portray himself as a liberal, and a noisy rally in front of the house where Rossini and his wife, Olympe Pélissier, were residing led the couple to abandon Bologna for what seemed to be a safer haven in Florence.

Later, from Paris, Rossini continued to insist that he had always been a proto-liberal: he cited his father's political activities, his composition of a republican hymn in 1815 (the music of which is lost), and a text from his 1813 comic opera, *L'Italiana in Algeri*. The chorus of Italian slaves, rallied by the Italian girl, Isabella, to escape from servitude and return to their homeland, sings:

Pronti abbiamo e ferri e mani
per fuggir con voi di qua,
quanto vaglian gl'Italiani
al cimento si vedrà.

The music sung by the chorus seems neutral:

p
 Quan - to va - glian gl'! - ta - lia - ni, quan - to va - glian gl'! - ta - lia - ni al ci -
 $[f]$
 sf p
 -men - to si ve - drà, si, al ci - men - to sí ve - drà,

But what is not neutral is the first violin melody accompanying this chorus:

$[p]$

It is an obvious reference to the “Marseillaise.” Yet it was ironic in 1813 to invoke the French anthem, after France had abandoned its efforts to free Italy under Buonapartian leadership and instead was forming alliances with Italy’s traditional enemies.

Rossini also cited as a sign of his patriotism the text of Isabella’s Rondò, which begins “Pensa alla patria.” He did not point out, however, that this verse—which of course he did not himself write—was rarely heard in Italian theaters. It was regularly replaced by “Pensa alla sposa” or “allo scampo.”

Verdi had the opposite experience. His music and personal political predilections were considered by many to be heavily influenced by the growing sentiment for Italian independence, so much so that myths intensifying and exaggerating this sentiment began circulating, myths easily dismantled by anyone who looks to the documents of history. I have mentioned some already. In recent years, however, it has become fashionable among non-Italian authors to discredit entirely the composer’s credentials as a card-carrying Risorgimento figure. That strikes me as an exaggerated reaction to myth-making tendencies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and a failure to understand the choices presented by all biographical evidence. It is worth pointing out that I cannot think of a *single* Italian scholar who is prepared to accept such claims, although of course that cannot by itself be held as any kind of significant factor. In the remainder of my paper I wish to focus our attention on the relevant evidence.

It is often asserted that Verdi during the 1830s was dependent on a circle of amateurs and dilettantes drawn from the higher echelons of society and from the city’s Austrian rulers. There is some truth in this, but it is hardly surprising. Verdi wanted to establish himself as a

composer in Milan, and that meant working with persons and institutions capable of helping him. He was no Jacopo Foroni, the Italian musician who, after the “Cinque Giornate” in 1848, fled to Sweden, where he spent the remainder of his career far from the oppression of occupied Italy. No, Verdi made compromises, with which he was not always happy, but he was unwilling in the 1840s or 1850s to end his days in prison or in exile. He remained, in short, the sensible peasant from Busseto (but, of course, he was neither a peasant nor a native of Busseto).

Austrian authorities in Milan faced enormous difficulties when giving approval for the performance of Verdi’s early operas, and the composer did not make life easier for them. While those in the opening night audience might not have signaled their republican tendencies by demanding the repetition of the chorus of Hebrew slaves, “Va pensiero sull’ale dorate,” the Austrians did censor the text of the “Immenso Jeovah” chorus, and I have often wondered whether knowledge of that censorship might have encouraged some of the audience to demand its repetition. There is ample evidence in his autograph manuscript that Verdi originally set this text:

Spesso al tuo popolo
donasti il pianto;
ma i ceppi hai franto
se in te fidò.

The censors were not overjoyed at this description of a captive people breaking its chains, and Verdi modified the text in his autograph manuscript:

Tu spandi un’iride? . . .
tutto è ridente.
Tu vibra il fulmine? . . .
l’uom più non è.

The modification substitutes “ridente” for “pianto,” and the music Verdi wrote for “pianto”—left unchanged by an angry composer (his crossing-out is done with vehemence) doesn’t work at all for “ridente.”

