

Communications

To the Editor of the **Journal**:

In a portion of his article, “Some Thoughts on the Use of Autograph Manuscripts in Editing the Works of Verdi and Puccini,” Philip Gossett seeks to counter the conclusions that I had reached some twenty-one years earlier with regard to the textual authority of Verdi’s autograph score for his last opera, *Falstaff* (1893).¹ At stake is the question of which document should serve as the “copy-text” or “principal source” for the future critical edition of that opera in the ongoing series, *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi*, of which Gossett, for many years, has been the enormously influential general editor. As he notes in his article, within *WGV* considered as a whole “the music is [to be] derived from a principal source, almost always the composer’s autograph manuscript” (p. 105). Among its other points, Gossett’s essay presents a high-pitched argument for extending that guideline to *Falstaff*: the autograph score as Verdi’s preferred “document of record” (p. 117).

After reviewing the entirety of the available evidence of Verdi’s, Boito’s, and Ricordi’s 1892–93 editorial activity with regard to *Falstaff*, my 1992 study had come to different conclusions, ones that called into question the authority of Verdi’s autograph score for that opera, favoring instead Ricordi’s first printed orchestral score, which was completed by July 1893. The goal of the *Falstaff* project, beyond the initial, early-1893 productions of the opera, was to manufacture, on one editorial track, a printed vocal score for sale and, on another, a printed orchestral score for rental. (Printing an orchestral score, *stampato in luogo di manoscritto*, demonstrated a new capability for Ricordi’s Milanese firm—a point of pride and a sign of the Italian house’s technological modernity.) The editorial issues at hand in all of this necessitated the close and trusting collaboration of Verdi, Boito, and Ricordi. This is a crucial point: everything that we know about these interrelationships in 1892 and 1893 affirms their willing, amicable cooperation. No existing document suggests otherwise. As all parties knew, getting a new opera into print in the modern, copyright-legalized world of 1893 was no small thing. It required the careful work of numerous parties.

1. This **Journal** 66 (2013): 103–28 (*Falstaff* pages, 112–18); Hepokoski, “Overriding the Autograph Score: The Problem of Textual Authority in Verdi’s ‘Falstaff,’” *Studi verdiani* 8 (1992): 13–51. Subsequent references to page numbers in these articles will be made in the text.

Amidst a host of nuances and details, my conclusions (and recommendations) included the following:

The [printed] *Falstaff* orchestral score was the product of a [newly and] thoroughly industrialized editorship under the guidance of Giulio Ricordi at the height of his powers. . . . From the beginning, [Verdi's, Boito's, and Ricordi's] *Falstaff* project celebrated the modern principle of the marriage of art to the economic and legal powers of big business. . . . This commodity called *Falstaff* was something that, once brought to its eventual state of release into the marketplace, would be a complex enterprise. To try to reduce this to a concern with Verdi's intentions alone—with the implication that these intentions may be investigated apart from the collaborative and commercial process with which they were inescapably intertwined—is grossly to misunderstand the multilayered reality of this opera. *Falstaff* was very much a “socially produced” work . . . (p. 15).

The autograph score of *Falstaff* is indeed a precious historical document. It is of great interest to historians and to all admirers of the opera who might wish to venerate the hand of the *vecchio maestro* in the act of creation. But it is no longer of significant editorial interest. In terms of authority, it preserves an older, essentially abandoned state of the verbal and musical text, and, for all practical purposes, present-day performers, *qua* performers, need not be concerned with it. In nearly all cases, readings in the autograph score should not be permitted to override those in the more reliable early printed sources. In general, it is the autograph score that should be overridden . . . (p. 43).

The principal source for a “new” orchestral score of *Falstaff* should be the earliest known printed copy of [Ricordi's] rental *partitura* [orchestral score], plate number 96180, originally published in three volumes. . . . The only existing orchestral score whose 1893, first-run printing is absolutely verifiable is that that deposited in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Consequently, this copy should serve as the principal listings . . . (p. 43).

