

The Disposizione Scenica for Verdi's Otello:

A Critical Study

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A Note on Abbreviated References within the Text

All parenthetical page references, unless otherwise specified, refer to the disposizione scenica for Otello.

All musical references from Otello, unless otherwise specified, refer to the currently available vocal score (spartito, abbrev. "sp.") published by G. Ricordi & C., Milan (pl. no. 52105, ed. Mario Parenti, 1964). Citations (following "sp.") refer to page number / system number / measure number: thus "sp., 181/4/1-2" refers to the Ricordi vocal score, page 181, system 4, measures 1-2.

The following books—most of them sources of Verdian correspondence—are also frequently cited within the text in abbreviated form:

Abbiati, Franco. Giuseppe Verdi. 4 vols. Milan: Ricordi, 1959.

(Abbrev. "Abbiati," with volume and page number.)

Carteggio Verdi-Boito. Ed. Mario Medici and Marcello Conati. 2 vols.

Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1978. (Abbrev. "Carteggio Verdi-Boito," with volume and page number.)

Cella, Franca, and Petrobelli, Pierluigi, eds. Giuseppe Verdi—Giulio

Ricordi: Corrispondenza e immagini 1881/1890. Milan: La Scala, 1982. (Abbrev. "Cella-Petrobelli," with page number.)

Luzio, Alessandro. Carteggi verdiani. 4 vols. Rome: Reale Accademia

d'Italia, 1935-47. (Abbrev. "Luzio," with volume and page number.)

The Disposizione Scenica for Verdi's Otello:

A Critical Study

1. "L'interpretazione di una opera d'arte è una sola."

The 111-page disposizione scenica for Otello, "compilata e regolata secondo la messa in scena del Teatro alla Scala da Giulio Ricordi," is an extraordinary and complex document. It is our foremost source of direct information about the original, 1887 production of the opera, and yet, much of what one finds within it is susceptible to misinterpretation unless one is aware of the network of relationships that it has with other source documents—letters, scores, related publications on staging practices, and so on. As apparently the last of the series of Verdian disposizioni sceniche published in Italy, primarily by the Ricordi firm (one for Falstaff was apparently planned but may never have been prepared—at the time of this writing it has not yet turned up),¹ that for Otello is markedly more ample than its predecessors: Giovanna de Guzman (Les vèpres siciliennes, ca. 1855, 39 pp.), Un ballo in maschera (ca. 1859, 38 pp.), La forza del destino (ca. 1863, 44 pp.), Don Carlo (ca. 1867, 55 pp.), Aida (ca. 1872, 68 pp.), and the revised Simon Boccanegra (1885, 52 pp.). Significantly, its principal rival in thoroughness is Ricordi's 109-page disposizione scenica for Arrigo Boito's Mefistofele (1877), "compilata e regolata secondo le istruzioni dell'autore." As will emerge in Section 2 below, Boito's characteristically detailed ideas—as well as those of Verdi himself—

are surely present in the Otello production manual and may in part account for its length.

The modern reader's initial reactions to the disposizione scenica are likely to be, first, delight that so much information is available—thus permitting a close reconstruction of the early La Scala performances—and, second, perhaps, a certain surprise at the aggressive tone of much of the document, for its meticulousness clearly springs from the assumption that its readers (the direttori di scena in various non-Milanese late-ottocento opera houses, who could rent these stage directions from G. Ricordi & C. along with the orchestral parts) would not infrequently be ignorant, incompetent, and heedless of even the most obvious points in the score. It may be difficult for us to understand, for instance, why Ricordi believed it necessary to fix as definitive such a small point of detail as the design and pattern of the handkerchief produced by Cassio in the Act III Terzetto ("avrà tutt'intorno un ricamo a fili d'oro e seta rossa e verde, formante un ornato a fiori, di stile moresco . . ." [p. 68n]) or to include the explanatory footnote about Otello's kisses at the end of the opera: "Questi tre baci . . . fanno riscontro ai tre baci che **Otello** dà a **Desdemona** nel primo Atto" (p. 107n). The level of detail throughout is heavy-handed, paternal. And its ultimate effect is tyrannical, for it aimed to march all future productions in lockstep with a distillation of those first seen at La Scala. Thus near the beginning Giulio Ricordi placed a sentence taken from his earlier disposizioni sceniche—for instance, those for Mefistofele (1877) and Il re di Lahore (1877) (but one not included in his earlier Verdian efforts, the Aida of ca. 1872

and the Simon Boccanegra of ca. 1885): "E assolutamente necessario che gli artisti prendano esatta cognizione della messa in scena e vi si conformino" (p. 7). And now with Otello Ricordi went further to add with imperial authority, "come pure Direzioni ed Imprese non devono permettere alterazioni di sorta ai costumi: questi furono accuratamente studiati e copiati da quadri dell'epoca e non v'è ragione perchè vengano alterati secondo il capriccio di questo o di quell'artista" (p. 7).

In short, the language of the disposizione scenica is the language of power—commercial and artistic power. Its premises are that under the guidance of Ricordi, Boito, and Verdi himself (it was widely known that all three had been directly involved with the first La Scala performances) the guidelines for the ideal production had been revealed; that Otello could now exist as a fixed object, virtually the same everywhere; that there was such a thing as a single, "correct" performance against which others could be measured. Significantly, even as Verdi two years later was fiercely criticizing the original production and suggesting new stage sets and other things for the first La Scala revival—criticisms that raise questions about the final authority of this disposizione scenica (see Section 4 below)—he retained as axiomatic the principle that an ideal performance did exist, particularly with regard to vocal delivery, a major concern of the disposizione scenica. Thus on 1 January 1889, to Ricordi: "Hanno un bel dire se dicono male quelli che pretendono che bisogna concedere qualche cosa alle diverse qualità di timbro di voce. No: l'interpretazione di una opera d'arte è una sola e non può essere che una sola" (Abbiati, IV, 366). Despite Verdi's later objections to the 1887 La Scala

performances, it is clear that Ricordi's disposizione scenica attempted to describe the una sola that it was hoped Otello could become.

2. Authorship and Authority (1): Initial Considerations.

The crucial question, of course, is to what extent does Ricordi's disposizione scenica capture the express intentions of Verdi and Boito? The answer—essentially the assurance that the manual, approved by both men, is reasonably reliable and incorporates many staging decisions suggested by the composer or the librettist—should not be misconstrued as conveying a kind of Verdian infallibility on these printed ideas. Disposizioni sceniche, the first fruits of direct, recent staging experience, seem to have been more a passion of Ricordi than of Verdi, although the latter did not object to them, and, indeed, through his rehearsal activity often contributed indirectly (and perhaps directly, as might have occurred with the Aida manual²) to them. Although they projected the familiar, late nineteenth-century image of the immutable art-work, they were fundamentally items of commercial interest, part of a possible rental package from the publishing firm. Ricordi had been interested in producing them from at least the Aida manual (ca. 1872) onward, and they are obviously works on which he lavished much care: he appears, for instance, to have devised (or borrowed) an elaborate system of blocking diagrams to meet his needs, one which is followed in the Otello book. By the 1880s Ricordi was a powerful influence at La Scala and within the Italian operatic world in general. We may discover in his letters a keen interest in the most practical aspects of stagecraft: the lighting, the special effects, and so on.³ Verdi, too, mentions the practical aspects of staging in his letters, but—at least for Otello--

his remarks on performance more typically have to do with the selection of singers or the interpretations of individual roles. His comments on practical stagecraft tend to be reactions to or corrections of decisions initially made by others (see especially Section 4 below), even though we know that he took an active part in the Otello rehearsals and had veto power over any production decision made by anyone else. No extant document suggests that Verdi wished to be involved with the actual writing of the Otello disposizione scenica, or even that he was particularly concerned about it: he was content to delegate this project to Ricordi—apparently with additions and revisions by Boito, most notably the important Preface—with the understanding that he would examine the results at a late stage of its preparation.

Although Ricordi (and perhaps others) probably jotted down some notes and prepared some of the set and blocking diagrams during the January 1887 rehearsals (see Section 3 below), he actually drafted the disposizione scenica in the late spring and early summer of 1887, after the twenty-five Otello performances at La Scala (5 February—9 April) and perhaps even after the eight at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome (16 April--3 May) and the six at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice (beginning 17 May). The first we hear of the manual is in a letter from Ricordi to Verdi on 14 July 1887: "Ho completamente terminato la messa in scena dell'Otello ed il manoscritto fu riveduto da Boito[.] quando ne sarà pronta una prova corretta glie la spedirò, onde Ella veda se vi sono modificazioni a farsi" (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 59). The libroni in the Archivio Storico of G. Ricordi & C., Milan, however, record that the "Disposizione scenica per l'opera Otello" had been assigned a plate

number, 52159, a few weeks earlier, on 23 June 1887, and it is possible that the handwritten copy had already been consigned to the typographers on this early date, although it seems unlikely: Verdi had made a trip to Milan during the last week in June⁴ and had the manual already been finished one would think that he would have known about it—that is, Ricordi would not have had to inform him on 14 July of its completion. Within less than a month some of the proofs were ready. From 9 to 12 August Verdi was in Genoa, and one day after his return to Sant'Agata, on 13 August, he wrote to Eugenio Tornaghi, Ricordi's secretary, about a few proof-pages for Boito's Preface that he had received: "Le rimando la Prefazione d'Otello. Benissimol Niente di meglio! Ma...quei Signori...la leggeranno, la capiranno...seguiranno i consigli? In ogni [modo] è bene che sia stata fatta" (Carteggio Verdi-Boito, II, 368; see Section 5 below).

Shortly thereafter Ricordi delivered the complete set of proofs to Verdi. The editor's letter to Verdi of 24 August 1887—only recently published—contains the most significant allusion to the disposizione scenica in the letters and confirms the need for the composer's approval of the final product:

A mezzo dell'amico Muzio le mando questa mia: più l'ultima prova completa della messa in scena. Si compiacchia leggerla un po' per giorno, e se trova osservazioni a fare, le segni in margine -- Boito l'ha pure corretta: ora vi manca l'occhiata del summum judex--

Maurel mi ha fatto alcune osservazioni: alcune le trovai ottime: di ciò sentirà dallo stesso Muzio. (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 61)

Thus the order of essential interest in the disposizione scenica is clear: Ricordi as the principal author, calling upon his own memories of the rehearsals and the production; Boito as the principal reviser and the author of the preface; Verdi as the final reader, providing the inspection and final blessing of the summum judex. The issue of possible contributions at this late stage by Victor Maurel, the first Iago (the "Maurel intervention"), is problematic and needs to be dealt with separately (see Section 3).

While reading through the proofs, Verdi requested a few changes in the text. Some of these survive on bigliettini—all undated, although they must stem from late August or very early September 1887. All of them concern the second act. In one, Verdi objected to a gesture of weakness for Otello after the Moor has thrown Iago to the ground:

Nascondendosi il volto fra le mani et. et

pare un pentimento, e non dovrebbe essere tantopiù che dopo dice = Forse onesto tu sei, ma tante volte ti credo un birbo = [sp., 181/4/3ff]

L'atteggiamento d'Otello dovrebbe essere di sprezzo supremo. Nient'altro. (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 61)

It would appear that after Iago's cry of "Divina grazia, difendimi!" (sp., 179/5/2) Ricordi had instructed Otello to hide his face. This may have been intended as a gesture of despair, but Verdi saw that it could be mistaken for a pang of remorse for the abuse of Iago. In any event, Verdi's remark did affect the final reading of the disposizione scenica--in fact, Ricordi even seems to have reinforced the composer's suggestion. There, after Iago's "Divina grazia, difendimi!", one reads: "**Otello**, che lo domina di tutta la persona, guardandolo con ferocia, fa un gesto di sprezzo, e volgendogli le spalle, fa cinque o sei passi a destra" (p. 51).

The second of the Verdian bigliettini concerns Iago's delivery of a crucial phrase earlier in the second act:

Tanto per dire qualche cosa

Non amerei che Jago dicesse molto sottovoce la frase,

"Temete Signor, la gelosia" = [sp., 130/4/1]

1^o. Perché l'orchestra suona au grand complet

2^o. Perché l'accento di quella frase dovrebbe essere, più che misterioso, cupo, fatale sentenzioso quasi profetico...che so io!

Parlatene a Boito, e se, ne conviene, trovate la parola da sostituire al sottovoce[.] (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 61)

Here also the disposizione scenica as finally printed contains Verdi's correction: "**Jago**, su questa esclamazione, va direttamente contro **Otello**, colle mani protese e gli dice con accento cupo e fatale: Temete, signor, la gelosia" (p. 40).

Verdi's third correction involves the removal of a gesture for Otello at the end of Act II:

Quest'ultimo gesto di minaccia non dà forza abbastanza, ma piuttosto raffredda. Dopo che Otello ha giurato e bestemmiato tanto, ha altro in testa che di fermarsi ancora per fare un'altro gesto.

Io mi fermerei colla annotazione "s'incamminano rapidamente verso la porta"-----e cala il sipario.
(Cella-Petrobelli, p. 61)

Once again, in the disposizione scenica: "esclamando: Dio vendicator! alzeranno di nuovo il braccio destro. **Otello** si volge a **Jago**, e gli fa cenno imperioso di seguirlo, incamminandosi ambedue verso la porta di sinistra. Sulla terz'ultima battuta cala rapidamente il sipario" (p. 54).

The evidence is clear: in August 1887 Verdi did see the disposizione scenica before it was published; he made some corrections that were carried over into the ultimately published version; and we may conclude that he gave the document his general approval. The final confirmation for this comes from a letter of Ricordi to Verdi on 6 September 1887, by which time the editor had received the (slightly?) emended proofs from Verdi: "e sta benissimo per le indicate correzioni alla messa in scena -- La ringrazio vivamente per ciò" (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 62). One may presume that shortly thereafter--perhaps only a week or two later--several copies had been bound and were

available for rental. The early copy given to Boito, for instance, carries the blind stamp 9/1887 (see Section 13 below).

Although the three bigliettini mentioned above provide the clearest evidence of Verdi's participation in the disposizione scenica project, it is evident that there is much of Verdi's thought—and Boito's thought—embedded elsewhere in the manual. The more closely one reads it, the more one is convinced that it is not merely a record of the La Scala production, albeit idealized and perhaps altered at some points, but it is also a catalogue ("compilata e regolata") of what Ricordi remembered Verdi and Boito to have insisted upon during the rehearsals: the disposizione scenica skillfully weaves together the ideas of at least three men. At some points individual strands—individual voices—may be inferred. For instance, the idea of providing an exceptionally close reading, almost line-by-line, of Desdemona's Willow Song (pp. 89-91) is unprecedented in the manuals for other Verdian operas. An analogous set of instructions, however, does appear in the 1877 manual for Mefistofele in Margherita's "L'altra notte in fondo al mare" (Mef., p. 56): see Plate 1. Even though the Mefistofele production book was also "compilata e regolata" by Ricordi, the close reading was probably Boito's idea: as mentioned earlier, the obsessive detail of that document seems more characteristic of Boito than of Ricordi. We may guess, then, that the idea for the layout of the Willow Song in the Otello book might have been Boito's; and, by extension, we might also presume that his influence was felt in the pantomime of Otello's Act IV entrance (pp. 93-6), in which individual extracts of orchestral music are synchronized with stage action, a feature that one also finds in the

Mefistofele manual (but see also Section 12 below for an account of Verdi's acute interest in the individual actions of this pantomime).

Plate 1

[The Disposizione Scenica for Mefistofele (1877), p. 56.]

Similarly, the little that we know of Verdi's rehearsal activity is also reflected in the the disposizione scenica. In February 1887, the month of the Otello premiere, the Illustrazione italiana brought out a special "numero unico," Verdi e l'Otello, a sumptuous, illustrated booklet, "compilato da Ugo Pesci ed Ed^o Ximenes," but clearly reflecting the interests of Giulio Ricordi. One of Pesci's essays, "Le prove dell'Otello" (pp. 39-40), confirms the active presence of Ricordi, Boito, and Verdi at the rehearsals. Here, at least according to Pesci (who surely had received the information from Ricordi),⁵ Verdi's wishes and suggestions reigned supreme. We read, for example, that while rehearsing the singers at the pianoforte "A Verdi preme però che si cominci subito ad unire al canto l'azione, ed egli può esser maestro di attori come di cantanti. Raccomanda la massima naturalezza e con l'occhio intento studia ogni movimento, ogni gesto, per cogliere quello che gli sembra più naturale, più vero." Doubtless reflecting Verdi's insistence on this point, the principle of naturalezza--at least as conceived by the composer and Boito--pervades the disposizione scenica as one of its central themes (see Section 6 below). Pesci provides three specific instances of Verdian suggestions during the rehearsals. In the first,

La signora Pantaleoni [Desdemona] canta soavemente la
romanza del salice Canta la strofa
Scendean gli augelli a vol dai rami cupi
Verso quel dolce canto....

E poi ad Emilia: — "Riponi questo anello." — Il
maestro osserva che, per far parere meno brusca
l'interruzione, essa dovrebbe mostrare di vedersi in dito
l'anello facendo il gesto col quale ha con molta grazia
indicato lo scendere degli augelli dai rami... Con un tale
maestro è possibile interpretare una parte senza squisita
finezza?

The disposizione scenica (p. 90) clarifies both of the gestures that
Pesci attributes to Verdi. For the first ("Scendean l'augelli") one
reads, "Alza il braccio sinistro, e quasi indicando il volo degli
uccelli, lo accompagna abbassando lentamente il braccio, che terrà
steso." And immediately following this Desdemona notices the ring on
her outstretched arm: "Rimane immobile, con espressione d'immenso
dolore: poi d'un tratto gli occhi suoi fissano un anello che tiene in
dito: lo leva, e volgendosi a destra, lo consegna ad **Emilia** dicendole:
Riponi quest'anello."

Pesci's second anecdote concerns the end of the opera, Otello's
death-scene, with which Verdi was particularly concerned:

Otello deve cadere alla fine dell'ultima scena. Verdi
desidera una caduta tragica, salvinesca. Il Tamagno cade più

volte, ma il maestro non è completamente soddisfatto. Rimanda
le prove della caduta ad un altro giorno, vedendo l'artista
stanco.

Other, later accounts report that Verdi lost patience with Francesco
Tamagno and finally showed him precisely how to stab himself and roll
down the bed-steps by miming the action himself, while the onlookers
were stunned, fearing for the maestro because of the intense, realistic
vividness of his acting.⁶ All of this agrees with the carefully
described suicide-scene in the disposizione scenica (pp. 107-8), and one
may conclude that these final details of the opera were worked out
essentially by Verdi.

Pesci's third anecdote tells of an incident in which Verdi,
replacing an indisposed Tamagno at the rehearsals, "fa vedere alla
signora Pantaleoni quale debba essere un amplesso fervido,
appassionato."⁷ The moment in question probably concerns Otello's and
Desdemona's first embrace, at the point in the first act when the sound
of a single muted cello blossoms into a quartet of muted cellos in a
shadowy G-flat major, seven measures before Otello's "Già nella notte
densa" (sp., 94/5/4). For this important moment the Otello manual,
while of course incapable of conveying Verdi's precise gesture, at least
provides a great deal of "emotional" advice (p. 33; the passage is
discussed in Section 7 below).