The image shows a musical score for the 'Immenso Jeovah' chorus. It consists of two staves: a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is marked *pp* (pianissimo). The original text is written below the vocal line, and the censored text is written below the piano line. The original text is: "Original: Spes - so al tuo po - po - lo do - na - sti il pian - to;". The censored text is: "Censored: Tu span - di u - n'i - ri - de?.. tut - to è ri - den - te." The piano accompaniment consists of chords and arpeggiated figures.

Verdi would never have permitted such a poor word/tone relationship in newly composed music. Was he expressing his discontent? We’ll never know.

But we do know that Francesco Maria Piave's original verses for another chorus widely regarded as "Risorgimental" were modified to make them acceptable. The suggestion for Verdi to set Victor Hugo's *Hernani* came from the Teatro La Fenice of Venice, with which the composer had a contract. Verdi might never have suggested it, since the play was banned almost immediately after its first performance in Paris in 1830. It was considered revolutionary, filled with unbridled passion and going against all the "rules" of French classicism, including the classical unities of time and place. Verdi loved the idea and wrote back at once: "Oh! . . . If I could only do Ernani it would be a wonderful thing! . . . Sig.¹ Piave has great facility at writing verses and in Ernani all that would be necessary would be to reduce and streamline: the action is done, and its interest is immense." But the composer feared the Austrian censors—with good reason. They were always on the lookout for those who surreptitiously wanted to stage sedition (even using the word "libertà" was considered dangerous) or who proposed sexually charged scenes or words.

One of the most problematic scenes in *Ernani* was what became Act III: the scene in which one of Leonora's three would-be lovers, the baritone King Carlo, is proclaimed Holy Roman Emperor as Charles V. The scene opens with a conspiracy against Carlo. The police were aware of the problems this scene could pose, and they wrote to the theater, "[W]here the Conspirators appear let the scene be as brief as possible, and no swords are to be unsheathed. And let the action of the Emperor in offering clemency in Scene III be liberal and great, when he appears among them." Piave, fully aware of the problems that could arise, wrote to the librettist Jacopo Ferretti in Rome on 13 November 1843, "I thought to have finished but when my maestro Verdi arrives (whom I know thus far only by name), I assume there will be the regular boredom of changes, modifications, etc. Pazienza!" In the same letter he sent his original verses for the conspirators' chorus, "Si ridesti il Leon di Castiglia," and added, "I don't know if the police will approve." There are many differences between what Piave originally wrote and what ultimately appeared in the opera. Where Piave wrote, "e col sangue de' spenti / Scriveranno i figliuoli viventi / Qui regnare sol dee liberta," Verdi set a revised "ed il sangue de' spenti / nuovo ardire ai figliuoli viventi, / forze nuove al pugnare darà." The word "libertà," indeed, all the power of the original, has been sacrificed:

Original: Mor - te col - ga, on'ar-ri - da vit - to - ria, pu - gne - rem, e col san-gue de'
 Censored: ed il san-gue de'

spen - ti scri - ve - ran - no i fi - gliuo - li vi - ven - ti: Qui re - gna -
 spen - ti nuo - vo ar - di - re ai fi - gliuo - li vi - ven - ti, for - ze nuo -
 - - re al sol dec - li - ber - tà.
 - - ve pu - gna - re da - rà.

Verdi must have been aware that this passage *had* to be changed, for his autograph manuscript has only the revised text.