[Thus] there is no need to clog the critical commentary with constant references to different autograph-score readings, particularly those that concern phrasing, dynamics, and articulation. For the most part, it is doubtful that anybody would—or should—be concerned with such things. . . . Sheer practicality suggests that references to the autograph score should be restricted to pointing out—at most—differences in notes, text, or stage directions—and, perhaps, to noting a few spectacular differences in the conception of an entire passage. (pp. 46–47)

All this flew in the face of *WGV* guidelines, of which Gossett is the guardian. Hence his heated pages devoted to *Falstaff*. With all due respect, I am convinced that Gossett's more predictably orthodox assertion, defending the principal-source authority of the autograph score, is mistaken and that Verdi himself would have been astonished by, and displeased with, any such claim. (I do not believe that I am alone among Verdians in this assessment.) What is most important, and what may take readers by surprise, is that Gossett's article offers no new evidence for his continued assertions. Instead,

he cherry-picks from the broader range of evidence that I had laid out in order to bolster his own long-held convictions.

Downplayed or ignored altogether are numerous points that run counter to those convictions. I summarize here only three of these points, though several more remain. First, Gossett does mention, although only in passing, that the preparation of the orchestral parts for *Falstaff* was accomplished, on Ricordi's request, by "Gerolamo De Angelis, who was the concertmaster of the La Scala orchestra, and with Giuseppe Magrini, who was its first cellist" (p. 113). This work involved standardizing (making more consistent) such features of the autograph score as dynamics, articulation, and the like. The De Angelis–Magrini interventions lie at the core of the issue at hand. They deserve much more attention than Gossett gives them. The critical questions are: was Verdi aware of these interventions? and did he approve of them? The answer to both is most certainly yes.

In brief, as I document more fully in my 1992 article, Ricordi asked Verdi to come to Milan on 13–15 October 1892, shortly after the editor had received the final installment of the autograph score, in order to firm up a number of details related to the upcoming production process, including, as Verdi put it in his letter to Ricordi of 9 October, the "bowing" and "other things" ("delle arcate . . . e di altre cose") (p. 24). Two days later, on 11 October, Ricordi contacted De Angelis and Magrini to come to his office on 13 October "to talk with you [De Angelis and Magrini] about an important matter" (p. 25). What was going on could hardly be clearer: Ricordi was eager to have De Angelis and Magrini—illustrious Milanese figures who were to be responsible for altering and standardizing some aspects of the autograph score—present or nearby at the time that Verdi was on hand in Milan to deal with *Falstaff*-preparation matters. In all likelihood Ricordi, De Angelis, Magrini, and Verdi himself came to an understanding of what was needed (or authorized) to regularize the autograph score for practical performance and print. The ever-exacting Verdi must have agreed to this, since the two performers immediately set about their task, which was completed by late December 1892.

The conclusion is inescapable: subject to his own later approval (during the January 1893 rehearsals moving up to the 9 February premiere), Verdi must have delegated the authority for such things over to Ricordi, De Angelis, Magrini, and perhaps a few others of whom we are unaware. By 1892–93 this was simply how business was done. Since the results of the engraved orchestral parts could be heard and altered, if needed, during the January and early February rehearsals at which he was to be present, Verdi need not have concerned himself with them in late 1892. (He did need to concern himself, however, with the separately prepared vocal score, destined for sale in the commercial market. That was planned to be completed by early January 1893. The first copies of the vocal score were bound and sent off to Ricordi's copyright attorney, Jean Lobel, on 4 January 1893.)

Second, Gossett does not sufficiently consider that much of the collaboration among Verdi, Boito, Ricordi, and others took place in person, not in letters or other written documents. There can be no doubt about this. For any editor of *Falstaff*, as I put it in 1992, the documentation problem is:

At this point in the history of the *Falstaff* orchestral score, with Verdi's arrival in Milan on 2 January [1893] to supervise the rehearsals, we enter [an] informational blackout. About a half-year later, by July 1893, the printed *partitura*, 96180—standardized in phrasings, dynamics, articulations, verbal text, and so on (and therefore differing in thousands of small respects from the autograph score)—was finished and available for rental. (p. 29)

Concerning the orchestral parts (or, I should add, the provisional master-copy of the score, from which Edoardo Mascheroni must have conducted), Gossett roundly declares that “there [is not] the slightest evidence that Verdi personally examined this material during the course of rehearsals in January” (p. 116). With this statement he asks us to accept, simply on the basis of a lack of any explicit documentation, that during the intensive rehearsal process Verdi took no notice of—or failed to examine to whatever degree that he regarded as adequate—the “material” related to the orchestral score. But consider: during this period Verdi was in daily, extended contact with Boito and Ricordi—and, toward the end of the rehearsal period, with Mascheroni and the full *Falstaff* orchestra. And it was during this time when the source-copy for the eventual printed orchestral score—whatever that source-copy might have been—was being stabilized and actualized in sound. It is unimaginable that Verdi would have been indifferent to the current editorial state of the orchestral score and parts.