In these matters and doubtless in many others Ricordi's
disposizione scenica is a direct record of the La Scala rehearsal
experience. In sending the manuscript to Boito before it was printed

and the proofs to Verdi before it was published Ricordi must have expected that the librettist and the composer would recognize their own concerns—and at times, surely, their own words—scattered throughout the document. Even further, it is particularly because Verdi seems to have been so adamant on the few dramatic points that we do know are his—and because we know how testily he reacted to any staging suggestion or performance that displeased him—that one may conclude that Ricordi wrote the disposizione scenica with at least partially the aim of pleasing (or at least satisfying) a somewhat unpredictable and crotchety old maestro. All of these considerations further enhance the general reliability of the document.

The disposizione scenica also reflects vividly some of the practical problems encountered during the La Scala rehearsals and performances—trouble-spots that Ricordi (or Verdi or Boito) judged likely to reappear in any future Otello production. Some portions of the opera, we learn, had required repeated rehearsings to provide the desired speed and naturalness: the clearing of the stage before the Act I Love Duet, kept nearly silent to ensure that the music could be heard (p. 32); the Otello-Desdemona struggle and murder in Act IV (p. 100); and the rapid, final entrance of Lodovico, Cassio, and Iago after the murder (p. 103). Other points of special concern in the Milanese production may be found, for instance, in Ricordi's counsels to rehearse patiently until the chorus is able to arrange itself picturesquely around the botola for the fire (p. 19); to have the taverners enter rapidly and efficiently to set up the drinking apparatus before the Brindisi (p. 23); to have Otello throw down Desdemona's handkerchief

before the Act II Quartet "dietro di sè, e più lontano che gli sarà possibile" (p. 48); to ensure that all of the praticabili in Acts I, II, and III are of the same height (60 centimeters) to facilitate changing the set between the acts (p. 56); to eliminate motion behind the closed curtain during the Act IV Prelude, because "L'esperienza ha dimostrato che, ed in causa della parapettata, ed in causa dell'istrumentale, il più piccolo rumore sul palcoscenico è avvertito dal pubblico" (p. 87); to position Desdemona in such a way that she can see the conductor during the "Ave Maria," and to provide a substitute for the normal prompter during this piece (p. 92); to have Otello memorize the music for his Act IV entrance in order to synchronize his subsequent movements with it, perhaps aided by a newly relocated substitute prompter during the initial performances (p. 93); to profit from the circumstance of Desdemona's face being concealed from the public as she is being strangled "per prendere colla sinistra il piuncino della cipria, che si darà abbondante sul viso" in order to appear pale after the murder (p. 100n); to be certain that the nearby Emilia does not block the view of Desdemona at the latter's death (p. 101); and so on. A related group of concerns deals with the explanations of the scenic "tricks," particularly in the first act: the moving boats (p. 9), the rolling sea (p. 9), the lightning (p. 9), the thunder (p. 10)⁸, the changing of the sky from stormy to serene (p. 20), and the risky business of the fire (whose actual lighting, as Ricordi aptly puts it, is to be managed by "un corista intelligente," p. 20).

All of these things, and many others besides, are not only badges of authenticity but also windows whose patent—almost naive—

transparency reveals the mechanics and problematic areas of the first Otello production. In addition to incorporating directly some of Verdi's and Boito's ideas, that is, and in addition to having been examined by both Boito and Verdi before its publication, the very language and concerns of the manual have the ring of truth and, above all, practicality about them. We have every reason to conclude that the disposizione scenica conveys in idealized and somewhat abstracted form (probably correcting and emending portions that had been unsuccessfully or unsatisfactorily executed) the essential stage-actions of the first Otello performances. As will be evident, however, this generally positive conclusion cannot be accepted uncritically. Indeed, in certain respects it must be qualified: the following two sections are devoted to the most notable of the difficulties, doubts, and questions surrounding the disposizione scenica.

3. Authorship and Authority (2): The "Maurel Intervention."

The possibility of corrections and emendations of the version actually presented at La Scala in early 1887 deserves special consideration, for there is one clear instance--possibly two--in which the printed manual alters what had been seen on-stage, at least during the rehearsals. On p. 55 of the disposizione scenica one finds the set-diagram for Act III. Downstage right, near the footlights, are placed three items, described on pp. 55-6: a "poltrona, coperta con stoffa antica a damasco" (indicated with a letter c); a solid "colonna"; and a "piccolo sedile, coperto [con stoffa antica a damasco]" (letter d). The "piccolo sedile" is occupied only once during the act. At the conclusion of the Otello-Desdemona Duet the Moor pushes Desdemona towards the door at the stage right and she exits, backing through the door, as the orchestra explodes with savage convulsions (sp., 225/2/1ff). Otello now prepares for his monologue, "Diol mi potevi scagliar tutti i mali," and the disposizione scenica provides the following instructions: "Nel massimo grado dell'abbattimento, **Otello** ritorna verso il centro della scena, e cade accasciato, oppresso dal dolore sul sedile presso la colonna, ove rimane immobile, colle braccia cadenti sulle ginocchia, il volto quasi piangente" (p. 62; the sp., 225/2/1-2, does not call for him to be seated at this point: one reads only that "ritorna verso il centro della scena"). A blocking diagram specifies the precise action. He is to remain seated until near the end of the first of the monologue's two strophes: "soltanto alle parole: E rassegnato al volere del ciel, **Otello** alzerà il braccio destro verso il

cielo, e la di lui voce sarà più ferma e marcata: in pari tempo si alzerà in piedi avanzandosi di due or tre passi" (p. 62).

Similarly, the "poltrona" (letter c) comes into play only during the Act III concertato, and, once again, it is a despairing Otello who seats himself after a gesture of violence directed towards his wife. (This reflects the stage directions in the sp., 278/1/2: "... Otello che si sarà accasciato su d'una sedile.") Following the words "A terra!...e piangil" (sp., 270/3/1), the stage manual calls for general gestures of horror and compassion (pp. 78-9), but as for Otello himself: "**Otello**, cupo, fremebondo va lentamente a destra e siede accasciato sulla poltrona, tenendo gli sguardi fissi al suolo, come uomo trasognato" (p. 78). He remains in this position, to one side of the stage, throughout most of the ensemble, raising his head "senza scomporsi" only when Iago comes to speak quietly with him (p. 81). Finally, at the end of the concertato: "**Otello**, che sarà fino allora rimasto seduto, cupo, agitato, d'un tratto ergendosi, si avventa contro la folla, urlando come forsennato: Fuggitel [sp., 315/1/2] ed interrompendo per tal modo la frase del finale" (p. 82).

Thus the disposizione scenica calls for Otello to sit down twice during the third act, whereas the spartito had required only one seating. This relatively minor discrepancy gains in importance when one considers the set-diagram for Act III published earlier by Ugo Pesci in a section entitled "Arrigo Boito.--Il libretto" in the February 1887 Verdi e l'Otello, p. 38 (Plate 2). (A separate diagram was also printed for the first scene of Act I--see Plate 3--but that diagram is with a few small differences similar to that found on p. 8 of the disposizione

scenica. Both plans are early, January 1887 conceptions of the sets furnished by Giulio Ricordi. That both are already engraved suggests that the forthcoming disposizione scenica was already occupying Ricordi's thoughts. In addition, one should mention that slightly later--but still preliminary--engraved and printed set-diagrams for all four acts are preserved at the Archivio Storico in G. Ricordi & C., Milan: see Plates 4-6.)⁹ As conceived during the period of the rehearsals, the Act III set (Plate 2) contained no chairs of any sort downstage. One may observe, however, that two "sedili" are present much deeper into the set, upstage right, tucked into the corners next to the "invetriata" looking out onto the "parapetto balcone." It is possible that Otello might have seated himself in one of them during concertato (thus following the spartito instructions, although it seems unlikely that the crucial Iago-Otello dialogue during the ensemble, the audibility of which was to worry Verdi so much in subsequent years, was originally planned to occur there)¹⁰, but it is obvious that he would not have sung his earlier monologue so deeply upstage. It seems most likely that at this early stage of the planning--and perhaps for the entire run of La Scala performances--Otello remained standing at least throughout the first portion of Act III.

Plate 2

[Act III set-diagram (January 1887), Verdi e l'Otello, p. 38]

Plate 3

[Act I Scene I set-diagram (January 1887), Verdi e l'Otello, p. 38]

Plate 4

[Early Act I set diagram (February-March 1887?),
Archivio Storico, G. Ricordi & C., Milan]

Plate 5

[Early Act IV and Act II set diagrams (February-March 1887?),
Archivio Storico, G. Ricordi & C., Milan]

Plate 6

[Early Act III set diagram (February-March 1887?),
Archivio Storico, G. Ricordi & C., Milan]

The most provocative evidence, which also tends to confirm the above conclusion, comes from an undated slip in Verdi's hand preserved at the Archivio Storico of G. Ricordi & C. (Plate 7):

M'hanno detto che Maurel vuol proporvi di presentare Otello seduto!! Che orrore!.. Immaginate lo stato d'animo d'Otello in quel momento dopo tante sofferenze ~~ingiure~~ [?] tante ire, tanti giuramenti; e ditemi se in tale stato un'uomo può star seduto! Io lo capirei stravolto convulso, magari un po' di Ballo di S. Vito, ma seduto!!!...Oh!! (also in Abbiati, IV, 365)

Clearly Verdi was objecting here to an Act III seating of Otello—probably during his monologue—and the precise date of the objection is uncertain. (Because of its present filing position in the Ricordi Archives, as will be discussed below, the slip has been previously assumed to date from late December 1888.) Thus the problem emerges, how may we account for the present stage directions with the two chairs and the seated monologue of Otello—apparently the idea of Victor Maurel—in the disposizione scenica?

Plate 7

[Verdi, Undated Slip, Archivio Storico,
G. Ricordi & C., Milan, numbered 937/II]

At this point one might recall Ricordi's letter of 24 August 1887, cited in Section 2 above: as the editor, by means of Emanuele Muzio, sent Verdi a copy of the disposizione scenica proofs, he mentioned, "Maurel mi ha fatto alcune osservazioni: alcune le trovai ottime: di ciò sentirà dallo stesso Muzio." It seems evident that Maurel—a strong personality with his own ideas—had either suggested things already included in the manual or had made new proposals not yet printed, and it may be that some of these observations concerned the re-staging of the Act III monologue (or concertato?) with prominent chairs. Significantly, in Maurel's own description of the staging of Otello, a separate publication (1887-8) released soon after the appearance of the disposizione scenica, A propos de la mise en scène du drame lyrique Otello (see Section 11 below), one does find the mention of chairs, at least as options. For the first moment, after the exit of Desdemona

(supported here by Emilia, whom this staging has appear at this point),
Maurel writes:

Otello reste immobile; sa figure et son attitude expriment encore la colère, même après la disparition des deux femmes, mais peu à peu, pendant que la musique à l'orchestre arrive au pianissimo, il laisse tomber ses bras en signe de découragement et tombe lui-même affaissé sur la chaise ou le fauteuil qui se trouve près de lui et murmure les premières paroles du monologue: Gran Dio! [sic] etc., etc. (Maurel, pp. 136-7).

For the less problematic concertato:

Desdémone tombait étendue de tout son long, et Otello disparaissait par la droite ou bien allait s'asseoir sur la chaise près de la colonne (Maurel, p. 140) . . . [during the concertato itself] Otello, toujours menaçant, après avoir jeté un regard dominateur sur l'assemblée, se retirerait la tête haute, dans l'attitude d'un justicier qui vient d'infliger une punition à une coupable (Maurel, p. 141).

But given Verdi's undated slip objecting to a seated Otello—again, presumably in the monologue—how are we to judge the authority of this advice in the disposizione scenica? A crucial point—but one which, unfortunately, cannot be answered at this time—is whether Verdi made

his objection before or after he approved the proofs in late August 1887. In the Ricordi Archives the slip (Plate 7) is preserved in one of several albums of Verdian letters to Ricordi and Tornaghi; it follows letters dated 14 September 1888 and 9 November 1888 and precedes one from 1 January 1889. The positions of letters within the Ricordi album, however, are not infallible guides to precise dating: it was arranged in the twentieth century. Moreover, some discrepancies in the internal numbering suggest possible irregularities in its ordering of documents. A non-published catalog of the letters, prepared in 1951 [?] by Maffeo Zanon for G. Ricordi & C. and available at the Ricordi Archives, "Elenco delle lettere autografe di Giuseppe Verdi," numbers the 9 November letter 936 and the undated slip 937; in the catalog Zanon describes the slip as "D'un interpretazione errata nella parte d'Otello" and assigns it as a date only the year 1888. Contrarily, in the album itself the 9 November letter is numbered (in pencil) as 937/I; its predecessor, that from 14 September, is numbered 936; and Verdi's "Maurel" slip (Plate 7) is numbered 937/II, and a large "1888" has been written (when?) on its verso.

It seems clear that the position and dating of the bigliettino within the album presented a problem at some point in its history. The slip itself provides a few tantalizing, but insufficient, clues about its origins. It consists a piece of ordinary Verdian stationery, but one which the composer cut or neatly tore to make it slightly smaller. It now measures 13.6 x 10.6 cm.; its top and right edges are "original," its left and bottom edges torn or cut; it lacks a corresponding envelope; it appears to have been folded once, right to left; and its

upper left corner (above the words "M'hanno") contains three pin-holes in a straight line. Evidently Verdi sent or gave Ricordi the slip pinned to another document. But which? And when could this have happened? Verdi would probably not have pinned the slip to a letter (and, for example, the letter of 9 November 1888 has no corresponding pin-holes); rather, it seems that he would have pinned it to a larger document, a score, perhaps, or a set of proofs—things that generated other bigliettini from the maestro, such as his comments on the disposizione scenica, mentioned in Section 2 above.

Through contextual placement Abbiati (IV, 365) implies a late 1888 dating for the slip, largely on the basis (one supposes) of the modern Casa Ricordi album. One must admit that its harsh tone matches that of the composer's other complaints of the subsequent months, a time when Giulio Ricordi was preparing the first La Scala revival of Otello (with Maurel as Iago; see Section 4 below). Still, we know of no large documents sent to Ricordi in late 1888 and early 1889 to which the composer might have pinned the slip. Most significantly, if the late 1888 dating is accurate, this would suggest that Verdi had overlooked the prominent presence of the Act III "piccolo sedile" and "poltrona" in the disposizione scenica when he examined the proofs in August 1887—more precisely (and we cannot know for certain), that he had not noticed important alterations in the stage diagram on p. 55 and significant actions and blocking diagrams on pp. 62, 78, 81, and 82. This scarcely seems possible. But if we accept the late 1888 dating for the slip we are driven to this conclusion, which carries with it the implication that Verdi might also have overlooked other pages of the disposizione

scenica to which he might have objected had he paid more attention. Moreover, if the seating of Otello for the first part of "Diol mi potevi scagliar" was in fact one of Maurel's ideas that Ricordi had intended Muzio to convey in person to Verdi in late August 1887, it follows that Muzio failed to mention it. All of these considerations, if accurate, cast a shadow of doubt on the final authority of portions of the disposizione scenica.

Another hypothesis, certainly happier but still problematic, would be that Verdi's slip stems from an earlier date, perhaps from the first half of 1887—from before the printing, that is, of the disposizione scenica. This allows for the possibility that Verdi was subsequently convinced—in conversation (for instance, during his trip to Milan in late June 1887)¹¹—that Maurel's idea was a good one. On the other hand—and this seems less likely (because of the time that would have been required to accomplish such a change, along with the lack of its mention in letters)—the idea of a seated Otello could have been presented to Verdi by Muzio in August 1887; Verdi might have rejected it (by means of the slip, pinned to the disposizione scenica proofs); and he could have been immediately thereafter convinced otherwise (again, in an unknown conversation) and might have given his verbal approval of the idea—all before early September 1887. In both of these instances the production book would remain definitive. It is obvious, however, that the methodological problem with these hypotheses—and I must admit that I favor the first of them—is that they are obliged to assume much beyond the evidence of the available documents for the undisguised purpose of controverting a "difficult" Verdian statement: multiplying

hypotheses in such a cavalier fashion is inevitably, and rightly, a suspect procedure. Whatever our conclusions, several major issues remain:

1. When could Maurel have told Ricordi about his proposed change?
Perhaps when he was still in Milan, before mid-April, when the La Scala company moved to Rome?¹² In any event it is difficult to document any meeting between Ricordi and Maurel between 31 May and early September 1887,¹³ and there are no known letters from this period from Maurel either to Ricordi or to Verdi.
2. Maurel's idea concerns not his own role (Iago) but that of Francesco Tamagno (Otello). It seems likely that Tamagno—heavily coached by Verdi—would not have followed Maurel's advice without Verdi's approval.
3. If Maurel had contributed new ideas to the disposizione scenica at an early date (but one after the La Scala performances), why did Ricordi fail to disclose this in his letter to Verdi of 14 July 1887—the first mention of the manual? Ricordi does refer to Boito, but not to Maurel. Had Maurel not yet made the suggestions? Or were these ideas already part of the standard Otello performance?
4. The tone in which Ricordi mentions Maurel in his letter of 24 August suggests that this was the first that Verdi had heard of any Maurel intervention into the disposizione scenica. Yet why is Ricordi's reference to Maurel so casual, particularly when earlier letters, from December 1886, suggest that Verdi had been highly

suspicious of the baritone's propensity to meddle in matters of staging and costuming?¹⁴

5. Who are the implied "they" who informed Verdi about Maurel's idea to seat Otello ("M'hanno detto . . .")? Who could have told Verdi this, for instance, in late January 1887? in March 1887? in August 1887 (Muzio?); most problematically, in December 1888, long after the Otello manual had been published?
6. Why is there no written reply from Ricordi to Verdi's objection? Surely Ricordi, always responsive to Verdi's suggestions, would not have let this objection pass without comment. This suggests that Ricordi's reply was offered in a conversation, not in a letter.

Many of these questions could be more comfortably resolved by ascertaining the precise date of Verdi's slip to Ricordi. But at present this is no easy matter. In the meantime, the problematic issue of the "Maurel intervention" casts a pale—very pale—shadow over the generally reliable authority of the disposizione scenica.

4. Authorship and Authority (3): Verdi's Later Criticisms of the 1887 Otello.

Within the decade after its premiere Otello was revived only twice at La Scala, in 1889 for thirteen performances and in 1892 for ten. Both productions were supervised by Giulio Ricordi, and both were opposed by Verdi, who not only grumbled about the revivals but also began to elaborate a series of criticisms of the original La Scala production, criticisms that he had only hinted at in 1887. These later carpings, which would become an idée fixe with the composer, deal with the very performances on which the disposizione scenica was based, and hence they need to be considered here. As I shall argue, the disposizione scenica ultimately survives these attacks, but our perhaps initial hope that it might infallibly reflect Verdi's definitive intentions will be further chastened by another dose of ambiguity. The document remains reasonably reliable but must be approached with caution.