In another Milanese opera, he encountered yet other problems. As Francesco Izzo has pointed out, the cult of Maria was strong in Italy, but the Maria admired by the Austrians was the sad mother of Christ, weeping at the foot of the cross, not Maria Vergine (references to virginity, explicitly referring to sexuality, were frowned upon) or the warrior Maria, fighting for Christianity (symbolically, for Italian independence). At several points in the opera the name “Maria” is replaced by “la Pia,” emphasizing the piety of the mother of Christ, certainly not what Schiller’s *Maid of Orleans* (the source of Verdi’s opera) imagined. In the key scene of the opera, however, after Joan—who has allowed her personal feelings to interfere with the future of France—has been present at the coronation of King Charles, her father—before a crowd of peasants—accuses his daughter of witchcraft. In the censored version, he addresses her three times: “In nome del Dio vindice, non sacrilega sei tu?” “Per l’anima dei parenti, non sacrilega sei tu?” and “Per l’anima del tuo madre, non sacrilega sei tu?” Verdi’s original text, crossed out in his autograph, is “In nome della Francia, pura e vergine sei tu?” followed by “In nome della fede, pura e vergine sei tu?” and finally “In nome di Maria, pura e vergine sei tu?” The fundamental question now is “pura e vergine sei tu?” asked in ascending order of significance, “in nome della Francia,” “in nome della fede,” and, worst of all, “in nome di Maria.” But Giovanna, aware that she has fallen in love with the king, is no longer “pura.” Hence, she is taken prisoner and condemned. The shift in meaning between the non-censored and censored versions is not even subtle.

One could continue tracing places where censors wrought havoc on Verdi’s operas, but let us examine instead his reaction to the 1848 revolutions. Unlike Wagner, who participated actively in revolutionary movements and was ultimately forced to flee Dresden and take refuge in Switzerland, Verdi was in Paris when the “Cinque Giornate” broke out, but he did not remain there. Already on 5 April he had arrived in

Milan, whence his correspondence with his librettists Salvatore Cammarano and Piave make clear his enthusiasm for the new political situation. His most famous letter from this period is to Piave, written on 21 April 1848:

Just imagine that I wanted to remain in Paris when I heard of the revolution in Milan. I left as soon as I received word, but all I could see was the splendid barricades. Honor to the heroes! Honor to all of Italy, which in this moment is truly great.

The hour has sounded, be convinced, of its liberation. The people want it and when the people want something there is no absolute power that can resist. They can try, they can do what they will, even using force, but they will not succeed in defrauding the rights of the people. Yes, yes, in a few years or even a few months, Italy will be free, one, republican. What else could it be?

You speak to me of music? What has gotten into you? . . . You can't think that now I want to occupy myself with notes, with sounds? . . . There can be only one music grateful to the ears of Italians in 1848: the music of the cannon! . . . I would not write a note for all the gold in the world: I would feel remorse at using music paper, which is so good for making bullets.

That Verdi soon wished to celebrate the new political situation through his music became clear in his correspondence with Cammarano. In a letter of 20 April Cammarano excused his previous silence because “in this era of political events, of anxieties, of hopes, thoughts of citizenship take precedence in me over artistic thoughts.” Now that he is seeking a subject for a projected new opera with Verdi, however, the changed political situation has “opened wide the possibilities.” What is the subject he really wishes to develop? “If there burns in you, as in me, the desire to treat the most glorious epoch of Italian history, let us return to that of the Lombard League.” After summarizing the subject of *La battaglia di Legnano*, he concludes, “By God, such an argument must move everyone who has in his breast an Italian soul.”

On 15 June Cammarano sent his outline to the composer in Paris. In the poetry of the first act, which followed on 26 June, the chorus concludes its introduction with this strophe:

Viva Italia forte ed una
colla spada e col pensier!
Questo suol che a noi fu cuna,
tomba sia dello stranier!

Verdi responded to Cammarano's libretto of Act III in a letter of 24 October. The only change he requested was the introduction of a short scene for Lida and Rolando, so as to give the *prima donna* an expanded

presence. Cammarano obliged with a scene in which Rolando tells his wife what to say to their son should he die in battle:

Digli ch'è sangue italico
 digli ch'è sangue mio,
 che dei mortali è giudice
 la terra, no, ma Dio!
 E dopo Dio la Patria
 gli apprenda a rispettar.

con espressione

Di - gli ch'è san - gue i - ta - li-co, di - gli ch'è san-gue mi - o,

As of January 1849, such texts were still possible in Rome, where papal forces had not yet returned, but were no longer acceptable in Milan, where the Austrians were firmly in control. Although Ricordi published *La battaglia di Legnano* in its original form, it was described in the 1857 catalogue of the firm as “edizione estera, distrutta”: an edition prepared outside Milan, but destroyed. Instead, Verdi and Cammarano’s opera became *L’assedio d’Arlem*, with changes in the text to make it acceptable to the Austrian rulers. That both were aware such changes might prove necessary is clear in their correspondence, beginning as early as September 1848. Yet the willingness of both Verdi and Cammarano to yield to political necessity in order to permit their opera to circulate can hardly negate the enthusiasm and conviction with which they conceived and wrote *La battaglia di Legnano*.