Third, a precedent for the industrialized production of the printed orchestral score of *Falstaff* had been established with *Otello* in 1887. At that time Casa Ricordi was not yet in a position to print a full orchestral score. Instead, Ricordi commissioned the Leipzig house, G. Röder, to do it. As I have noted elsewhere,

Plans for having [*Otello*] printed, *alla moderna*, were well under way by March 1887, and by 18 May Ricordi wrote Verdi . . . that he would soon be able to send him some orchestral proofs from the first act. . . . [Some months later] Ricordi sent Verdi an early copy of the printed [rental] orchestral score on 12 October . . . and, most significantly, Verdi praised it on 16 October: “The printed orchestral score is beautiful! It only lacks a few errors to be perfect.”²

While Röder's printed score was by no means flawless, we do know that Ricordi took pains to make sure that Verdi had seen it (including at least some of it in proof stage) and given it his blessing. How likely is it that—at some point in the 1893 informational blackout—Ricordi, with all of his veneration (and fear) of the *maestro*, failed to do something similar with *Falstaff*?

2. Hepokoski, *Giuseppe Verdi: Otello* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 76.

There is more, of course. But perhaps this begins to suggest some of the deficiencies in Gossett's argument about *Falstaff*. Readers of my 1992 study will encounter the full set of relevant evidence, carefully discussed and assessed. As I came to realize, that evidence leads inexorably to the conclusion that Verdi's "last word" does not reside in his handwritten autograph. It resides in the first printed orchestral score.³ While I realize that Gossett will continue to disagree with me, I stand by my original conclusion. I urge readers and performers interested in this question not to assume that his declarations represent the "last word" on this matter.

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PHILIP GOSSETT responds:

I am not surprised that James Hepokoski did not like what I had to say about Verdi's *Falstaff*. What astonishes me, though, is that he has no new documentation whatsoever to bring to bear on the problem. I would have been pleased to find any serious proof that Verdi was himself responsible for the printed orchestral score of the opera, but in this letter Hepokoski provides nothing of the kind. We know that Verdi was very actively involved in the Fall with work on the vocal score and that he asked Ricordi constantly to bring the full autograph score into agreement with the vocal score, when he himself did not make the changes in his autograph score. But there is no evidence that he devoted the same attention to the full score in the Spring, despite Hepokoski's confident assumption that he did so.

We know, as Hepokoski pointed out, that Giulio Ricordi entered into an agreement with Gerolamo De Angelis and Giuseppe Magrini to prepare the full score of the opera for printing. But Verdi was never, ever, pleased with the work that Ricordi did in preparing full scores for use in theaters. His attitude was well expressed when Ricordi sent to Madrid a full score of *La forza del des-*

3. I put "last word" in scare quotes for a reason. By July 1893 Ricordi's first printed orchestral score had incorporated two major post-premiere revisions that Verdi had made for the opera's first performances in Rome (15–25 April 1893). As Gossett notes (p. 117), these are also revisions that Verdi insisted on including in his autograph score—probably, in my view, both to secure the autograph as a historical document and also to suppress that document's original traces of what had been revised. But of course Ricordi's first printed orchestral score of July 1893 could not have included five small (but interesting) retouchings that Verdi would make for the Parisian performances that would begin on 18 April 1894. As I note in "Overriding the Autograph Score," "It is unclear to what degree [Verdi] considered the [1894] Parisian revisions to be either authoritative options or definitive changes for all future performances" (49). Subsequent printings of the opera have often reproduced them only selectively. The Parisian revisions and the editorial problems that they entail are elaborated in my *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 76–84, and "Overriding the Autograph Score," 49–51. The main point, though, is that by July 1893—and even much earlier—Verdi was fully aware that the "final word" on the opera's musical and verbal text no longer rested with the autograph score.