Despite the almost unanimous critical acclaim for the 1887 Otello, Verdi was displeased with certain aspects of its production: above all, with its elaborate sets (which he had at one time approved) and with some of the individual singers, particularly with Romilda Pantaleoni's increasingly strained and weak performance of Desdemona. In March 1887, while the Milanese performances were still continuing, Verdi demanded that the sets for Acts II, III, and (apparently) IV be modified, presumably before the La Scala company began its mid-April Otello performances in Rome.¹⁵ His orders were followed, but he was never to

be appeased on these points—and the ensuing "Desdemona crisis" disappointed him even further. Throughout the rehearsals and early Milanese performances Verdi had accepted without complaint Pantaleoni's unforeseen weakening health and voice, but by the final performances these had become intolerable. Pantaleoni ultimately decided that she had to break her contract with the Fratelli Corti, the impresarios of La Scala, and to give up the part for the subsequent Otello tour in Rome and Venice.¹⁶ Legal action followed. At the peak of the crisis, on 29 April 1887 (after he had heard criticisms of Adalgisa Gabbi as Desdemona in Rome), an angered Verdi launched his first written attack to Ricordi on the La Scala production. Bearing all the earmarks of a sudden, perhaps exaggerated venting of frustration, it was delivered in the double context of a general attack on the Fratelli Corti ("è certo, più che certo che anche loro non sanno formare le compagnie, preparare gli spettacoli, ne formare un programma") and of an emphatic rejection of a proposal to mount an Otello in Naples:

Andate adagio coi, così detti, primarj Teatri, che hanno molte pretese, e mezzi insufficiente. Alla Scala stessa non tutto era bene... Decorazioni mal intese, mise en scene mal regolata... Il fuoco di gioja... Il Bastimento La tempesta et et. meschini assai assai...e poi e poi! — Povero Otello! Deploro, che sia venuto al mondo... Del successo? Cosa me ne importa! Amen. (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 60; Luzio, CV, IV, 87-8)

Similarly, from Verdi's letter to Ricordi of 1 May 1887: "Allora io era il solo che non credevo alla Pantaleoni per Desdemona. . . . ebbi il torto di dare Otello alla Scala e tollerare tante e tante cose (ed erano molte) che non m'andavano a genio!" (Abbiati, IV, 335). And from 19 May: "Io sono stato scontento della mise en scene e di molte cose musicali a Milano. Un po' di più ma ben poco a Roma. Ora dolentissimo di questo...successo di Venezia!" (Abbiati, IV, 337-8). Ricordi, soon to complete the disposizione scenica, seems not to have responded in letters to Verdi's objections to the mise en scène. The most likely conclusion is either that he well understood the crux of the complaints, having heard them before, or that he at some time consulted with the composer on the disputed issues and included the latter's "new" ideas into the Otello manual. The critical point to notice, however, is that Verdi's first attack came before the production of the disposizione scenica and long before he proofread the entire document.

Verdi's complaints re-surfaced for the first revival in early 1889.

On 1 January 1889, to Ricordi:

Prima di tutto le scene [di 1887] non me persuadevano. Saranno state tanti capi d'opera, ma non servivano all'azione che si svolgeva nel Dramma. Troppo piccola e corta la prima scena, e quindi affastellata l'azione. Troppo lunga la scena del Giardino. Cambierei la terza, e ne farei due: una piccola sala interna per le prime scene fra Otello, Desdemona, Jago e Cassio. Poi, cambiamento a vista per il resto. Per questo sarebbe conveniente consultare Boito. Poi

bisognerebbe trovare qualche cosa di meglio di quel meschino fuoco di gioja. (Abbiati, IV, 366)

Verdi went on to suggest, both here and subsequently in letters from 3 and 9 February 1889, a reduction in sonority for the internal stanzas of the Act II Homage Chorus. His idea was to pare down the instrumental forces to include only one or two mandolins and guitars, and to have the stanzas sung by soloists—a boy, a baritone, and a soprano—lightly accompanied by choristers (this would require, of course, a few alterations in the disposizione scenica, pp. 41-6).¹⁷ Whether these instructions were ever carried out is unclear: neither the manuscript nor the printed scores were altered, however, and it is possible that Verdi's proposal was only a passing idea. Nonetheless, Verdi's letters to Ricordi indicate that he remembered the first Otello as being unsatisfactory. From 3 February:

Dopo ho deplorato e deploro di non essere stato più severo ed esigente in principio! Ma che volete! V'erano tante e tante cose che non mi appagavano, ma mi pareva che a 74 anni non doveva permettermi le escandescenze degli anni dell'Aida, e più della Forza del Destino. Ho voluto, una sola volta in vita mia, posare da uomo grave, e non vi sono riuscito . . . Non ci tornerò più. (Abbiati, IV, 371-2)

The 1889 La Scala production was quite new in many respects: new scene (apparently again by Zuccarelli—perhaps those already used for Rome?),

a better storm and subsequent serene sky, a new macchinista from Trieste (who had studied the Vienna theater, and whom Ricordi greatly praised and judged superior to the 1887 "Direttore ed inventore del Macchinismo," Luigi Caprara), and new, more effective lighting.¹⁸ Despite all of this—and further intensifying Verdi's bad feelings about Otello productions—the 1889 revival failed, having foundered on poor planning, inadequate rehearsal, and severe problems with the tenor: the new Otello, G. Oxilia, had to withdraw for reasons of health and was replaced after nearly a month's delay by a certain Signor Giannini. Midway through the crisis Verdi—who had not seen the production—could only write with dismay to Ricordi (11 March 1889), "Tutto sommato, era meglio non si fosse dato quest'Otello" (unpublished [?]; Ricordi Archives). (Yet within four months Boito would begin—successfully—to tempt the maestro with the Falstaff project.)

Three years later, in 1892, Giulio Ricordi proposed another revival of Otello at La Scala—this in anticipation of the premiere of Falstaff, which seemed a sure thing for the following year. But the raw nerve had again been touched. On 31 January 1892 Verdi responded angrily with his sharpest, most specific criticism of the 1887 Otello:

Ancora Otello alla Scala?!?! Dopo il massacro fattone l'ultima volta, bisognava lasciare passare dieci anni prima di rispondere! . . . Bisogna per altro convenire che Otello è stato mal piantato alla Scala fin dalla prima volta. La colpa fu in gran parte mia, perchè m'era imposto di star calmo, e di frenarmi su tutto quello che non mi persuadeva.

Non mi persuadevano nè Desdemona, nè Emilia, nè Rodrigo [sic]: e forse meno ancora le scene, che saranno state ben dipinte e ben disegnate, ma non servivano affatto alla scena ed al Dramma. E per dirne [?] una: la scena del Secondo Atto era disposta in modo che non si capiva nulla: non si capiva come e dove avveniva il dialogo tra Cassio e Iago; nè si capiva se nella Serenata, Otello Iago erano segregati dalli [sic] altri o insieme. Così presso a poco in tutti gli atti. Insomma l'Otello fu mal piantato alla Scala, e siccome in Teatro le tradizioni cattive restano, il male è restato e dura. E pare impossibile che non siasi mai potuto trovare una Desdemona che sappia trar partito del Duetto del Terz'Atto, e del Finale dello stesso atto. E così anche in questa ripresa non si avrà che una specie di concerto con Duetti e Soli di Otello e Iago, a consolazione dei critici vostri, che continueranno a gridare che il Dramma musicale, il vero Dramma, l'eccelso Dramma bisogna andar a cercarlo in Germania ed in Francia! Allegri dunque ed Amen! (incomplete in Abbiati, IV, 433-4; Ricordi Archives)

Once again Verdi's principal criticisms are three: individual singers (the ever-problematic Desdemona and, now, two smaller roles), the sumptuous 1887 scene (which, it seems clear, had already been altered by April 1887—but if so, Verdi's continual return to the original, problematic sets borders on the abusive), and the relationship of the scene with the staging of the first part of Act II, through the Homage

Chorus. Now in 1892, as production plans for Falstaff were about to take shape, Verdi sounded the note of his Otello dissatisfaction more than once. These were good strategic moves to prepare Ricordi and the La Scala theatrical world for his more active participation in the Falstaff rehearsals. Thus, from his lengthy letter to Ricordi of 13 June 1892:

Voi mi parlate di scene [per Falstaff], di mandare pittori a Londra (a che fare?), di costumi, di macchinismi, d'illuminazione? . . . E, per amor di Dio, non facciamo come si fece per Otello che per voler far troppo bene, si è strafatto¹⁹. . . . Non effetti di luce come nell'ultimo atto della Wally: bellissimo, se volete, ma che ha rovinato del tutto l'effetto drammatico, e l'opera è finita freddamente! Aggiungo che le prove al cembalo ed di scena saranno lunghe, perchè non sarà molto facile eseguirla come io desidero e sarò molto esigente, e non come per Otello, che per deferenza o per l'uno o per l'altro, e per posare a uomo serio e grave, e venerando, ho sopportato tutto. No no: tornerò orso come una volta, e ci guadagneremo tutti.
(Abbiati, IV, 442-4)

From these remarks from 1887 to 1892 one may conclude several things. First, Verdi was dissatisfied with some of the individual performers in the 1887 Otello, and, second, he believed that the essential problem had lain in insufficiently strict, principled

rehearsal. These two points need not concern the disposizione scenica per se, for they deal with the quality of individual realizations, not with the plan of the stage action itself. But they do seem to have triggered Verdi's general discontent, which then spilled over into other areas. Third, then, he believed that the close attention given to elaborate scenery, costumes, and the like tended to distract attention away from the "Drama" (his ultimate aesthetic goal, typically written with a capital "D"). As will also be mentioned in Section 9 below, underlying Verdi's criticism is a strong sense of priorities, according to which the total effect—the "Drama," within which the music, of course, played a large part—must maintain its constituent parts in a proper balance. The ongoing narrative and action (that is, the gripping theatrical totality) must not risk calling undue attention (positive or negative) to any of its individual elements, and particularly not to aspects of decoration, such as the sets, props, and costumes. These features must be accurate, efficient, and well conceived, but they must never be perceived as ends in themselves (see also n. 44 below). Again, although these remarks do address the original Edel-Ferrario-Zuccarelli materials, they do not reflect directly on the more "abstract" disposizione scenica as printed.

More significant are his complaints about the first half of the Act II and those concerning the special effects, such as the ship, the fire, and so on—the concerns of the macchinista. But since most of these remarks were initiated before Ricordi had completed the disposizione scenica, it is unclear whether the Otello manual reflects at these points the actual 1887 Milanese performances or whether some of Verdi's

later thoughts have been incorporated. Surely there would have been sufficient time for Ricordi to improve a defective first half of Act II in the Otello book had Verdi insisted upon it, and as the experience of the redone scene demonstrates, the composer was not at all reluctant to request major changes in Otello (see n. 15 above). Thus the Otello manual could include some action emended for the Rome or Venice performances. Moreover, Verdi would have had ample opportunity to alter the first half of Act II when he read the proofs of the disposizione scenica in August 1887. (The concerns of the macchinista, however, seem not to have been altered until 1889.)

Most disturbing and most difficult to judge properly are Verdi's two outbursts against the mise en scène in general (29 April and 19 May 1887). These complaints were delivered in an atmosphere of performance crisis and seem exaggerated--or perhaps they were purposeful hyperboles to underscore his other criticisms. It could be that that they need not be taken literally. Ricordi seems not to have been startled by them (which he surely would have been had the charge been made with total conviction), and, after all, Verdi did examine and approve the disposizione scenica a few months later. But the fact remains that we do not know to what extent Verdi's most general 1887, 1889, and 1892 criticisms also applied to the printed directions in the stage manual, a document that apparently ceased to interest him after he had read the proofs. Given the available evidence, we ought to approach the first half of Act II in the disposizione scenica cautiously, for no performance of this portion of the opera ever seemed to satisfy Verdi; and we ought to realize that although the various printed solutions for

the stage effects were perhaps the solutions actually used in 1887, the composer seems not to have considered them ideal (and the same might be said of the scene). These portions, that is, might have received only a grudging acceptance from him in late August 1887.

What does emerge clearly, however, is that by 1887 opera production--particularly the premiere of a full-scale masterwork--had become an immensely complicated affair, beyond the control of a single person. Verdi had ceded the supervision of many of the production details to Ricordi and, especially, to the fussily precise Boito, whom, it must be added, he seems generally to have trusted: by this time any direct criticism of Boito seems to have been nonpermissible. Still, apart from his dissatisfaction with singers, most of Verdi's grievances are directed against a studied complexity and overrefinement, things that one might otherwise be tempted to lay at the door of Boito or, perhaps, at the door of modern opera productions in general, with which Verdi seemed not to be in complete sympathy. One senses beneath his remarks a deep disturbance that he could no longer be in a position of nearly complete control of the production, as he might have been in former days: he had ceded too much power--or the complex, modern world and casual circumstance had robbed him of it--and he planned to regain it, he insisted, in Falstaff. (One wonders whether these issues might bear on the apparent failure of Ricordi to produce a disposizione scenica for Falstaff--see n. 1 above.) In brief, then, he might have been willing to approve the disposizione scenica of Otello--a written record of a fluid collaboration of three strong-willed men (or of four, if we count Maurel's contributions)--but one would doubt that he could

have been persuaded to sign it "G. Verdi" and to add his note of personal, definitive approval. And this is the caution that we, too, should bring to this document.

5. Boito's Preface.

The first pages of the disposizione scenica are devoted to Boito's Preface, read and vigorously approved by Verdi in mid-August 1887 (see Section 2 above). Entitled "Personaggi," this section is an expansion of the simpler character descriptions found other disposizioni sceniche prepared by Giulio Ricordi: those, for instance, for Aida, Il Re di Lahore, I Lituani, the revised Simon Boccanegra, and Erodiade. One earlier disposizione scenica also includes an expanded "Personaggi" section. Not surprisingly, it is that for Mefistofele (1877): "Personaggi (Avvertenze per i Cantanti)," surely the product of Boito himself. The Otello Preface subdivides into two parts. In the first, a set of preliminary remarks (p. 3), the librettist uses an extended quotation from Hamlet to exhort future performers not to overdramatize, exaggerate, or overstylize their performances. This is the first of many injunctions on behalf of the principle of naturalezza—the striving for more realistic, less theatrical—formulaic gestures, a (problematic) concept energetically urged by Verdi that pervades much of the subsequent manual. (See Section 6 below for a discussion that includes some crucial limitations to this principle.) In the second part (pp. 4–6) Boito provides a thumbnail sketch of each character's personality and frequently adds advice on which interpretive errors to avoid. Again, the errors are consistently those of excessively stylized exaggeration.

Boito's descriptions of his characters are best understood by considering them in their nineteenth-century critical context. The principal sources for Boito's understanding of Shakespeare's Othello—

and hence his own operatic characters--are four: two Continental critics, August Wilhelm Schlegel and François-Victor Hugo, and two Italian actors, Ernesto Rossi and Tommaso Salvini. With the possible exception of Hugo these figures were also the wellsprings of Verdi's understanding of the play, and it should be noted as we proceed that the rather simplistic, Romantically idealized (or scapigliatura-influenced) conceptions of the characters are leagues away from twentieth-century conceptions of the roles. The key figure behind virtually all ottocento critical interpretations and understandings of Shakespeare was Schlegel, whose lectures Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur (Heidelberg, 1809-11) had appeared in a three-volume Italian translation by Giovanni Gherardini in 1817, Corso di letteratura drammatica del Sig. August Wilhelm Schlegel. It was Gherardini's translation that was excerpted and included as commentary in most of the principal nineteenth-century Italian Shakespeare translations, including Othello: those, for instance, of Michele Leoni (1825), Carlo Rusconi (1838-9, in prose, for years the standard translation, one which appeared in several subsequent, revised editions; Verdi owned a copy and it was clearly his principal source for the play), and Andrea Maffei (1869, also used by Verdi).²⁰ To the counsels of the ubiquitous Schlegel, Boito would add those of Hugo, whose French translation of Othello was his most important primary source for the text of the opera: La Tragédie d'Othello, Le More de Venise, in the fifth volume ("Les Jaloux") of the Oeuvres complètes de W. Shakespeare (1860 edition), a careful translation that included an extended, thirty-five-page introduction analyzing the play and the characters. Boito's main personal copy of

Hugo, with important underlinings and marginal annotations, still exists in the Library of the Museo Teatrale alla Scala.²¹ Finally, the actors Rossi and Salvini had revolutionized the Italian understanding of Shakespeare and Othello with their powerful, emotional portrayals of the Moor. Both had begun their long Othello careers in 1856, a landmark date in the history of Italian theater. Rossi particularly stressed strong passions and savage, "uncivilized" rage; Salvini relied more on a wider spectrum of carefully graded, but no less intense, emotions, with a strong emphasis on Othello's essential elevation of soul and the purity of his love.²²

Boito's Otello in the disposizione scenica Preface (p. 4) is described as "la Gelosia," and much weight is placed on the single transforming moment in which the "veleno" of jealousy is "iniettato nel sangue del Moro" to produce a torturous emotional aftermath, "il fatale progresso di quell'attossicamento morale," in which the apparently previously unflawed hero is exposed and undone. Much of this seems indebted to the ideas of Schlegel, who had divided Othello's being into a fundamental, primitive sphere and a more superficial, civilized sphere and had also stressed concepts of blood (the "tirannia del sangue") and the fearful efficacy of "una stilla di questo veleno." Schlegel's celebrated commentary, which for modern sensibilities uncomfortably embraces a facile racial stereotyping without a second thought, deserves extensive quotation, here excerpted from the appended "Nota" to the Rusconi translation:

... l'Otello è coperto di fosche ombre. Egli è un quadro di Rembrand. Ma qual felice sbaglio è mai quello che fece prendere a Shakespeare il Moro dell'Affrica settentrionale, il Saracino battezzato, di cui si parla nella Novella originale [from the Hecatommithi (1566) by Giraldo Cinthio], per un vero Etiope? Si riconosce in Otello la natura selvaggia di quell'ardente zona, che produce gli animali più feroci e le piante più velenose. Il desiderio della gloria, le leggi straniere dell'onore, costumi più dolci e più nobili, non l'hanno domato che in vista. La gelosia non è in lui quella delicata irritabilità del cuore, che si unisce ad un entusiastico rispetto per l'oggetto amato; ma è la sensuale frenesia che introdusse nei climi cocenti l'indegna costumanza di rinchiudere le donne, e tanti altri abusi contro natura. Una stilla di questo veleno, versata nel suo sangue, vi eccita la più spaventevole effervescenza. Otello si mostra nobile, sincero, pieno di fidanza, riconoscente all'amore che ispira; è un eroe che sprezza il pericolo, il degno Capo de' suoi soldati, il fermo sostegno dello Stato: ma il potere, puramente fisico, delle sue passioni abbatte d'un colpo le sue virtù adottive; e il selvaggio mette in esso al di sotto l'uomo incivilito. Questa medesima tirannia del sangue sopra la volontà si manifesta nell'espressione del suo sfrenato desiderio di vendicarsi di Cassio; ed allorchè, riavuto dal suo acciecamiento, i rimorsi, la tenerezza, il sentimento dell'onore offeso si destano a un tratto nel suo seno, egli si

rivolge contro sè stesso con tutto il furore d'un despota che punisce il suo schiavo ribelle: ei soffre doppiamente; soffre nelle due sfere entro cui si divide la sua esistenza.