Verdi’s other musical commitment of 1848 was at the request of Giuseppe Mazzini, whom the composer had met the previous summer in London, when he supervised the premiere of *I masnadieri*. During Verdi’s Milanese sojourn in May 1848, Mazzini—who had also returned to Milan when word of the “Cinque Giornate” reached him—persuaded Verdi to set a patriotic hymn. On 6 June Mazzini requested from Goffredo Mameli a text “that might become the Italian Marseillaise, and in which the people, to use Verdi’s phrase, might forget the composer and the poet.” Mameli’s text, dated 26 August 1848, was promptly forwarded to the composer. On 18 October from Paris Verdi sent Mazzini a musical setting:

I send you the hymn, and even if it arrives a bit late I hope it will be there in time. I tried to be as popular and simple as is possible for me. Use it however you want. Burn it if you think it unworthy. . . .

May this hymn, amidst the music of the cannon, soon be heard in the Lombard plains.

It was not to be. Although Verdi may have tried to be “più popolare e facile che mi sia stato possibile,” his melody could not compete with the ever-popular “Fratelli d’Italia,” the text also by Mameli, but set to music by Michele Novaro.

Suo - na la trom - ba, on - deg - gia - no le in - se - gne gial - le e - ne - re;

Fra - tel - li d'I - ta - lia, l'I - ta - lia è de - sta,

Whether the composer’s effort was successful or not, however, Verdi’s own reaction to the “Cinque Giornate” and its aftermath was similar to that of contemporary critics, who invited artists to write patriotic hymns and to compose operas that directly reflected the new political reality. It was no longer time for metaphorical references, for operas about Hebrew slaves in Babylon or Scottish refugees weeping over their oppressed homeland or Attila and the Huns at the outskirts of Rome, even if audiences were prepared to understand such references (as several reviewers make clear). It was a time for direct statement.

Still, the period after 1848 and the 1850s, in general, was no longer a time for direct statement in the world of Italian opera, nor even for veiled references, although representing the operas of Verdi that had already been approved by the Austrian censors was not considered seditious in Milan. After 1848, however, the censors were even more ferocious, as Verdi learned when he produced *Stiffelio* in 1850 and *Rigoletto* in 1851 in northern Italian cities, and hoped to produce *Gustavo III* in Naples in 1858 (it was later transformed into *Un ballo in maschera* for Rome in 1859). Although the composer allowed himself to set a libretto on the subject of *Les vêpres siciliennes* for Paris in 1855, when the opera was returned to Italy the following year he himself arranged the text in a highly censored form as *Giovanna di Guzman*.

But political events were moving fast, and Verdi’s position with respect to them leaves no doubt about his feelings. Let me say as I quote several passages from his correspondence that I have a file with *every* document pertaining to Verdi and these crucial years in the quest for Italian independence. The document is three hundred single-spaced pages long. I can here, of course, provide only a sampling, but none of these samples is ever contradicted by anything else in the file. To his French friend and publisher, Léon Escudier, he wrote on 11 November 1860, “What beautiful music and what great Finales Garibaldi knows how to produce! . . . We want only that you, our friends, allow us to be rulers of our own homeland . . . and perhaps one day we can convince

you (it is understood that it will take a long time) that the Italians, too, know how to fight. . . .”

When in December 1860 a Neapolitan friend asked Verdi to write a hymn celebrating the decision of the Neapolitan king to deposit his crown before Garibaldi, the composer responded, “You want me to write a hymn, when the red-shirted Hero has a final step to take? No! The national hymn must be heard at the same time on the Venetian lagoon, in Naples, and on the Alps. I have refused and will continue to refuse until that moment to write one, and if God helps us break our chains and if I live to see that day, it will be the first and last hymn of G. Verdi.”