tino that a copyist prepared for a performance there in 1863. The composer was horrified by what he found in that score (which exists still today in the Paris Conservatoire library). Yet he made no effort to remove the task of preparing performing materials from his publisher. He knew full well that he would have similar problems with any publisher in the world, and he trusted Giulio Ricordi, in particular, to do his job as well as could be hoped. He himself, though, said on numerous occasions that he was a “terrible” proofreader, and could not be depended upon to get printed scores right.

Hepokoski mentions that there was an “informational blackout” after Verdi came to Milan for rehearsals for his new opera, and that during that period, from early January 1893 through the first performance of *Falstaff* on 9 February 1893, there would be no Verdi letters about the opera, since he was present in Milan. That is likely to be true, but the score was not published, by Hepokoski’s own reckoning, until July 1893, and nowhere in the time he left Milan for Genoa in early March 1893 and then for St. Agata on 6 May does he so much as mention this publication, let alone De Angelis and Magrini. He writes to Ricordi, Boito, and Mascheroni (publisher, librettist, and first conductor, respectively), never to the other two, although Hepokoski is certainly right that they were important performers in Milan at the time and especially in the orchestra at La Scala. Still, their names are nowhere to be found, either in Hans Busch’s remarkable collection of letters related to *Falstaff*¹ or in Mary Jane Phillips-Matz’s important biography of the composer or in any other document I know pertaining to this period. If Verdi was dealing with them in any way, it was not directly. And his letters about the vocal score go well beyond the dates of 13–15 October 1892, when the composer gave Ricordi what at the time he thought would be the last installment of the first and third acts of his opera. Corrections, though, followed until the end of December 1892. There is no reason whatsoever to assume that Verdi would not have behaved much the same way with the full score, if he occupied himself with it, but there is no evidence that he did so.

Any critical edition must take very seriously the work of contemporary musicians as important as De Angelis and Magrini, but there is no reason to assume that we should necessarily use as the basis of our edition their interpretation of Verdi’s often incomplete notation rather than our own interpretation of the notation of the composer himself. Yes, of course we must take their decisions seriously and use them where it makes good sense to us. But remember that Verdi *never* provided bowings in his scores, although Giulio Ricordi rightly felt that musicians of his age wanted such practical information, and who better to determine what to write in the orchestral score than De Angelis and Magrini, who assumed the roles of concertmaster and first cellist at La

1. *Verdi’s Falstaff in Letters and Contemporary Reviews*, ed. and trans. Hans Busch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Scala. Still, do we really want to allow their vision to be preserved in print today? The attitude of a modern conductor to the matter of bowing certainly is not the same as that of musicians of Verdi's time. We no longer believe that everyone needs to be bowing in exactly the same way. Would we rather know what De Angelis and Magrini thought or what Verdi wrote? I believe strongly that scholars and performers care more about the latter than they do about the former.

From the time Verdi arrived in Genoa, he bombarded his principal collaborators with requests for changes in his score. There are letters to Ricordi of 8 March and 10 March. He made some changes for the Roman performance in mid-April. On 7 May, from S. Agata, he wrote to Mascheroni, saying "If you think it useful to add the little instruments in the quartet, as long as they aren't heard, go ahead" (Busch, p. 398), and in the autograph the oboe and clarinet parts for this passage (which are found on ff. 57–59) are crossed out, including the offensive low B for Oboe that Verdi specifically requested to be removed.

I do not mean to suggest for a moment that the printed score has no use in work on the critical edition of *Falstaff*, but I think we make a mistake if we favor its readings over the composer's own autograph manuscript. Certainly, if Verdi is less than clear in his autograph, we want to be helped by the printed score, but I do not worry about having too many critical notes as a result of our decision to choose Verdi's autograph manuscript as the principal source. There is no significant indication that the number of notes has increased over time in the edition of *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi*, nor are these notes ever meant to be read through at a single sitting: they are there to help performers and scholars who have a query, and it is clear that they must be handled with tact and good judgment.

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