Verdi, too, seems to have accepted the "due sfere" theory, and although in the opera neither he nor Boito particularly stressed the racial aspects of the theory, it was nonetheless a postulate of any Continental nineteenth-century consideration of the play, impossible to discard.²³ In his own instructions for the role, Verdi wrote to Ricordi on 11 May 1887 that only two types of vocal delivery were required: "Otello ora guerriero, ora amante appassionato, ora accasciato fino alla viltà, ora feroce come un selvaggio deve cantare e urlare" (Abbiati, IV, 336-7). As is well known, in selecting Francesco Tamagno to play Otello, Verdi had been worried that the powerfully-voiced, stentorian tenor would be unable to succeed in the gentler, more nuanced portions of the role--presumably, many of the "cantare" portions.²⁴

Boito's Otello in the disposizione scenica Preface steers clear of the direct mention of race, and, unlike Schegel, it emphasizes that the real source of Otello's jealousy is more purely ideal. He loves greatly because he is a great man, a great hero. And "da quel prodigioso amore nascerà la gelosia terribile per opera dell'astuzia di Jago" (p. 4). This emphasizing of Otello's natural, noble virtues, great even in their overthrow, is characteristic of the most celebrated Othello on the Italian stage, Tommaso Salvini, greatly esteemed by both Boito and Verdi.²⁵ Indeed, in 1883 Salvini had published in the Roman Fanfulla della Domenica an analysis of the role, in which Othello was conceived

not so much as a drama of jealousy (as in Schlegel and, apparently, in the "ferocious" interpretation of Ernesto Rossi), much less one of the "tirannia del sangue," but rather one of deep, idealistic love in which race is only an incidental, not a causal, factor. Salvini's Othello was a man who lives and moves on the most elevated levels of emotional existence: "Non è un'amore sensuale il suo, che nasce all'alba e muore al tramonto; è un affetto duraturo, riconoscente, purissimo; è un'anima che si innesta alla sua, senza la quale non avrebbe scopo di esistere."²⁶ Boito also found this alternative concept of Othello in Hugo's introduction to his French translation, much of which is an undisguised attack on Schlegel's interpretation of the protagonist as a primitive. Aligning himself early on with the criticism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Hugo argues vehemently that Othello was not a truly black African but rather a lighter-skinned noble, "le fils des rois sarrasins," and that, in consequence, the Othello-Desdemona marriage "est la sympathique fusion de ces deux types primordiaux de la beauté humaine, le type sémitique et le type caucasique" (p. 58)—an argument that seems not to have convinced Boito, to judge from his marginal annotations.²⁷ In Hugo's interpretation the play is fundamentally a tragedy of honor, not of jealousy. In sum, it is clear that Boito's sketch of Otello's character in the disposizione scenica blends aspects of both the Schlegel and the Hugo-Salvini conceptions of the role, the two principal critical interpretations available to both him and Verdi.

Boito's discussion of Iago (pp. 4-5), characterized as "l'Invidia," subdivides into two parts. The first stresses the inherent, essential evil of the man ("Fa il male per il male"), who from envy and a

"critical" view of life draws extreme consequences from slight provocations.²⁸ The second, however, cautions the actor not to overplay the Mephistophelean side of the character, but rather to present him, at least in the company of others, as bearing an apparent surface normality. This is a concern that echoes that of Verdi in the early stages of his conception of Iago. For instance, from 7 February 1880, responding to ideas of Domenico Morelli, "Bene, benone, benissimo! Iago colla faccia da galantuomo! . . . colla faccia da uomo giusto" (Abbiati, IV, 111). And again, from Verdi's famous letter to Morelli of 24 September 1881:

Che Iago sia vestito di nero, come nera è la sua anima, niente di meglio! . . . il fare distratto, nonchalant, indifferente a tutto, frizzante, dicendo il bene ed il male quasi con leggerezza ed avendo l'aria di non pensare nemmeno a quel che dice; così che, se qualcuno avesse a rimproverargli: "Tu dici un'infamia!" egli potesse rispondere: "Davvero? Non credevo...non parliamone più!..."

Una figura come questa può ingannar tutti, e fin ad un certo punto anche sua moglie. Una figura piccola, maligna, mette tutti in sospetto e non inganna nessuno! Amen.
(Abbiati, IV, 184)

The seeming contradiction between the two parts of Boito's description is only an apparent one: the librettist (like Verdi) was merely instructing future performers that overtly "villainous" gestures would be inappropriate, for in real life such motions would betray Iago's

intentions to others. The issue of external appearance, however, fails to touch Iago's true, Satanic core. Both Verdi and Boito agree on this point. We perceive this demonic essence in Iago's unmasking, the Act II Credo ("e il tuo dimon son io," sp., 113/3/1-2). And at the Credo the disposizione scenica calls for restrained physical gestures, accompanied by critically important "giuochi di fisionomia" at the ribalta (p. 37; see also Sections 10 and 11 below, and especially n. 63). And Verdi himself conceived Iago musically as the antithesis of the lyrical, as a rejection of the beautiful: such is the point, for instance, of his remark to Ricordi on 11 May 1887, "Come Jago, non deve che declamare e ricaner" (Abbiati, IV, 336-7).

But the Satanic conception of Iago, so reminiscent of other Boitian creations (Mephistopheles, Barnaba) need not be traced only to Boito and his post-scapigliatura predilections. Schlegel, the foremost commentator available to Italian readers, had said similar things, and much of his character-sketch of Iago is echoed in the disposizione scenica and in the opera. Again, from the Schlegel excerpts in the "Nota" of the Rusconi Othello:

Se l'inclito Moro porta soltanto sopra il suo volto le fosche tinte del sospetto e della malvagità, Jago è nero infin nel fondo dell'anima. Egli si mette ai fianchi d'Otello qual genio malefico, le cui perfide insinuazioni non gli lasciano alcun riposo: si direbbe che relazioni naturali rendano la sua influenza più possente che quella del buon angelo d'Otello, Desdemona. Non mai fu messo sulla scena uno scellerato più

scaltrito di Jago: egli tende le sue insidie con tal'arte, che diventano inevitabili. Non si comporterebbe l'indignazione che ispira il suo fine, se l'attenzione non si rivolgesse tutta intera verso i suoi mezzi, che danno alla mente un'occupazione continua. Maestro consumato nella'arte della dissimulazione, egli non pare freddo, malcontento, feroce, se non quando ardisce permettersi d'apparir tale; ma è poi umile e piaggiatore tosto che stima necessario d'usar questa maschera: inaccessabile alle commozioni disinteressate, egli sa suscitare a suo grado le passioni degli altri, e far suo profitto della presa ch'esse gli danno. Egli è pure eccellente osservatore degli uomini, quant'esser può chi non ha imparato dall'intimo sentimento a conoscere i più nobili stimoli delle loro azioni. La sua pertinace incredulità sulla virtù delle donne non è simulata; è conseguenza naturale del suo modo di pensare, e che lo rende tanto più atto ad eseguire il suo disegno. Siccome egli vede ogni cosa dal lato cattivo, così distrugge aspramente l'incanto dell'immaginazione in tutto ciò che appartiene all'amore. Egli vuole esacerbare e disgustare i sensi d'Otello, affinché il suo cuore non gli chiarisca l'innocenza di Desdemona: ciò spiega perchè Jago adoperi espressioni che fanno inorridire il pudore. Se Shakespeare avesse scritto a' dì nostri, sicuramente le avrebbe mitigate; ma la verità de' colori vi avrebbe alquanto perduto.

Although Schlegel's comments may seem to be the primary source of Boito's own remarks, there remains another source that powerfully affected the latter's conception of Iago—and here the influence is surely more on Boito than on Verdi. This is, again, François-Victor Hugo's preface to his Othello translation. Along with the Schlegel, this source is central to many of the ideas in the Act II Credo, a soliloquy that several modern commentators have arraigned as non-Shakespearean, a Boitian indulgence (this despite Verdi's receipt of its text with the enthusiastic response on 3 May 1884, "Bellissimo questo credo; potentissimo e shaesperiano [sic] in tutto e per tutto"; Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 76). Much of Hugo's discussion of Iago, which we know Boito to have studied, reads like a ground-plan for the Credo:

Il n'est qu'un critique, I am nothing if not critical; mais c'est un critique qui ne voit jamais que les mauvais côtés [cf. Schlegel]; il est incapable d'admiration et d'enthousiasme; moralement il a l'hypocrisie de Tartufe; intellectuellement il a le scepticisme de Don Juan; il ne lui manque que le pouvoir surnaturel pour être Méphistophélès. — En fait de poésie, car Iago improvise parfois, il n'a jamais produit ni pu produire que des épigrammes; le lyrisme lui est interdit comme la foi; et pour lui le sublime n'est que le voisin du ridicule. Il regarde donc en réalité comme parfaitement grotesque la passion si grandiose que Desdémona a conçue pour le More. Desdémona, spiritualiste et presque mystique, ne voit du More que l'âme, et admire; Iago,

matérialiste et presque nihiliste, ne voit du More que le corps, et rit. (Hugo, p. 67)

In his principal copy of the Hugo translation, Boito marked off with a pencil the following lines. They are essential for understanding Iago's motivation, often considered a weak point in the opera:

Mais la principale cause, la cause véritable de la haine d'Iago, il faut la chercher dans sa nature même. Iago est un homme qui ne peut accepter ni supporter aucune supériorité. Il l'avoue quelque part avec une cynique franchise, la beauté quotidienne d'un autre le rend laid. . . . Iago en veut à Othello d'être tout ce que lui n'est pas; il lui en veut d'être puissant; il lui en veut d'être grand; . . . honnête; . . . héroïque; . . . victorieux; . . . aimé du peuple; . . . adoré de Desdemona. Et voilà de quoi il se venge. Ah! Othello, c'est le génie. Eh bien, qu'il y prenne garde! car Iago, c'est l'envie. (Hugo, p. 65)

Significantly, Boito begins his own character sketch of Iago with the words "Iago è l'Invidia"²⁹ and follows it soon afterward with the Hugo-esque device of quoting "Io non sono che un critico" both in Italian and in the original English.

Of the remaining characters mentioned in the disposizione scenica Preface, only Desdemona need be considered here. Boito's discussion of Desdemona is less a character-sketch (although she is endowed with the

attributes of simplicity, chastity, harmony, "amore," "purezza," "nobiltà," "mansuetudine," "ingenuità," "rassegnazione," "gioventù," and "bellezza") than an admonition to performers: clearly, by mid-1887 the interpretation of Desdemona had emerged as a particularly troublesome point to both Boito and Verdi (see Section 4 above). Within the opera, however, as Francesco Degrada and Stefan Kunze have pointed out, Desdemona is given pre-Raphaelite, Madonna-like attributes characteristic of European fin-de-siècle culture.³⁰ This conception also has its "Romantic" roots in Schlegel, who had resorted to ecclesiastical images to describe what he considered to be a flawless Desdemona: "è una vittima senza macchia"; "ella è dolce, umile, semplice, e così innocente, che non può nemmeno concepire l'idea dell'infedeltà; "Il bisogno di consecrare altrui la sua vita, questo istinto naturale delle donne, ha cagionato l'unico suo fallo: il suo matrimonio senza saputa del genitore." Moreover, according to Schlegel, Shakespeare underscores "la purezza di questo essere angelico"; she is the "buon angelo d'Otello"; and so forth. Verdi himself had echoed some of these ideas in his many remarks about the interpretation of Desdemona: for instance, in the letter to Ricordi of 22 April 1887:

Giudicando terre à terre il carattere di Desdemona che si lascia maltrattare, schiaffeggiare, ed, anche strozzata, perdona e si raccomanda, pare una stupidina! Ma Desdemona non è una donna, è un tipo! E il tipo della bontà, della rassegnazione, del sacrificio! Sono esseri nati per gli altri, inconsci del loro proprio Io! Esseri che in parte

esistono, e che Shakespeare ha poetizzati e divinizzati creando Desdemona, Cordelia, Giulietta etc. etc., tipi che non hanno riscontro forse che nell'Antigone del teatro antico. (Abbiati, IV, 331-2)³¹

Thus both Verdi's and Boito's fundamental conceptions of the principal characters, even though they might have differed on a few particulars, are seated recognizably within the traditional ottocento perceptions of Othello. Given the prevailing Continental views of the play and of Shakespeare in general—and given Boito's fondness for fin-de-siècle (and operatic) simplifications and dualistic intensifications—the interpretative advice found the Preface to the disposizione scenica (along with that implied in the opera itself) is neither surprising nor unpredictable.

6. Naturalezza.

As has been observed by previous commentators,³² one of the most prominent features of the disposizione scenica is the seemingly omnipresent principle of realism or "naturalezza." It recurs in two hortatory modes: positively, one finds injunctions to embrace an aesthetic of credible naturalism; negatively, one finds warnings to avoid excessively stylized gestures and exaggerations, to beware of unnatural pauses that hinder the fluidity and "real-life" credibility of the action. Boito begins his Preface by quoting from Hamlet's celebrated set of acting instructions, "Speak the speech, I pray you" ("Ecco la lezione," p. 3), an admonition against exaggeration, and the point saturates the next few pages, particularly in the individual discussions of Iago and Desdemona. The disposizione scenica closes with the same advice, now in Ricordi's words: "non devono in alcun modo esagerare: molta sobrietà del gesto, unita ad un opportuno atteggiarsi della persona, riesciranno assai più efficaci di qualunque azione convenzionale, o troppo marcata" (p. 108). Such comments reveal that which Ricordi, Boito, and Verdi feared would be the principal manner of Otello misinterpretation. Their obsessive, heavy-handed exhortations on behalf of naturalezza remind us that the conventions of Italian operatic acting, no doubt reflecting the marked changes in Italian society and theatrical aesthetic in the last forty years of the century, were in the process of change.

On the face of it the Otello manual might seem to be embracing an almost radical naturalism, an identity of stage gesture with "normal,"

non-theatrical gesture. As will be seen, however, this is not the case. By the standards that were emerging on the late nineteenth-century dramatic stage, Verdi's naturalezza was still riddled with conventional gestures, grandiose effects, and the like. In a purely theatrical sense, then, Verdi's realism may strike us today as somewhat old-fashioned, clearly rooted in mid-century acting practices--a compromise between a more truly modern fluidity and the older, grand style of acting. Still, that he was calling so ardently for this naturalezza suggests that the typical late nineteenth-century operatic practice lagged even further behind, that excessively antique, stiff poses and postures were still normal practice in some parts of Italy--in short, that certain reforms already largely won on the dramatic stage were only beginning to invade Italian operatic acting. The discussion below will begin with a review of some of the calls for naturalism in the disposizione scenica; and it will conclude by suggesting some obvious limitations to this principle. (Sections 10 and 11 below are also directly relevant to this study.)

Many of the stage directions in the disposizione scenica, then, sound the call for realism, as understood operatically in 1887 Italy. In the Act III concertato the chorus, typically, is advised to react to Otello's throwing down of Desdemona by converging into small groups: "Per formare questi gruppi, vi sarà gran movimento nei cori, onde ne risulti una certa confusione, come accadrebbe in realtà . . ." (p. 79). Here the principle of realità (and even confusione, the image of disorder for the sake of truth) is invoked to supersede that, say, of picturesqueness or graceful stage movement--things that an earlier stage-practice might

have prized, and, indeed, things that are prized elsewhere in Otello, as will be mentioned below. Almost identically, after Emilia discovers the murdered Desdemona in Act IV, Otello and Emilia participate in a "rapido e tragico dialogo": "insomma, si deve raggiungere sulla scena, ciò che sarebbe nella vita reale un dialogo che avesse luogo in condizioni così orribilmente tragiche" (p. 102). Such injunctions may be read as operatic-theatrical manifestos, and we may presume that they were deemed appropriate to the contemporary state of operatic acting.

Each singer is encouraged to enter into the true personhood of his character—not into an all-too-familiar or standardized stage personality, but into the character's essence. In Cassio's intoxication scene, for instance, the singer is advised "di non passare una giusta misura, onde non cadere in una indecente parodia dell'uomo ubbriaco: non deve dimenticare che **Cassio** è un ufficiale elegante, vagheggino, epperò quantunque ubbriaco non avrà gli atti, i gesti triviali del soldataccio o dell'uomo plebeo" (pp. 24-5). And in the Ave Maria, Desdemona is advised: "Però è necessario avvertire che questi diversi coloriti d'espressione non devono in alcun modo esagerarsi . . . insomma è sempre una donna, inginocchiata e pregante, è quindi naturale che non ricorra ad intonazioni di voci, nè a gesti troppo drammatici" (pp. 92-3). Similar examples, several making use of the term naturalezza, could be multiplied at length.³³

Perhaps the most insistent calls for naturalezza are addressed to the chorus. Ricordi and Verdi had been working to rid operatic choruses of static postures and immobility for some time. The new "reformist" goal after mid-century was one of increasingly natural movement, but the

old habits were evidently still lingering into the 1870s and 1880s, at least in the smaller theaters. The characteristic counter-injunction first appears in Ricordi's production book for Aida (p. 5): "Persuadere i Cori, specialmente uomini, che non devono raffigurare una massa insignificante di persone, ma che bensì ciascuno rappresenta un personaggio e come tale deve agire, muoversi per conto proprio, secondo i propri sentimenti, mantenendo soltanto colgi altri una certa unità d'azione, atta a meglio assicurare l'esecuzione musicale." Ricordi's words would be repeated verbatim, or very nearly so (the singling out of the uomini was usually omitted), in the disposizioni sceniche for Mefistofele, Il Re di Lahore, I Lituani, Simon Boccanegra, Manon Lescaut, and so on. With the Mefistofele manual, however, a final sentence—Boito's?—would be added (to be omitted only in the Boccanegra and Manon Lescaut books): "L'immobilità, a meno che non sia espressamente voluta dalla messa in scena, deve essere assolutamente vietata." The entire admonition, of course, also occurs on p. 7 of the Otello disposizione scenica. And on pp. 80-1 Ricordi mounts the pulpit for a homily on the topic of "quell'impassibilità funesta della fisionomia che è abituale nei cori," which he decries as something old-fashioned ("si bandisca una buona volta il comodo adagio: così faceva mio padre"), something to be renounced, and, indeed, something already largely overcome in the model modern theater, La Scala. His typical solution, as suggested above, was to instruct the chorus to break down into realistic sub-groups, often of twos and threes, and to carry on their own "natural" activities (see, e.g., pp. 15, 17, 18-20, 21, 29, 79, 80, 84, and so on). In a brief study of the Otello production book,

Doug Coe, at that time (1978) the Assistant to the Technical Director at the New York City Opera, summarized the aims of the choral movements and their ultimate arrangements:

Three main considerations seem to govern its movement, though these were often in conflict. One evident concern was to create a pleasing stage picture [see, e.g., the Fire Chorus, p. 20, the Homage Chorus, p. 42, etc.], another to achieve dramatic realism, and another to promote musical clarity. These are the same conflicting concerns of any modern stage director In this staging, dramatic realism—that is, the effect of people randomly distributed—is maintained whenever possible, but during set numbers (the Fire Chorus, the Drinking Song) the need for musical clarity takes precedence. . . . [The ever-present problem is to strive for the maximum naturalness,] while at the same time reaffirming Verdi's constant concern for the stage picture.³⁴

Thus it is clear that late-Verdian staging is concerned in some important ways with recognizable naturalism and flexibility (cf. Ugo Pesci's report, quoted in Section 2 above, of Verdi at the Otello rehearsals: "Raccomanda la massima naturalezza . . ."). As has already been suggested, however, these principles were by no means identical with what we might consider "realistic" acting today. Verdi's realism is only relative; it is to be perceived against the operatic conventions that he had encountered—and, doubtless, had to some degree accepted—in

his earlier career. In the first place, as even a quick reading of the document should reveal, many of the gestures of the Otello manual are notably stylized and recur to a degree that would probably be considered disturbingly mannered by the norms of today's operatic theater: raised arms towards heaven, footlight gestures, hands-on-heart poses, various facial attitudes and expressions, vocal nuances (such as we also find in Maurel's and Tamagno's recordings of Otello excerpts), and so forth. Many of these will be enumerated and considered separately in Sections 9 and 10 below. Much of what the disposizione scenica advises, that is, is likely to impress us as overtly "theatrical" and not "natural" at all. And it is precisely to the degree that we find ourselves uncomfortable with some of these practices that our own operatic expectations and conceptions of the normal differ from those accepted by Verdi, Boito, and Ricordi.