Whatever his hopes for a united Italy, it is clear that Verdi was insistent that the change occur in a well-ordered fashion, preferably under a strong leader, not on the basis of radical action. That is the message of the council chamber scene in his revised *Simon Boccanegra* in 1881. And to Clarina Maffei he wrote on 9 January 1861, “I am mortified that you preceded me in sending good wishes for the new year; good wishes that I exchange with all my heart, and with the great desire that in 1861 the work of our complete redemption will be concluded.”

This is the context in which one must read the letter that Camillo Benso, count of Cavour, who had been prime minister of the Kingdom of Savoy, and who sought to bring into the new Italian government both politicians and artists, wrote to Verdi the next day, on 10 January, inviting him to be a member of the first national Parliament: “[Your presence] will contribute to the reputation of the Parliament both within Italy and outside. It will give credit to the great national party that wishes to constitute the nation on the solid bases of liberty and order. And it will help us with our imaginative colleagues from the southern part of Italy, who are more susceptible to the influence of artistic genius than are inhabitants of the cold valley of the Po.”

The complex history of Verdi’s candidacy for the Parliament from the Province of Borgo San Donnino (the present-day Fidenza) and his unfortunate problems with another candidate, Giovanni Minghelli Vaini, are well known. The composer did not want to participate, as he told the conductor Angelo Mariani on 26 January 1861: “Perhaps I will be a deputy (let Heaven forbid, for it would be a disaster for me), but not for long, for in a few months I will give my resignation.” When he was elected, however, he accepted and on 6 February wrote these words to the head of the electoral process from Borgo San Donnino: “[I]f I cannot bring to Parliament the splendor of eloquent language, I will bring independence, a scrupulous character, and the firm wish to work with all my power for the good of, the well-being, and the unification of our Country, so long under attack and divided by foreign forces and civil discord.”

Nor was the significance of his election lost on his friends, such as Piave, who wrote to the composer on 11 February 1861:

You may not remember, but several months ago I wrote to you predicting that you would be a Deputy, and now that you are elected to the first Italian Parliament, may I be allowed to rejoice with you at this honor, and even a bit with myself at not having been a vain prophet.

My Verdi will be one of the fortunate ones who will vote to give the Crown of Italy to the greatest of Kings! To the true Emanuel, sent by God to redeem this land blessed by the Sun, by Music, by Love!!! Ah, such a thought exalts me and it will make even stronger, if that is possible, my pride in my affection for you.

For the next few months, Verdi often asked Giuseppina to handle his correspondence because, according to his wife, he was “most occupied at the Parliament.” He did indeed serve faithfully in the first session, from February through May 1861, but before leaving for the second session he learned of the death of Cavour on 6 June, and wrote the next day to his friend Opprandino Arrivabene, “At the moment I was to depart I heard the terrible news, which killed me! I do not have the courage to go to Turin or to attend the funeral of that Man. . . . What a disaster! What an abyss of horrors!” After the funeral, which he did attend, after all, he wrote on 14 June to Arrivabene, “I could not hold back my tears and wept like a baby . . .” That Cavour’s death had a profound impact on Verdi’s parliamentary life is certain, but he was already planning a new opera for the Imperial Theater at Saint Petersburg, and by July he was hard at work at Sant’Agata with Piave.

Thereafter Verdi’s participation in the Italian Parliament was minimal, as he wrote to Piave on 3 February 1865: “For two long years I was absent from the Parliament! Afterwards I attended only rarely. Often I wanted to resign, but each time something intervened, and so against my will, against my taste, without inclination, habit, or talent, I remain a Deputy. That is everything. If someone some day wants to write a biography of me as a member of Parliament, he needs to leave half a page blank, and write, in large letters: ‘The 450 are really only 449, since Verdi, as a Deputy, does not exist.’”

Still, Cavour was right. He asked Verdi to be a member of the first Italian Parliament because he understood the symbolic value of the gesture. However much the image of the man and composer may have been exaggerated in the latter part of the nineteenth century and however true Verdi’s statement was that his biography should show that as a “Deputato” he did not exist, it must also show that he was quite rightly considered by his countrymen one of the leading figures in the Italian Risorgimento.