Perhaps most telling here is our knowledge of the reactions of the three men to current dramatic practice—in particular to the Shakespearean acting so prominent in Italy in the later ottocento. As it happens, at about the time of the Otello premiere a pointedly modern, more "realistic" Othello was also produced in Milan, with Giovanni Emanuel as the protagonist. Influenced by the innovative theatrical currents that were also leading to the new, Northern dramatic schools (that of Meiningen, and Antoine's "Théâtre libre" in Paris), Emanuel ultimately broke sharply with the grand traditions of Salvini and Rossi in favor of a new naturalism and a shift towards verismo—a style that Salvini himself would criticize as "un vero troppo vero."³⁵ Even while admitting that Emanuel, as a kind of transitional figure, avoided some

of the extreme naturalism of the French and German actors, theatrical historian Anna Busi makes it clear which tendencies governed his style of acting—challenges, for Italy, to the Salvini-Rossi tradition:

Lo stile di recitazione si rinnova: niente istrionismo o ciarlataneria, piaga ancora molto diffusa a quel tempo; non più toni ampollosi, gesti ampi e plateali, pose o atteggiamenti statuari. La nuova parola d'ordine è "verità." Si vuole abolire la differenza che ancora sussiste tra il comportamento, il gestire dell'attore sul palcoscenico e quello di un uomo qualunque nella vita e nelle circostanze di ogni giorno. . . . Gli attori della nuova scuola si muovono sulla scena in piena libertà, incuranti delle regole tradizionali che imponevano loro di parlare rivolgendosi al pubblico, senza mai voltare le spalle alla platea. La scenografia, il trucco, i costumi sono oggetto di cure meticolosa . . . Non può ignorare la grande tradizione interpretativa di cui sono esponenti Rossi e Salvini—ne lo desidera—ma al tempo stesso, nutrito di idee più moderne, coglie gli aspetti convenzionali di uno stile che non è più al passo coi tempi e non di rado degenera in vieto e stucchevole romanticismo.³⁶

At a first glance, this may seem to read like portions of the disposizione scenica for Otello. But did Verdi and Boito respond favorably to such an aesthetic? On the contrary. On 18 December 1886 Emanuel put on his Othello in Milan: an interpretation that he would

later defend stoutly as exemplifying "la mia naturalezza e l'abbandono di ogni convenzionalismo. . . . Otello . . . uomo come noi."³⁷ Ricordi and the main figures in the upcoming opera cast attended the performance (this was less than two months before the operatic premiere). As for the librettist, Ricordi (himself considerably impressed and caught up in Otello-fever) wrote to Verdi: "Boito non venne, perchè non è ammiratore di Emanuel; anzi a lui seccava che vi andassero gli artisti della Scala, dicendo che avrebbero imparato brutte cose! Secondo me ha torto: l'Emanuel fu discreto nei primi due atti, ma Eccellente negli altri quattro [sic]" (Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 55-6). Boito explained his boycott to Verdi on 21 December:

Non sono andato a vedere l'Emanuel, è un mediocrissimo attore, freddo, monotono, antipatico. Se dall'ovo d'una gallina non può nascere un aquila, dalla testa dell'Emanuel non può venir fuori nessuna specie d'interpretazione dell'Otello. Rossi e Salvini ecco i due giganti! da quelli Tamagno avrebbe potuto imparare qualche cosa ma dall'Emanuel non può aver imparato nulla di nulla e non avrei voluto ch'egli assistesse a quella rappresentazione. Gli altri attori so che furono, anche peggiori dell'Emanuel! (Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 119).

Three days later, on 24 December, Verdi wrote to Ricordi: "Son anch'io del parere di Boito. Gli artisti hanno fatto male ad assistere all'Otello d'Emanuel" (Abbiati, IV, 304-5). And when Ricordi protested (25 December) that he had enjoyed the performance, that it at least had

provided Tamagno with a "visione ottica" of the role, Verdi responded on 26 December that "La visione ottica v bene se Emanuel era nel vero; ma se Emanuel ha fatto d'Otello un'uomo debole, ed in certi punti quasi un vecchio piagnucoloso (come l'han rimproverato) sarebbe una brutta lezione per Tamagno" (Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 58-9).

It seems clear that Verdi and Boito conceived of both dramatic and operatic acting within the towering, intense styles conveyed by Rossi and, especially, by Salvini, the two Othellos who had been singled out for praise by Ugo Pesci in the "official" Verdi e l'Otello (see n. 25 above). Rossi and Salvini, both students of Gustavo Modena, had also begun in the 1850s as reformers in the direction of increased realism, and, as Hilary Gatti and Anna Busi have pointed out, each actor insisted on total identification with his characters' beings while on stage.³⁸ Yet from our perspective their reforms remained only partial. They exemplified the tradition of the "great actor," of larger-than-life emotions, of grand gestures. Thus Hilary Gatti writes that to the school of Gustavo Modena—that is, to Salvini and Rossi—"la bellezza della forma sembrava indispensabile. Pur insistendo su una chiara interpretazione del personaggio ed una maggiore naturalezza nello stile, conservava comunque una certa forma stilistica nella plastica dei movimenti e nella pronunzia della frase che manteneva una considerevole distanza tra gli attori in palcoscenico ed un comportamento naturale."³⁹ Understandably, the reliance on such powerfully projected, emotional interpretations had a special attraction for those interested in creating opera: indeed, Verdi had been concerned with creating intense, projected effects from the beginning of his career—and, in all

likelihood, he had probably conceived of them as instances of increased "naturalezza." Small wonder, then, that Emanuel's plainer realism was a threat, "freddo, monotono, antipatico," from Boito's perspective, potentially "debole" from Verdi's.

One must conclude, therefore, that the advice stemming from both Verdi's and Boito's conceptions of naturalezza was, relatively speaking, outdated—or was on the verge of becoming so—when compared with the experiments on the more flexible, dramatic stage (although it is equally clear that some Italian operatic theaters persisted in maintaining even older, more old-fashioned dramatic stage-practices, such as stiff, immobile choruses). Verdi's stage-image of Otello--and that conveyed in the disposizione scenica--was expressively stylized for the sake of heightened drama and relied more heavily on conventional nineteenth-century gestures than one might initially suspect after reading, say, Boito's Preface and Ricordi's "spiegazione dei segni." (Even Victor Maurel, the first Iago, would criticize the original La Scala staging on roughly these grounds while lobbying for a more modern staging: see Section 11 below.) Ultimately, Verdi's and Boito's principles of operatic acting reform and naturalezza were allied with those forged on the Italian dramatic stage in the 1850s and 1860s.

7. Disposizione Scenica and Spartito (1): Amplifications of the Stage

Directions by Means of Controscena, Pantomimes, etc.

One of the most valuable aspects of the Otello disposizione scenica is the level of stage detail that it provides beyond that furnished in the standard printed scores, the spartito and the partitura, which are essentially identical with regard to stage directions, and which are more elaborate in these matters than is the printed libretto. (The rather sparse, largely non-definitive stage directions in Verdi's autograph score, which reflect an earlier, superseded plan, are not immediately relevant here; this document will be considered in Section 12.) These amplifications, and, above all, their relationships to the directions in the spartito, form the subject of this and the next sections. Of necessity, what follows is a collection—or, better, a sampling—of smallish details along with remarks on some of their dramatic or musical implications. Each of the hundreds of additional instructions in the disposizione scenica presents individual issues for discussion; each has its own way of interacting with the printed score. This section will be concerned with a selection of prescribed actions that add significantly to—but typically do not directly contradict—those called for in the spartito: those that provide more information where the spartito is silent. I have tried to defer until Section 8 the consideration of most of the crucial points in which the directions in the Otello manual contradict those in the spartito or more clearly seem to suggest modifications in the musical score itself—usually, additions of fermate, minor changes of timbre or sonority, and so on. As will soon

be evident, the distinction between "addition" and "correction" is not always easily made. In some instances one must deal with complexes or sets of details, some of which are additional and some of which are corrective. One must acknowledge at the outset, that is, an overlapping or dovetailing of the concerns of Sections 7 and 8.

Perhaps the most prominent of the new actions that are essentially additional in nature are the semi-elaborate controscena. (The term controscena, used, for instance, on p. 45, refers either to a brief, but trenchant, mute response-action from someone not directly involved in the singing at the moment or to a more extensively mimed action that is prolonged while something more obviously related to the main lines of the plot is also occurring on-stage. As what might metaphorically be called "dramatic counterpoints," large controscena are informative "second levels" of stage activity that unfold while the text and music themselves are principally concerned with other matters, or point towards a more central "first level" of dramatic action.) The three largest of the added controscena are: the preparation of the Act I fire, along with Cassio's simultaneous (mute) activity; Otello's and Iago's gestural responses as they observe the Act II public homage to Desdemona in the garden; and, shortly following this, Iago's badgering of Emilia after the Homage Chorus and before the Quartet.

The first of them, the description of the chorus' and Cassio's actions during the preparation of the fire in Act I (pp. 17-20), occurs as a backdrop to Iago's initial conversation with Roderigo ("Roderigo, / Ebben, che pensi?", sp., pp. 31-3). The spartito and libretto are already quite explicit here, at least about the chorus' "second level"

activity: ". . . mentre dei popolani escono da dietro la rôcca portando dei rami da ardere presso lo spaldo; alcuni soldati con fiaccole illuminano la via percorsa da questa gente," and "alcuni del popolo formano da un lato una castata di legna: la folla s'accalca intorno turbolenta e curiosa." The disposizione scenica, however, specifies the crowd's activity much more clearly, probably to assure the desired effect of naturalizza, coupled with a pleasing stage picture that manages to conceal until the last moment the somewhat clumsy apparatus of the fire itself. In any event, we are provided with anticipatory gestures of "alcuni marinai e cipriotti," eager to have the fire lit (p. 17); the entrance of the necessary "comparsa" with the "fascine" at Iago's words "M'ascolta" (p. 18; sp., 33/3/3); their following of the chorus-leaders to the trap-door near center-stage; the chorus' formation of a protective circle around the comparsa while the fire is being prepared, thus shielding it from the public's eyes (p. 18); the actual lighting of the fire (p. 20); and so on. Perhaps more significantly—because it is "corrective"—just before the fascine are brought in from stage-left, Cassio emerges on-stage from the osteria "con fare spigliato" at the moment of Iago's "Se un fragil voto / Di femmina" (p. 17). This is ten measures earlier than indicated in the spartito (see sp., 33/4/2). Once on-stage, according to the disposizione scenica, "fa un piccolo giro sulla scena, poi vedendo riunite presso il pergolato alcune ragazze, s'avvicina, e si mette con esse a chiacchierare con molta galanteria" (p. 17; notice that the sp., 33/4/2, requires instead that Cassio "s'unisce a un crocchio di soldati"). All of this, moreover, is to be done in a way that calls attention to himself. The "second-level"

points are obvious and skillfully managed. First, Cassio is from the beginning to be depicted as flirtatious and comfortably attractive to women; this serves to add credibility to Otello's later suspicions of him. Second, Cassio emerges from the osteria, thus fortifying his later point, "Già m'arde il cervello / Per un nappo vuotato" (sp., 55/4/2-3; the simple direction "Entra Cassio," sp., 33/4/2, could suggest that he enters from the rôcca, into which he had exited earlier, sp., 23/2/2). And third, the bantering, light-hearted on-stage crowd, a portion of which is involved with the bonfire-preparations, clearly furnishes the happy background of normal social activity, in contrast with which Iago's plottings and Otello's alienated and purely individual moral plummet will stand in significant, depraved relief. The chorus helps to provide a visual, even sociological, standard against which the subsequent actions of the opera may be measured.⁴⁰

A second prolonged controcena occurs in Act II, as Desdemona, having entered the up-stage garden visible through (and framed by) a large castle window, is being honored in song and gesture by the adoring chorus. The spartito, pp. 135-53, provides no suggestion for stage-action on the part of Otello and Iago, except for their final words of reaction, Iago's ["a parte"] ("aside") and Otello's "soavemente commosso," on p. 150. One is left to presume that they merely observe the Homage Chorus from inside the castle. But the disposizione scenica (pp. 43-45) is more specific. During the first portions of the Chorus, Otello and Iago apparently remain relatively motionless, the former gradually calming down and observing Desdemona "amorosamente," the latter separating himself from Otello and regarding the garden-activity

"con indifferenza" (p. 43). At the midpoint of the Chorus (the onset of the second of the three internal strophes, the baritones' "A te le porpore", sp., pp. 141-44), Otello begins to react warmly to the pastel garden-scene. He steps closer to the window—thus initiating the controcena proper with a motion calling attention to himself—and is "visibilmente commosso" (p. 44). Observing Otello's anxiety, Iago moves towards him, and, in pantomime, he again begins to impugn the innocent Desdemona. Most of this seems to occur during the third internal strophe, "A te la florida" (sp., pp 144-48):

Frattanto **Jago** parlerà ad **Otello**, il quale gli risponderà con una azione tale che significhi chiaramente come se dicesse: No...sono tutte ubbie...vaneggianti: non è possibile che una simile creatura possa ingannarmi. **Jago**, prudentemente, non insisterà e con un gesto di remissione s'allontanerà, riprendendo il posto di prima a destra, presso il tavolo: **Otello** si recherà a sinistra, e si volgerà ancora a rimirare **Desdemona**, appoggiandosi alla poltrona che è alla parete di sinistra. Tutta questa controcena fra **Otello** e **Jago** sia fatto in modo da occupare buona parte del Coro esterno. (pp. 44-5)

The dramatic point is clear, and it complements the musical effect. At the sound of the first strains of the Homage Chorus Iago had begun to "poison" Otello with his menacing, repeated warning, "Vigilate!", archly delivered on the tonic and dominant pitches (sp., 134/1/1)—the very

pitches that are providing the "innocent," rustic-pastoral ostinato bass-line in the lower voices and the cornamusa. With this wicked "staining" of tonic and dominant, with their appropriation as his own, Iago strives to distort everything that Otello will subsequently see and hear—guileless cadential patterns, for example. The controcena, skillfully begun midway through the Homage Chorus, reinforces this idea within an otherwise dramatically static (and today frequently cut) set-piece⁴¹ and helps to prevent both Otello and ourselves from hearing this music as purely naive, as psychologically untouched by disturbing, if unfounded, suspicions. We are encouraged to perceive its Arcadian naiveté, that is, as something already irrecoverably lost. As is typical of the disposizione scenica, the indicated stage action reinforces both dramatic and musical ends.

Immediately after the Homage Chorus concludes, the disposizione scenica requests more separate activity for Iago—and now Emilia—that constitutes a third significant, somewhat extended controcena. Although the spartito (p. 153) requests that both Desdemona and Emilia are to enter the castle from the garden at the conclusion of the Chorus ("Desdemona, seguita poi da Emilia, entra nella sala e s'avanza verso Otello"), the La Scala staging altered Emilia's activity at this point. (Desdemona's entrance is not altered but is amplified to intersect with new instructions for Iago: she enters "con sorriso dolcissimo; **Jago** s'inchinerà alla signora, con atto ossequioso" [p. 46]). As Otello and Desdemona begin their dialogue, "D'un uom che geme" (sp., p. 154),

Emilia rimarrà nel giardino, passeggiando. . . . **Jago** uscirà dalla sala ed andrà nel giardino, ove s'incontrerà con **Emilia**, di lui moglie: parlerà con essa un poco, poi amendue s'avvicineranno, passeggiando, alla invetriata del salone: **Jago**, dopo aver osservato **Desdemona** ed **Otello**, li indicherà ad **Emilia**, susurrandole alcune parole, alle quali essa risponderà con un gesto sdegnoso di rifiuto, allontanandosi da **Jago**, che guarderà con isprezzo. . . . **Jago** la raggiungerà tosto, arrestandola per un braccio, e con un gesto quasi minaccioso, le dirà: Bada a ciò che fai...ubbidisci. (pp. 46-7)

It is unclear what Iago could have been whispering to Emilia. It seems too early to be pointing out the handkerchief (but cf. Emilia's words in Othello, V.ii, 225-7, "For often, with a solemn earnestness -- / More than indeed belonged to such a trifle -- / He begged of me to steal it"). Nor could he be asking her to make any slurs on Desdemona's infidelity, if the Emilia-Iago encounter at the end of the opera were to remain credible. The point, evidently, is not to determine the specific request, but rather, by underscoring Iago's scheming nature, along with his bullying of his wife and her proud refusal to obey him, to prepare for their argument in the ensuing Quartet, their first actually spoken words to each other in the opera.⁴² One might also notice that Iago's prior "second-level" gesture at Desdemona's entrance (the bow, "con atto ossequioso") is mirrored by his controcena several minutes later as, terribly shaken, she exits after the Quartet (the spartito, 169/2, provides no special instructions here): "poi, cambiando fisionomia, fa

qualche passo verso **Desdemona**, ossequiosamente la inchina, e le dice qualche parola come per rassicurarla: poi s'arresta mentre **Desdemona** entra nella porta a destra, seguita da **Emilia**" (p. 50). Iago's mimed words of false consolation are notable: he never speaks directly with her elsewhere in the opera (although one might mention that in the third act the disposizione scenica, p. 73, requests that he lead Desdemona on-stage before the Act III concertato). All of these gestures reinforce the insinuating presence of Iago in passages where one's attention might otherwise be elsewhere.

Closely related to the controcena are the numerous pantomimes indicated in the disposizione scenica but not in the spartito. Generally considered, these differ from controcena in that they are concerned not with "second level" activity but with the heart of the action itself. The most noteworthy and elaborate is Otello's entrance in Act IV (pp. 93-6). Here the actor is guided, step-by-step, by printed musical cues—perhaps the heritage, as mentioned in Section 2 above, of the manual for Boito's Mefistofele. Discussion of this pantomime will be deferred until Section 12 below, in which it will be considered along with an even earlier one for this scene (in Verdi's hand), which is recoverable from the autograph score. The only other extended "first level" pantomime is the Duel in Act I, whose instructions are astonishingly precise (pp. 27-9). Ever aware of the axiom of historical verisimilitude (probably betraying the concerns of Boito, that fastidious researcher into the historical settings of the actions of his operas and libretti),⁴³ the Otello manual calls for the reconstruction of the style of fifteenth-century dueling—presumably the

late quattrocento—and we are soberly instructed that "è un misto di taglio e di punta, e più che in ripetuti colpi, l'assalto si svolgerà con rapide mosse dei combattenti, con opportuni salti e cambiamenti di posto" (p. 27). There follow five blocking diagrams, each accompanied by commentary, to show the various changes of duelling position. Rounding off the discussion is, once again, the unmistakable, patronizing tone so typical of the disposizione scenica: "Questo duello. . . non potrà riuscire di buon effetto se, come si disse, non verrà regolato da un intelligente maestro di scherma" (p. 29). On the same page a footnote proudly identifies the fencing master for the La Scala Otello to have been "maestro signor Corsini." Throughout this passage one encounters what must surely be the ideas of Boito filtered through the characteristic finger-wagging writing style of Ricordi. Although Verdi (usually gratefully) accepted the principle of aiming for accurate "scholarly" or "historical" details, none of his letters insist that this level of precision is a sine qua non of the opera's success. (On the contrary, some of Verdi's letters suggest that to be overly concerned with detail can distract from the main tasks of opera production.)⁴⁴

Many other disposizione scenica gestures that amplify the spartito seem particularly telling, although they are briefer and less elaborate. One of the most effective of these "minor" pantomimes occurs in Act I, just after Otello has dismissed the crowd that had gathered on-stage before and after the Duel in order to be alone with Desdemona. The instructions of the spartito upon the crowd's departure are perfunctory: "la scena si vuota. Otello fa cenno agli uomini colle fiaccole che lo

accompagnavano di rientrare nel Castello"; and, finally, "restano soli Otello e Desdemona" (sp., p. 94). The disposizione scenica, however, specifies in greater detail the motions of the two lovers at this point (pp. 32-3). Clearly, the principal concern is the faithful mirroring of the music, itself in transition from Duel-reverberations to the intimate warmth of the Love Duet. Thus while the pedal F-natural in the contrabasses is prolonged (sp., 94/1/1—94/4/1), eventually yielding to the rising, solo muted cello (sp., 94/4/2)—a musical image of the warmth and depth of Otello's and Desdemona's love—the stage manual instructs Otello to move up-stage to be certain that everyone has in fact left. For her part, Desdemona moves towards him and then stops, "contemplandolo amorosamente" (p. 32). As the solo cello swells towards its high-point, Otello and Desdemona re-approach one another. And "alla sett'ultima battuta della pag. 94" (sp., 94/5/4)—the critical moment when the solo cello splits prismatically into four muted solo cellos (a sudden multiplication of their emotions, or, perhaps more specifically, the release from or melting of their public persons into the depth of their private adoration of each other)—"**Otello** ritorna presso **Desdemona**, e la stringe dolcemente al petto: la più dolce calma è subentrata all'ira di poco dianzi" (p. 33). At this point the disposizione scenica requests actions that become something of a commentary on the (here untexted) music. (Section 9 below deals with other such commentaries.) One would suspect, therefore, that Verdi was the likely source for this portion of the stage action.⁴⁵

Somewhat similar instances of these brief, but salient, pantomimes would include several that deal specifically with Iago. Such, for

example, is the Act II instruction for him to push a reluctant Cassio out into the garden to speak with Desdemona (p. 38; cf. sp., pp. 120-1). Here Cassio's hesitation strengthens our awareness of his fundamental urges towards propriety in dealing with Otello and Desdemona (and hence our awareness of his guiltlessness); and Iago is again seen as the puppeteer, manipulating and posturing his victims for maximum effect and efficiency. The many "additional" stage directions for Iago throughout the disposizione scenica, including frequent gestures of triumph, cynicism, and so on (see Section 10 below), exemplify Boito's crucial point in his Preface: "Jago è il vero autore del dramma, egli ne crea le fila, le raccoglie, le combina, le intreccia" (p. 5).

Act IV is particularly rich in added gestures for all of its principal characters. Desdemona's Willow Song and Ave Maria gestures (pp. 87-93) seem relevant here, although most of them are not pantomimes but gestural reflections of what she is singing. In between Desdemona's two solo pieces, however, a brief controcena is added for Emilia. As she leaves Desdemona's bedchamber after their emotional embrace (see n. 45 above): **Emilia** nell'uscire, si volgerà una volta per contemplare **Desdemona**: giunta sul limitare della porta, si volgerà ancora, alzando le mani al cielo in atto di angosciata preghiera, poi aprirà la porta, e tirando dietro sè l'arazzo, escirà, chiudendo la porta stessa" (pp. 91-2). This is eloquent indeed within the norms of nineteenth-century, more stylized staging conventions, and with it we might be reminded again of the context within which Verdi's axiom of naturalizza was to be applied. The subsequent Murder and Death Scenes are described full detail. Thus we learn that Otello, in a scene of "grandissima difficoltà" (p. 100),

is to strangle Desdemona with his bare hands (p. 99; cf. the less specific "la soffoca" in the sp., p. 351/2/3). The actual manner of the murder probably recalled for the Italian theatrical public Ernesto Rossi's more "savage" Othello than that of Tommaso Salvini, who insisted on staging the murder behind the bed-curtain, out of the sight of the public.⁴⁶ Emilia is given a brief controcena shortly thereafter: as Lodovico demands Otello's sword, she is to kneel and weep at the dead Desdemona's bedside (p. 106). And, of course, Otello's final actions, his wounded crawling towards the dead Desdemona, his failed attempts to kiss her, his succeeding only in kissing her hand (cf. the words about her hand near the opening of the Act III Otello-Desdemona Duet), and his final death and rolling down the bed-steps might be mentioned here as well (see also Section 2 above).

Appropriately, the most unexpected added pantomime of the opera's concluding scene belongs to Iago. To make his escape more credible (the obvious objection to this occurrence is that Iago, now recognized for the villain that he is, would be under heavy guard), the disposizione scenica invents an "artful" ruse for him, thus confirming that he remains true to his essential, deceptive nature to the end. To Otello's shouted demand, "Ah! discolpati!" (sp., 358/3/3-4), Iago, remaining silent,

col gesto e la fisionomia finge voler parlare, mentre maliziosamente indietreggia di alcuni passi per avvicinarsi alla porta d'uscita: gli altri, tutt'intenti a quanto sta per dire, non avvertono questo movimento. . . . D'un tratto, colla

rapidità del fulmine, **Jago** grida: No, estrae la spada, e con largo molinello impedisce che lo si avvicini; in pari tempo fa un balzo, e guizzando fra le due Guardie, fugge dalla porta (pp. 105-6).

Moreover, this new pantomime was deemed sufficiently important to warrant a modification in the score: thus we read that a hold is to be applied to the string tremolo (sp., 358/3/4, last two beats) for as long as needed for Iago's actions (p. 105). This is one of the few points in the disposizione scenica that explicitly suggests a change of the musical notation itself (see also Section 8 below).

In addition to the controcene and pantomimes, the disposizione scenica adds hundreds of gestures to the staging as individual lines are being delivered. These, too, are clearly the fruits of practical stage experience. Although we need not compile a complete inventory of these details, it may be helpful to conclude this section by citing four examples that are notable in imagery and implication.

1. One notices that a chair is a conspicuous prop for the Brindisi and its immediately preceding music in Act I, (pp. 21-5). The spartito is vague on this point: not surprisingly, tables and chairs are present (sp., 55/1, mentions that the group is positioned around a table, "parte in piedi, parte seduti"), but it is unclear whether Cassio is one of those who are seated. In the disposizione scenica Cassio is initially seated, rises for his dramatically important toast to Desdemona ("Essa infiora / Questo lido," etc.), soon sits

back down, rises for his lines in the Brindisi, totters about once he feels the effects of the wine, and the like. We might recall here that stage-right seating and rising are also crucial (and controversial) images for Otello--another victim of Iago--in Act III (see Section 3 above).

2. In the manual Otello breaks up the duel, "Abbasso le spade!", with a drawn sword himself (pp. 29-30; cf. sp., 89/1, which does not mention any weapon). This image doubtless contributes to our perception of his authority, strength, and imperiousness. But, more importantly, it also begins to condition our ever-growing awareness of his propensity to fall into rapid rages and to resort to violent solutions.
3. The manual calls for rather extreme stage action for Otello and Desdemona surrounding the moment of the "Bacio" in the Act I Love Duet. Otello's and Desdemona's gestures here are among the most provocative innovations in the disposizione scenica: we are presented with the startling image of the hero physically collapsing under the impact of his emotions. As Otello sings "Ah! la gioia m'innonda / Sì fieramente...che ansante mi giaccio" (sp., p. 105/2/2) the manual goes beyond the spartito--although without contradicting it--with the instruction (p. 34) that Otello is nearly to faint. He is compelled to sit down, led and supported by Desdemona, to recover. As she leans over her stricken husband, he turns to her and requests "Un bacio," and so on. In sum, "il Duce / Del nostro Duce" (sp., 111/3/1) must take command, support him, and lean over him in his excess--even though, in context, it is

blissful excess. As is well known, Boito, following Shakespeare, had originally planned to have the eavesdropping Iago vow at this point to ruin the lovers.⁴⁷ Whatever its effect on the rapturous Love Duet might have been, at least one aspect of the idea would have been brilliant: an extended negative recurrence of the image of someone bending over a collapsed Otello may be found at the end of Act III, Otello's fainting and Iago's "Ecco il Leone!" A more explicit, "reversed" evocation of the Love-Duet image occurs at the end of the opera, where the wounded Otello struggles to hover over the dead Desdemona. There she is motionless not merely in a near-faint, as Otello had been, but in death; and once again Otello's final rhyme is "giacio"—"bacio." At the climax of the Act I Love Duet, then, the disposizione scenica adds a powerful, recurring—and certainly disturbing—image to the stage directions in the spartito.

4. In an image related to those mentioned in No. 3 above—and surely as an additional, pointed irony—when Otello does faint at the end of Act III, the manual states that he "d'un tratto cade svenuto al suolo come corpo morto, a traverso il tappeto che sta sotto al trono" (p. 85). The symbolism of the carpet and throne, unmentioned in the spartito (cf. sp., 320/4/1, a mere "sviene") is too obvious to require further comment here.

8. Disposizione Scenica and Spartito (2): Alterations of the Stage

Directions, Implied Modifications of the Score, etc.

In most of the instances cited in the last section the additional disposizione scenica stage directions—significant amplifications—neither contradicted those found in the spartito nor suggested alterations in the music as notated. There are a number of other details, however, in which the Otello manual does disagree with the information printed in the score. These conflicts evidently represent the later thoughts of Verdi, Boito, or Ricordi (more likely of one or both of the first two than of the third alone), and they must have been conceived during the La Scala rehearsals and first performances. In this respect, a strong case may be made that they are to be preferred to the earlier stage directions. In none of the conflicting instances does the Otello manual admit the contradiction. Apart from the obvious interest that such discrepancies have for those interested in historical performance, it must be recognized that they also present modern editorial problems. Given a case, for example, in which the autograph score, libretto, spartito, and partitura essentially agree on a particular point of stage action, and in which the disposizione scenica—a later document, approved by Verdi and Boito—counsels something different, are we justified in removing, altering, replacing, or adding to the original stage direction in modern editions of the opera?

The question is by no means easily resolved. On the one hand, the "superseded" stage directions (or, occasionally, the music as notated) reflect Verdi's concerns as he was composing and proofreading the music,

and they doubtless convey a more abstract, and hence freer, conception of the action. Thus one might argue that it is desirable to retain them regardless of disposizione scenica contradictions, since they provide authoritative general advice freed from the concrete concerns of a specific, individual realization, albeit one informed and sanctioned, or at least reasonably sanctioned, by its creators. On the other hand, there is no denying the essential authority of the disposizione scenica. To reject the validity of a point of its action on the grounds that it violates what one finds in the score would, first, fail to recognize that its creators continued to strive to fix an increasingly accurate interpretation of the drama—a concern, especially, to Verdi for years to come—and would, second, require axioms of critical judgment that, if extended, would ultimately undermine the authority of the entire disposizione scenica. It would seem that any inflexible solution to the dilemma is bound to be unsatisfactory, and future editors of the opera might be advised to confront these discrepancies (and perhaps some of the amplifications mentioned in the prior section as well) by offering concise forms of both sets of directions—clearly distinguished with regard to their origins—on the relevant printed page of music. In order to avoid a cluttered score such instances should not be multiplied beyond strict necessity; but the desirability of some principle of this sort underlying the stage directions of a new Otello edition seems evident. What follows here, then, is an overview and sampling of two categories of contradictions: those in which the stage action of the disposizione scenica clearly disagrees with that in the printed scores; and those few instructions that seem to advise slight modifications in

the musical notation—the adding of extra holds, altered sonorities, and the like.

One of the clearest examples from the first category concerns the changing state of the sky in Act I. The issue is scarcely minor, for it bears on one of the central images of the first act. The heavens are persistent symbols of—almost metaphysical commentaries on—the action unfolding below them. Act I begins in the midst of a raging storm: this is simultaneously a foreshadowing of the elemental passions to come (indeed, Giuseppina Carutti has argued that "la tempesta" is "il tema base della regia")⁴⁸ and a symbol not only of the fierce war that Otello has been waging but also of Heaven's assistance of its favored hero ("nostra e del ciel è gloria / Dopo l'armi lo vinse l'uragano"). And the act concludes peacefully with Heaven's smiling upon the lovers, just as "l'ira immensa" has given way to "immenso amor" (cf. also "Disperda il ciel gli affanni . . ."; "Vien! Venere splende," etc.). But at which point and how quickly does this transformation of the sky take place? The spartito—which clearly implies some sort of moving backcloth—would seem to fix the moment at which the sky has finally become clear towards the end of the Love Duet, shortly after Otello's "Venga la morte!" Here one reads (sp., 103/4/1-3) "il cielo si sarà tutto rasserenato: si vedranno alcune stelle e sul lembo dell'orizzonte il riflesso ceruleo della nascente luna." Progress to this point has been accomplished in several stages: for instance, in the chorus' words, "Si calma la bufera," without stage directions (30/4/3-6); in the instructions at the end of the Fire Chorus, "la bufera è cessata" (54/2/2-3); and in those as Otello breaks up the Duel, "le nubi si diradano a poco a poco"

(89/2/2-3). Thus according to the spartito the sky-transformation is slow and spans the entire act. But the disposizione scenica disagrees; it favors a much more rapidly changing sky. According to the stage manual the storm begins to abate at the moment when Otello has entered the castle, that is, at the beginning of the Victory Chorus. We are informed on p. 15 that the velo grigio (which had been producing the effect of a rain-obscured vision of the sea) is slowly to be removed and the footlights slightly raised at this point. At the back of the stage the fondale mobile, representing the changing aspects of the sky (pp. 8-9), is already moving slowly. And (unlike the situation in the spartito) it should have completed its motion by the end of the Fire Chorus: "verso la fine del Coro di gioia il cielo sarà completamente sereno. . . . In questo momento l'illuminatore darà più luce alla ribalta, rischiarando anche il fondale-cielo, in modo che si abbia sulla scena la luce di una notte completamente serena" (pp. 20-1). It is difficult to know whether the change was purely aesthetic or whether it was a concession to the practical—for instance, to the length of the fondale mobile, to the problem of continuing a slow transformation over a lengthy period of time, and so on. In any event, the spartito and the disposizione scenica provide us with conflicting directions here, and modern stage directors might wish to be advised of the available options.

Another example of contradictory stage directions may be found at the point of Montano's entrance before the Act I Duel. The Otello manual calls for him to enter at least four bars earlier than indicated in the score (sp., 81/1/1): he is now to emerge at the final bars of the choral refrain of the Brindisi and cross the stage looking for Cassio

(p. 25; cf. Cassio's "early" entrance before the Brindisi, mentioned in Section 7 above). We are even advised that this action is to be carefully executed and timed. The early entrance, of course, is intended to attract the viewer's attention before Montano begins to participate in the drama. Such conspicuous entrances or motions are frequently found in the instructions of the manual (see also Section 9 below). Also differing from the advice in the spartito is Desdemona's entrance after the duel. The disposizione scenica instructs her to appear not alone, as implied in the score (sp., 92/2/3); rather, her entrance is to be more public, a bolder stage-event: "Dietro a **Desdemona** saranno entrati: due soldati con grandi fiaccole: un capitano: sei guardie: si schiereranno nel fondo della scena" (p. 31). The "new" military groups exit only a few measures later; they are to follow Iago, after receiving his orders (p. 31). Similarly, immediately upon receiving his punishment, Cassio exits—individually—into the castle (p. 31: the spartito does not specify the manner of his exit).

In the second act the disposizione scenica alters several features of the Homage Chorus staging and clarifies some of the details about its manner of performance—at least as conceived by the Spring or Summer of 1887. (Iago's and Otello's controcena here—an amplification, not an alteration—was discussed in Section 7 above. It should also be remembered that this Chorus presented a persistent staging and sonority problem—see Section 4 above—suggesting that the spartito instructions here should not be considered definitive.) The disposizione scenica calls for a coro speciale, or coro scelto, of approximately twenty-eight or thirty singers, including eight boys, to be seen in the garden along

with the mandolin and guitar players (five or six each) and a comparsa who pretends to play the cornamusa (p. 43). This chorus, whose principal function is to perform the three internal "solo" strophes (sp., 138/2/3—148/2/2) is to be reinforced in the main "Dove guardi splendono" sections by a larger, off-stage chorus initially grouped around an oboe, all for a sonorous "effetto di lontananza" (p. 41). (It is possible that the very first "Dove guardi splendono," sp., 133/3/1, is to be sung only by this coro interno.) Desdemona and Emilia enter by themselves, somewhat earlier than indicated in the spartito (p. 41; cf. sp., 135/2/1), and the special chorus appears shortly thereafter and enters with bows to Desdemona. In the meantime, the non-visible coro interno is to re-group closer to the audience and around an off-stage harmonium (p. 42). For the first statement of "Dove guardi splendono" (sp., 136/3/1ff) the boys of the coro speciale are to remain silent—thus altering the timbre of this reprise—in preparation for their succeeding "solo" strophe, "T'offriamo il giglio"; and in addition to the strewing of lilies on the ground before that strophe, as indicated in the spartito (138/2/2), one boy offers lilies to Desdemona and is caressed by her (p. 43). Just before the second interior strophe (and hence slightly earlier than indicated in the spartito), the baritones offer Desdemona "le collane ed i monili," and she in turn hands them to Emilia during the strophe. Before the last solo strophe, "A te la florida," the disposizione scenica does not call for the women to spargere fronde e fiore, as requested by the spartito (144/1/4); rather, the women are to be carrying roses and geraniums, and they are simply to offer them to Desdemona (p. 44). As mentioned above, the reprise of

"Dove guardi splendono" (sp., 148/2/3ff) is to be reinforced by the now-nearby off-stage chorus.

In sum, the suggested staging of the Homage Chorus—including the important controcena—may be considered a free elaboration of ideas suggested only sketchily in the spartito. The closeness of the detail in the disposizione scenica, the departures from the printed stage directions, the careful specifications of realistically "spatial," off-stage effects, the concern for delicately varying different masses of sonorities (along with an almost architectural balancing of parts), and our knowledge of the dissatisfied composer's much later tinkering with the sonorities of this music and its staging—all of these things clearly demonstrate Verdi's keen interest in this seemingly unassuming piece. "Che sprazzo di luce fra tanto scuro!", Verdi had exclaimed delightedly when he had first received its text from Boito.⁴⁹ Through its meticulously controlled pastel decoration it was to serve the dramatic function of "naively" enthroning the Madonna-like Desdemona only a few moments before the onset of her downfall. In an important discussion of Otello Francesco DeGrada has underscored the "iconologia devozionale" that surrounds Desdemona here, and he adds the significant remark: "Ma è chiaro che l'apoteosi non fa che esaltare il piacere macabro di cogliere lo spegnersi di quel sorriso nello sfregio dell'umiliazione e nel pallore della morte."⁵⁰ Precisely. And surely it was because the Homage Chorus contrasted so markedly with the emotional premises of everything that ensued that this scene would remain for Verdi the most difficult production problem in Act II—perhaps the most difficult in the opera—a problem that was (for him)

virtually unresolvable. The disposizione scenica, we must conclude, represents only one of several solutions provided for this scene by its creators.

Throughout the remainder of the opera explicit contradictions of the printed stage directions are more rare. Typically, these disagreements are limited to isolated gestures, and for this reason they are not as provocative as those mentioned above. The most notable are the following:

1. After the Act II Quartet Otello is not to throw himself into a chair, "accasciato" (sp., 169/4/1), to contemplate the horror of his wife's supposed infidelity. Instead, "accasciato da immenso dolore, si volge verso il pubblico ed esclama: Desdemona real!" (p. 50). This is one of several utterances in the opera that its creators singled out as "footlight lines"—moments of special dramatic importance. Others will be mentioned in Section 9 below.
2. In "Si, pel ciel" at the end of Act II the ritual of kneeling and rising is given closer attention as is the raising and lowering of their right arms (not both arms, as is implied in the spartito—see, e.g., 194/4/2, 197/3/1-2, and compare the disposizione scenica, pp. 53-4).
3. At the beginning of Act III the Herald does not merely deliver his news "dal peristilio" (sp., 204/1/1), but crosses the stage and comes much closer to Otello (p. 56). Once again, the effect is to direct the audience's attention to significant plot detail through stage movement.
4. The spartito (206/2/1) and the partitura (p. 308, m. 1), disagree slightly about the exact moment of Desdemona's entrance in Act III. The discrepancy is clarified in the disposizione scenica. As is also indicated in the partitura, her entrance coincides with the onset of the E-major allegro moderato string introduction to the Duet (sp., 206/1/1). Moreover, she is not to linger "ancora presso il soglio," as both the spartito and the partitura suggest, but is to move towards the center of the stage, closer to Otello, before stopping herself and beginning to sing (p. 58).
5. Otello's positions in his monologue "Diol mi potevi scagliar" and the later Act III concertato are thoroughly reconsidered in the disposizione scenica. See Section 3 above.
6. With Cassio's entrance for the Act III Terzetto, Otello is now to creep gradually forward to hide behind a pillar, instead of (apparently) staying largely "nel fondo a sinistra dove c'è il vano del verone" (sp., 232/3/1-2; cf. Otello's remarks "dal verone," 237/2/1). In brief, during the Terzetto Otello is more visible and prominent in the disposizione scenica, which also provides him with several "dramatic" changes of location (pp. 64-5). Cassio's and Iago's positions are also slightly modified in the Otello manual (notice, for instance, the alteration of the directions found at sp., 235/1/1).
7. As Lodovico and Iago engage in conversation before the Act III concertato, the stage directions of the spartito, "Si sarà formato un crocchio tra Desdemona, Lodovico e Iago" (262/2/3), are changed in the disposizione scenica. The blocking diagrams on p. 74 show

that the stage arrangement is: Otello alone; Desdemona and Emilia together; and Roderigo, Lodovico, and Iago in a small group. Desdemona and Emilia are doubtless kept together because of their immediately prior conversation, "(Come sei mesta)," etc. (sp., 261/3/3). Since this brief exchange is a relatively late addition to the score,⁵¹ it appears that the stage directions in the spartito were inadvertently retained after the addition of the Emilia-Desdemona remarks, and that this "problem" was discovered--as might be expected--only during the rehearsals. The alteration in the directions here is a paradigmatic instance of practical stage experience informing the advice of the disposizione scenica, or, conversely, of the latter authoritatively "correcting" the former. This is precisely the sort of correction that should concern future editors of the opera.

8. After Otello has brutally thrown her to the ground in Act III, the spartito (270/4) advises us that "Emilia e Lodovico sollevano pietosamente Desdemona" before she launches the concertato. But in the disposizione scenica Desdemona is only "un poco sollevata" (p. 79), whereupon she shakes them away from her and insists to be left alone. Surely the point is to reflect more literally her initial line in the concertato ("A terra!...sì...nel livido / Fango"): this "literal" aspect is an ever-present concern of the Otello manual, and it demonstrates again the closeness of the thought that went into its preparation. Desdemona is permitted to rise completely from the ground--by herself, one notices--only with the second quatrain of her text, "E un dì sul mio sorriso," etc. (p. 81; cf.

- sp., 272//2/1). At the end of the third quatrain she intensifies her gestures further with two steps towards the footlights (p. 81).
9. In the Otello manual, as the curtain rises for Act IV, Desdemona is already seated (p. 87). Therefore she does not sit down "macchinalmente" when she begins to remember the Willow Song, as indicated in the spartito, 327/3/2. As has been mentioned, the remainder of the Willow Song is carefully described, almost phrase by phrase, in the manual.
10. Near the end of Act IV Otello's rushing to grab his scimitar is delayed until he has completed the line, "E il ciel non ha più fulmini?!" (p. 106; cf. sp., 359/2/1-4).

The above examples have dealt with alterations of the stage directions. A second category of contradictions comprises passages in the disposizione scenica that appear to suggest or sanction modifications in the printed music. These suggestions, in particular, carry with them editorial implications. In most of these instances we are dealing with the effects of the "normal" ottocento interpretive procedures that seem to be presumed throughout: "elastic" holds and expansions, declaimed accenti and nuances, flexibility of pulse, and so on. But in a few cases this "elasticity" is emphasized and explicitly called for; the disposizione scenica, that is, advises special holds and delays that could also have been notated. For example, we read that Iago is to plunge directly into his line to Otello, "Voi sapete ch'io v'amo" (sp., 129/3/3), and is to deliver it "con molta espansione" (p. 40). The word "espansione" suggests the effect of breadth produced,

say, by a hold on "Voi sape—" followed by a pointedly deliberate delivery of the ensuing syllables. Would the same result be produced by placing a fermata over the high point of Iago's line? If so, the disposizione scenica seems to be counseling something that could translate directly into a minor notational change. (Should it be inserted [within brackets, of course] in a critical edition? Quite obviously this sort of tampering, however justified, would be controversial.) A similar question emerges near the end of Act IV, at the point where a stunned Emilia demands to know from Iago, "Hai tu creduto Desdemona infida?" Here the spartito (356/3/2-4) gives no special indications of nuance: a beat and a half of rest lead immediately into the next measure, her subsequent demand, "Parla!" The disposizione scenica, however (p. 104), bluntly requests after her first question: "Lungo silenzio. **Emilia** s'avvicina ancora più a **Jago** e gli dice con forza: Parla!" Again—even more explicitly—the advice here, in effect, urges the addition of a fermata (and a phrase of explanatory stage directions) to the rest after her "infida." The same thing occurs twenty-one measures later, at the moment of Iago's "pantomimed" artful escape (sp., 358/3/4; p. 105; the passage is discussed in Section 7 above).

Finally, the disposizione scenica occasionally makes recommendations with regard to instrumental and vocal sonority that suggest notational issues. The two cori that perform the Homage Chorus, mentioned above, is one instance. Another would be the instructions to the trumpeters in the Act III Fanfares, advice that concerns not only their "spatial" disposition off-stage but also the sonorities they produce. A footnote on p. 70 informs us that "Ove non si possa ottenere

un vero effetto di lontananza, le trombe metteranno la sordina: e la leveranno quando si riuniscono i tre gruppi, come si vedrà a suo tempo." (Cf. p. 71: "levano tutti le sordine nel caso sieno state applicate."). The partitura (p. 387) advises a sound that is "ben lontano" but says nothing about the possibility of mutes. Once again, then, one finds a remark in the manual with editorial implications. We may conclude that to Verdi the effect of distance was more important than the "absolute" timbre of unmuted trumpets. Even the brief survey of examples provided in the past two sections suffices to demonstrate that the disposizione scenica has much to say that must be considered—at least considered—in the preparation of a new edition of Otello.

9. The Disposizione Scenica as Interpretive Document: Highlighted Lines, Clarifications and Analyses of Individual Pieces, etc.

A fundamental principle underlying the disposizione scenica is its ever-present concern for a "close reading" of the text. The Otello manual strives to interpret through position, gesture, and nuance the dramatic significance of nearly every line. It furnishes a gestural complement to the music in its compulsion to bring forth the multitude of details that constitute Otello. Like the music itself, the disposizione scenica tolerates no wasted gestures. In principle, all stage-actions are to be justified not in themselves or for their own beauty, but only insofar as they contribute directly to (or, in some cases, do not distract from) the "Drama" (see the discussion of this concept in Section 4 above; and cf. n. 44). Figuratively speaking, the goal of the each gesture is to "disappear" into the "Drama." Each is to become transparent in such a way that the viewer's emotional engagement passes directly through it into the heart of the projected narrative, into an abstract dramatic totality that is valued over its constituent parts. Any false, unnecessarily attractive, or exaggerated gesture could render opaque that which should be transparent by calling the spectator's attention away from the "Drama" into an aspect of mere technique. The unified, gripping theatrical experience is to rule everything, and at times it demands sacrifices from its individual elements (often a sacrifice of personal ego) in order to maintain a proper dramatic balance or to ensure this consistent openness to the narrative. This is a crucially important Verdian axiom that, if

anything, is intensified in his final period of composition. It is clearly implicit, although not methodically elaborated, in his correspondence. Much less is it elaborated, of course (as is the case with Wagner), in separate essays or manifestos. But we may perceive the principle, for instance, in Verdi's rejection of Alfredo Edel's elaborately planned costume for Otello in Act IV: "Ho visto i figurini e trovo sempre l'ultimo d'Otello troppo selvaggio. . . . più attira troppo l'attenzione e distrae. Se il Pubblico arriva a dire 'Oh il bel costume' siamo perduti. Gli artisti devono avere il coraggio de s'effacer!!"⁵². This statement, if extended, may be considered a central postulate of Verdian aesthetics, and it underpins the choices in the disposizione scenica as well. Artistic and interpretive choices are to be made to highlight dramatic and textual detail. The ruling idea is that of efficiency—at times an almost sacrificial efficiency.

Thus it is characteristic for the disposizione scenica to assume a closely "interpretive" character: to ensure that music, gesture and text are synchronized; to draw attention to potentially obscured lines and dramatic points by significant stage motion; to highlight and nuance important lines of text, or to insist on a specific weighting or interpretation of those lines; and so on. A typical instance of the concern for synchronization occurs after Iago's Credo, at the point where Iago observes Cassio and Desdemona conversing in the garden. Their dialogue is to be mimed, of course, but the disposizione scenica takes great care that Iago's comments are not "generalized" ones but specific, individually detailed reactions to what he is seeing from moment to moment: "Si raccomanda la massima esattezza in questa scena, onde

l'azione degli attori nel giardino corrisponda a quanto dice di essi **Jago**" (p. 39). Desdemona's and Cassio's motions are valuable only insofar as they vanish into Iago's text: the goals are efficiency and the particularly Verdian style of naturalzza. Similar comments could be multiplied at length (the Otello-Iago struggle in Act II, p. 51; the chorus's gestures and features in the Act III concertato, p. 81; and so on). Much of this is relevant to modern vocal and stage interpretations, and, even apart from the matter of synchronization, one can scarcely ignore the many provocative issues of practical interpretation covered in the manual: that Iago is apparently not to burst out with a demonic laugh at the end of the Credo, as in virtually all modern performances, but instead "scrollerà le spalle" (p. 37); that Iago is to present Cassio's supposed words in the Act II Dream Racconto in a voice other than his natural one (p. 53—the point is confirmed by Victor Maurel's 1905 recording)⁵³ and, similarly, that Desdemona is to employ four different qualities of voice, in effect to "analyze" by timbre the various psychological strata of the Willow Song (p. 89);⁵⁴ that the Ave Maria is to be recited mezza voce (p. 92), not sotto voce, as indicated in the spartito (338/2/3); that portions of the Murder Scene and the final Monologue are to be interrupted by sobs (pp. 98 [Desdemona], 107 [Otello])—here too, the point may be confirmed through early recordings by the original Otello, Francesco Tamagno (two recordings of the Death Scene, 1903 and 1904).⁵⁵

Similarly, the principle of dramatic efficiency prescribes stage activity to call attention to a subsequent—but otherwise easily missed—line or action that is crucial to the plot. The prior gesture

becomes a technique of special bracketing or highlighting. (Several have been mentioned in passing in the preceding sections.) A model illustration may be found in the behavior of Iago during the opening Storm of Act I. For most of the Storm the audience cannot perceive Iago as an individual clearly separated from the on-stage group. Indeed, his first line, "E infranto l'artimoni!", is indistinguishable in tone from the other scattered cries up to this point. Yet his second utterance, still delivered amidst the confusing swirl, is important and begins to define his character. Of all the voices on stage, his alone hopes for Otello's destruction: "L'alvo / Frenetico del mar sia la sua tombal" (sp., 17/2/2ff). This line is also musically significant, for at the moment of Otello's entrance shortly thereafter the hero gloriously unfurls a heroic variant (musical and textual) of his enemy's earlier wish: "L'orgoglio musulmano / Sepolto è in mar" (sp., 21/2/3ff). How, then, can one properly highlight the easily missed line of Iago? Through stage motion and position: "**Jago**, afferrando per una mano **Roderigo** scende rapidamente dai gradini, e facendosi largo tra la folla, si avvanza nel mezzo per esclamare con accento d'odio feroce: L'alvo frenetico del mar sia la sua tombal (p. 13). Analogous examples occur frequently throughout the Otello manual: for Iago's seizing of the handkerchief in Act II (p. 49); to call attention to the inner dialogues in the Act III concertato (pp. 81-2); and so on.

Closely related to the above are the moments singled out for what might be termed "grand declamation": the turning towards or approaching of the ribalta to deliver a "summary" line of particularly dramatic impact. This is a directly personal appeal to the audience, and in most

cases the singer or group of singers gains the benefit of illumination from the footlights (electric footlights at La Scala in 1887: see n. 61 below). On eight occasions (Nos. 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 12, and 13 below) this highlighting continues beyond the limits of a few words and extends throughout an entire section or subsection. But often the effect is brief: the establishing of a sudden, direct contact with the audience to communicate a single, well-sculpted remark. Clearly, these are important moments, and dramatic (and even musical) analyses can profit by considering their treatment in the disposizione scenica. The most instances of "grand declamation" at the ribalta are:

1. Chorus, Act I: all of the "Dio, fulgor della bufera!" section of the opening Storm (p. 13, "l'intero Coro s'avanza impetuoso fino alla ribalta"; sp., 13/1/1--16/2/2).
2. The entire Victory Chorus, "Vittoria! Sterminio" (p. 15, "tutto il Coro si avanza impetuosamente al proscenio"; sp., 23/1/1--29/1/4).
3. Iago, Act II: all of the "Credo" (p. 37, "s'avanza verso la ribalta e si ferma in atteggiamento sardonico e fiero"; sp., 114/1/1--120/1/3).
4. Otello, Act II: "Desdemona real" (p. 50, "si volge verso il pubblico ed esclama"; sp., 169/4/1--170/1/1)
5. Otello, Act II: "Ah! Morte e dannazione!" (p. 52, "con gesto tremendo, volgendosi verso il pubblico"; sp., 184/1/1)
6. Otello, Act II: "Ah! mille vite gli donasse Iddio! / Una è povera preda al furor mio!" (p. 53, "balza verso il ribalta e quasi con urlo selvaggio esclama"; sp., 191/1/1--191/4/1).
7. All of "Sì, pel ciel" (p. 53, "avanzandosi di nuovo alla ribalta"; sp., 193/3/1--201/2/1)
8. Desdemona, Act III: "E son io l'innocente cagion di tanto pianto!" (p. 61, "disperata, si volge al pubblico"; sp., 222/1/2--222/3/1).
9. Otello, Act III: the second half of his Monologue, beginning especially with the words, "Ma, o pianto, o duol! m'han rapito il miraggio" (p. 62, "avanzandosi di due or tre passi," "s'avanza ancora di due o tre passi"; sp., 229/1/1--231/4/2).
10. Otello, Act III: for his lines in what is, in effect, the conclusion of a kind of special stretta to the Act III Terzetto, "Tradimento! Tradimento!" (perhaps less unequivocal than the others, p. 69, "si avanza di due passi"; sp., 248/2/1--250/2/2).
11. Desdemona, Act III: in the "exposition" (or "proposta") of the concertato, "le amare stille del mio dolor" (p. 81, "si avvanzerà di due passi"; sp., 273/4/2--274/1/1)
12. The Quartetto a voci sole within the concertato: "Quell'innocente un fremito," etc. (p. 81, blocking diagram; sp., 274/1/1, lasting until the end of the ensemble).
13. Chorus, Act III: at the climactic Ritenuto ending of the concertato (p. 82, along with those already at the footlights, "si avanzano ancora il più possibilmente vicino alla ribalta"; sp., 311/1/2--315/1/2)
14. Desdemona, Act IV: certain moments near the end of the expanded third strophe of the Willow Song, especially "Solea la storia / Con questo semplice suono finir" and the ensuing "Egli era nato," etc., and, shortly thereafter, the return to the "Io per amarlo e per

- morir" and the subsequent "Salce! Salce! Salce!" (pp. 90-91; sp., 334/1/5--334/4/1, 335/3/1--336/1/4).
15. Desdemona, Act IV: "Pietà di me, mio Dio" (p. 97, "si avanza rapidamente al proscenio"; sp., 348/2/1-2).
 16. Otello, Act IV: "Cassio vive!!" (p. 101, again, slightly less unequivocal than the other instances, "fa due o tre passi innanzi e verso il centro e con grido disperato esclama"; sp., 353/3/1).
 17. Emilia, Act IV: "O potenza divina!" (p. 104, "si avanza di due o tre passi"; sp., 357/2/3-4).

Within the general context of its "close reading" of words and lines, the disposizione scenica may be said to interpret Otello insofar as it comprises a series of highly characterized "analyses" of the successive moments of the opera. At times these analyses—emotional, gestural, and dramatic rather than structural in the usual modern sense—become more explicit and extend over an entire piece or scene. The most notable interprets Otello's Act III Monologue, "Dio! mi potevi scagliar tutti i mali." (And, indeed, because the discussion is so patently interpretive—and because it explicates the "meaning" of the music as elaborated in a succession of emotionally contrasting "periods"—we may assume that it stems from Verdi himself, or at least that it reflects the maestro's understanding of the piece. It is unthinkable that either Ricordi or Boito would have produced such exegetical remarks without consulting the summum iudex.) Thus we read that "Questo monologo di **Otello** si può considerare diviso in quattro periodi, nei quali si svolge un pensiero solo, ma che si esprime con

quattro sentimenti diversi. . . . [At the beginning] **Otello** prova uno stato di prostrazione generale: in questo primo periodo la voce è soffocata" (p. 62), and further instructions for the appropriate performance of this section follow. The first period begins to yield to the second as the seated Otello rises to his feet, lifts his right arm, and sings "E rassegnato al volere del ciel" (sp., 228/2/1). The second phase proper, which begins, it would seem, with "Ma, o pianto, o duol!" and its shift of key signature, is to continue for some fifteen measures, into the strong E-flat cadence ("che mi fa lieto!", sp., 230/2/1). Because it is based on the memory of "le gioie perdute," it is to be sung with a "voce espressiva." With the words "Tu alfin, Clemenza" (sp., 230/3/1) the third period begins, in which "l'animo di lui s'innalza a più elevati concetti." And this leads rapidly, "senza transizione," to the fourth and final, disintegrative period, presumably beginning with "Ah! Dannazione!" (sp., 231/1/3): "In questo il furore selvaggio scoppia tremendo, inesorabile, come fulmine. . . . la di lui parola va crescendo in forza e violenza" (pp. 61-2).

In one sense, of course, such an "analysis" of changing emotions is obvious. Yet, since it probably has its roots in Verdi's rehearsal remarks it deserves some reflection. Particularly notable is its avoidance of structural (musical/poetic) terminology of the type commonly encountered in current discussions of Verdi. The modern view might begin by noting that "Dio! mi potevi scagliar tutti i mali" consists of two parallel eight-line stanzas of poetry (the second begins, "Ma, o pianto, o duol!"). Verdi set the first stanza, beginning in A-flat minor, as stunned declamation over a set of phrase variations

(a a' a'', 5 + 5 + 12). He began the second stanza (sp., 229/1/1) not as a parallel musical strophe—for the monologue is about emotional change—but rather as a complementary set of (more expansive) variations, now in E-flat major, the dominant of the initial A-flat minor (b + b', 6 + 9). But at "Tu alfin, Clemenza" the music takes a different turn. As Otello begins to lose control of himself (and of the poetic/musical structure), the music plunges, stringendo, past the final stanzaic line, "Santo coll'orrida larva infernal" (sp., 231/1/1), and "spills over" with the Moor's emotions into the ensuing rhymed-scena verse. We arrive at a cadence only several measures later, shortly after Iago's voice breaks into Otello's frenzy to precipitate its conclusion. That Otello in his excess becomes heedless of the bounds of poetic and musical closure is the "structural" (and dramatic) point.

But the language of the disposizione scenica is not concerned with "structure" in this sense. It would appear that these concerns, too—doubtless Verdi's concerns while he was composing—are conceived to "disappear" into the ongoing "Drama" or, perhaps more precisely, to vanish into the presentation of carefully graded, direct emotions. Thus the first poetic stanza contains the first emotional period (which begins to veer towards the second at its end); the second stanza the second and third; the beginning of the recitative-verse the fourth. The periods may be considered to function as a separate, flexible "counterpoint" (of changing expressive "content") to the firmer grid-lines of the actual musical structure (even though the "formal" point, ultimately, is to trespass aggressively beyond those lines). No better illustration could be provided of the fluidity of the Otello music, of

its emotional complexity and tendency towards constant flux, the better to underscore and nuance every word of the text. While reading this portion of the disposizione scenica, one is reminded of the historical observation that the nineteenth-century musical mind generally strove to validate its works by means of apprehending and absorbing directly their emotional content. The artifice and technique that lay behind the art, while clearly a central occupation of the composer, remained relatively undiscussed. For the twentieth-century mind, however, the predominant mode by which music is validated is formal, structural, technical.⁵⁶ Thus we may subject the "analytical" methods of the disposizione scenica to a critique and, from our point of view, find them ultimately to be lacking; but, on the other hand, we should be aware that its methods—probably central concerns of Verdi—apply a reciprocal (and challenging) critique to our own assumptions about the way that the composer organized his works.

A few other pieces in Otello are accompanied by similar, if less precise, "emotional" analyses in the disposizione scenica, and these remarks are not without implications—if only as supporting evidence—for a modern structural analysis of the opera. One finds, for instance, a discussion of the "linee generali" of the Act III concertato (pp. 79–81), in which each participant is characterized in terms of personal emotion and expression. As would be expected, we read that "la parte di **Desdemona** rappresenta la grandé linea melodica" (p. 79), and we find that Iago's words (always a concern for Verdi) are given a high second place in importance: "Accanto a questa linea melodica [di Desdemona], parrebbe parte accessoria quella di **Jago**: non lo è; il testo dice

chiaramente l'importanza che ha questo personaggio," etc. (p. 79). Such remarks "interpret" primarily by offering advice to performers, but they cannot be regarded as irrelevant to modern analysis. Similar remarks accompany other sections of the score: Desdemona's Act IV Willow Song (whose "linea generale" was conceived to provide "quell'impressione vaga, triste, quasi magnetica, che nasce dal presentimento di una incognita, ma grande sventura" [pp. 88-9]); the Ave Maria (pp. 92-3, an "emotional" analysis that specifies the location of the "punto culminante" of Desdemona's "dolore" and "commozione"—the phrase, "Prega per chi sotto l'oltraggio piega / La fronte" [sp., 339/4/1]); Otello's entrance in Act IV (pp. 93-6, a detailed pantomime); and the Murder Scene (pp. 96-7, an analytical "sintesi" of the changing emotions: "Così i sentimenti dei due personaggi segneranno un crescendo drammatico, che si svolge con forza e rapidità fulminee"). One may also discover other, more fleeting comments scattered throughout the disposizione scenica that bear on modern analytical concerns. These would include the precise (or nearly precise) locations of certain events: Otello's and Desdemona's embrace before the Love Duet (p. 33); Iago's wresting of the handkerchief from Emilia's hands (p. 49); Otello's throwing of Iago to the ground (p. 51); and so on. Although the disposizione scenica is by no means an "analytical" document in today's sense of that word, modern inquiry into the structure of Otello would be well advised to consider its contents.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the closely prescriptive, quasi-analytical tendencies of the disposizione scenica, there are significant moments in which the the creators of Otello believed that it was best to

refrain from any such commentary—that the wisest counsel lay in a hopeful (?) appeal to the intelligence of the individual performer (that commodity so frequently denigrated by implication elsewhere in the document). In general, these moments are the important solo pieces, whose success or failure depends on the projection of the ability and personality of the performer. Here the advice given for Iago's "Credo" may be considered a paradigm:

Sarebbe inutile affatto il voler dettagliare gli atteggiamenti ed i gesti di **Jago** durante il Credo. L'attore che non trova nel proprio talento il modo d'estrinsecare questo brano di musica e di poesia, non riuscirà mai a dare neppure una mediocre interpretazione, se obbligato a farsi guidare da una descrizione scenica. (p. 37)

Similar remarks may be found with regard to Iago's narrative of Cassio's Dream (p. 53) and (although, somewhat amusingly, in these next three instances the urge to prescribe and dictate gesture immediately contradicts the advice) with Otello's "Diol mi potevi scagliar" (p. 62, "pel quale qualsiasi descrizione scenica sarebbe inutile, anzi dannosa" [1]), with Desdemona's Willow Song (p. 88), and with Otello's "Niun mi tema" speech (p. 108). Similarly, one might notice the many instances where upon reaching a lyrical moment, such as Desdemona's "Io prego il cielo per te con questo pianto" in the Act III Duet with Otello, in which the disposizione scenica (p. 60) simply passes over the "personalized" passage without significant commentary.

It is important to realize that this tendency to withhold commentary from major solo pieces is characteristic of disposizioni sceniche in general. The earlier Verdian production books, for instance, were not at all concerned with specifying the individual details or manners of delivering the "static" numbers.⁵⁷ By the time of the more complex Aida manual the reluctance to provide close commentary on this type of piece is explicit: here Ricordi relies more on a general characterization of the appropriate mood or emotion along with the typical counsel to pay close attention to the text and to the expressive texture of the music. Harvey Bordowitz, in a general study of the disposizioni sceniche, sees in all of this the

keys to [understanding] Verdi's approach to dramatic interpretation in his works. He was precise in his choice of words in the libretto, and had absolute assurance in the dramatic force of his music. Thus he felt strongly . . . that in the last analysis the best teacher for the singer, the best dramatic coach, the best stage director, was the score, which represented the synthesis of the words and the music.⁵⁸

Notwithstanding its compulsive urge towards paternalistic prescription, these principles are also clearly discernible as central elements in the Otello disposizione scenica.

10. The Key Words: Accento, Gesto, Fisionomia.

We have suggested in Section 6 above that the naturalezza called for in the disposizione scenica was one that by today's norms would be considered stylized. Although it claimed to favor an emphatically naturalistic method of acting, it is evident that the actual method that underlies the production book is grounded in a complex of traditional poses, postures, gestures, and manners of delivery: the appropriate nuancing of lines and plot-situations is prized everywhere. It would also appear that this stiffer, more formulaic system was theatrically and operatically in decline and was being supplanted by a system of more natural or realistic gestures. The disposizione scenica addresses that transformation in mid-course. As pointed out in Section 6, Ricordi, Verdi, and Boito seem to be urging as standard operatic practice the only partially realistic "reform" methods that had already become common on the dramatic stage. (See also Maurel's more "modern" criticisms of the disposizione scenica, discussed in Section 11 below.) In any event, we should recognize the deeply conventional world within which operatic acting was still generally conceived in 1887.

This in turn raises the difficult question, within which norms would a singer of the 1880s or 1890s interpret the advice that he had read in the Otello manual? Put another way, which acting conventions would a singer recognize—or believe that he recognized—in the disposizione scenica? For indeed, "standardized" sets of operatic acting practices were still being collected (and disseminated in Italy), even though some of them also included strong appeals to the "natural"

and the "true." Curiously, Ricordi did not publish but he did distribute one of them in 1885 (in an apparently widespread, three-language edition): the Estetica del canto e dell'arte melodrammatica of the Italian baritone Enrico Delle Sedie, then a celebrated teacher of singing at the Paris Conservatory. Although one would hesitate to suggest that the opinions of Delle Sedie concur with those of Verdi—in fact, there might well have been many points of disagreement between them, and it is unclear whether the composer even knew of the book—it is significant that the book, an almost exact contemporary of the Otello manual, contains much general counsel that seems to agree with the axiomatic bases of the disposizione scenica. In the Libro Quarto one finds a section, Lezione Quarta, entitled "Della declamazione e del gesto," in which, after quoting heavily from Alfieri (the French- and English-language versions substitute excerpts from Racine, Molière, Shakespeare, and others), Delle Sedie dispenses such advice as:

Sulla scena l'attore deve attribuirsi la natura del personaggio che rappresenta; non basta che egli canti e declami i versi messi in musica . . . ma deve altresì, coi suoi movimenti e coi gesti, descrivere agli spettatori l'immagine di colui la di cui parte si attribuisce; in fine, deve cercare di dipingere con verità la maggior parte degli atti della vita umana.

E necessario che la sua persona sia sempre convenevolmente disegnata in scena, il gesto, il passo ed il portamento devono variare secondo il soggetto che rappresenta. . . .

E d'uopo saper scegliere il gesto che previene un'azione e quello che la eseguisce . . . senza esagerazione. . . .

Allorchè l'attore racconta un fatto qualunque, dovrà aver cura di dipingere per così agli occhi degli spettatori coll'ajuto di gesti espressivi e bene appropriati, le persone o le cose delle quali si tratta. Dovrà calcolare l'effetto ottico dei suoi gesti. . . .

Durante lo svolgimento del dramma, quando rimanendo in silenzio si continua a prender parte all'azione, bisogna mostrare al pubblico le differenti emozioni che le parole degli interlocutori devono eccitare nell'animo del personaggio che si rappresenta, [etc.]⁵⁹

Delle Sedie followed this with a lengthy Lezione Quinta, "Dell'azione scenica," which includes several drawings illustrating the stage postures of various emotions [pose espressive]—affermativa, afflizione, agitazione, ammirazione, compassione, collera, dolore, dubbio, and so on—and he continued with a Lezione Sesta, "Dell'espressione del gesto e della fisionomia del saluto," that presents multiple depictions of certain emotions to show differing styles or "fasi" (see Plates 8-10 for selections from both Lezioni). Delle Sedie's goal is not rigidly to freeze gestures but to provide a common frame of reference from which individual nuancing can spring. It matters little whether Verdi knew the words and engravings of the Delle Sedie book; its general ideas, however, seem the common currency of the operatic theater, part of the

general atmosphere and accepted stage-practice that the disposizione scenica takes for granted.

Plate 8

[Selected Pose from Enrico Delle Sedie, Estetica del canto. . .]

Plate 9

[Selected Pose from Enrico Delle Sedie, Estetica del canto. . .]

Plate 10

[Selected Pose from Enrico Delle Sedie, Estetica del canto. . .]

An essential point underlying the Delle Sedie book is that to act properly is to supply a nearly perpetual, clearly recognizable series of gestures and actions appropriate to the drama. This is what one also finds in the Otello manual. Although here the most common verbs describing the delivery of lines are rather neutral (dire, rispondere, parlare, chiedere, and salutare seem particularly frequent), others carry a more potent emotional charge: esclamare, gridare, and urlare, for instance. But even the neutral verbs are often modified with adverbs or adverbial phrases that stipulate the manner of delivery and vocal nuancing. Verdi evidently insisted that his singers adapt their voices, deliveries of lines, and physical movements to the dramatic situation—probably in a more varied and stylized manner than is customary today. (The early recordings of Tamagno and Maurel bear out

this point: see nn. 53 and 55 above). This nearly constant adverbial modification of verbs of textual delivery and response is perhaps the most striking aspect of the language of the disposizione scenica.

The key words of the Otello manual are: accento (or vocal nuancing, including the timbre of the voice, the speed of the delivery, the shaping of the words, and so on), gesto (physical motion and posture), and fisionomia (facial expressions). These theatrical concerns outweigh any purely musical ideas (or musical/lyrical values) in the disposizione scenica, and our knowledge of how Verdi selected and coached his singers for this and other productions confirms that these concerns were indeed central. It may be useful to assemble several examples of the crucial modifiers of each key word, both to illustrate how prominent they are and to provide the performer, stage director, or student of historical performance practice with a potentially helpful set of cross references. Although the collections below make no claims to be exhaustive—that is not their aim—they are extended samplings of the interpretive language of the disposizione scenica. Above all, we must remember that we are dealing with collections of formulaic stage and vocal procedures that are intended to be instantly communicable to a typical late-nineteenth-century audience—procedures that are ultimately to disappear into the larger "Drama" that is Otello (see Section 9 above).

Our first general category, then, consists of the vocal nuances or modes of textual delivery: the accenti, although the synonyms toni and voci are also encountered. The modifiers can be nouns, adjectives or adverbs depending upon their syntactical position. One may find a noun, that is, as the object of such adverbial prepositional phrases as "con

accento di --," "con tono di --," "con voce di --," or simply "con --"; one may find an adjective concluding a briefer phrase, such as "con accento --"; or one may find a simple adverb modifying, for instance, dire, rispondere, soggiungere, and so forth. In the selection provided below, the most common modifiers of accenti are placed nearer the top of the list. Synonyms and related words follow within the same number. Parenthetical numbers refer to page-locations within the disposizione scenica; occasionally the pages indicated contain different grammatical forms from that exemplified by the first word (or words) listed. These, then, are some of the most prominent nuances that Verdi would have expected the performer to be able to produce in a recognizable manner:

1. dolce; dolcezza; etc. (30, 33, 34, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 58, 81 ['dolce e velata'], 97, 107.
2. vibrato (24, 30, 33, 51, 59); imperiosamente (29, 31, 48, 57, 76, 106); autorità (26, 30); molta espansione (40); duramente (53, 104); marcato (59); forza (26, 29, 65, 101, 103); risolutamente (23, 40, 82, 91, 104); maggior insistenza (104)
3. cupo; cupamente (40, 50, 52, 59, 61, 99, 106--a typical accento for the revelation of terrible secrets, sinister implications, and the like); insinuazione (39); misterioso (53, 59); intenzione (72, 75).
4. dolore (61 ["ma quasi infantile"], 66, 89, 107); ambascia (69); tristezza (89, 91); angosciato (50, 60); repressa (60); filo di voce soffocata (101); quasi parlato e con un filo di voce (53); affannosa (67); macchinalmente (89); melanconico (93).

5. ironia (60, 80, 82, 85, 101); affettata modestia (22); affettata cortesia (61); affettata furberia (66); esagerato (29); sdegno (67, 104); freddezza (99, 104); cinicamente (16, 50); amarezza (57); aspramente (48).
6. grazia (20, 23, 58, 69, 75); bonariamente (50); disinvoltura e galanteria (69); mellifluo (41); gentilmente (58); ingenuamente (59).
7. terrore; terribile (13, 61, 84, 98); sentimento d'orrore (61); raccapricciato (103).
8. solenne (53, 59, 106); suprema dignità (106); fieramente (78); grave (96, 97); grandioso (106).
9. minaccia (49, 51, 59); odio feroce (13); perfidia (52); ira (50); violenza (52); rabbia repressa (78).
10. amoroso (33, 107); commosso (34, 49); ammirazione (68); affetto (58, 91); singhiozzando (61, 98, 107).
11. calma (40, 57, 97); calma spaventosa (96); spiccato, benchè tranquillo (89); semplice, popolare (89).
12. supplichevole (78, 98); preghiera (13, 14, 47).
13. gioia (14); meraviglia (40); gaiezza (22, 64); giovanile entusiasmo (22); scherzando (70).
14. timido, rispettoso (40); dubitativo (40); rispettoso rimprovero (52); sommessa (52, 64).
15. flebile, strana, come fosse lontana (91); semispenta (107); fioca voce (30).
16. persona offesa (26); dispetto (67).
17. disperazione (67).
18. avvinazzato (26).

Similarly, the disposizione scenica implies a ready repertory of gesti. Some are extremely common and occur regularly throughout the manual. These include:

1. inchinarsi as a sign of real or ironic respect (e.g., 31, 32, 42, 56, 72, 73, 74, 76, 78, 93, etc.).
2. avvicinarsi, avanzarsi, or volgersi, a stepping or turning towards someone in order to emphasize or underscore an important line or to be perceived as more "frank" and "open" (passim, e.g., 13, 16, 17, 34, 40, 52, 57, 80, etc.). The extreme form of this consists of soft speaking or whispers directly into the ear (e.g., 16).
3. indietreggiare, the opposite of No. 2, a stepping back to express surprise, fear, submission, etc. (e.g., 26, 29, 34, 40, 49, 51, 59, 60, 61, 62, 83, 85, 98, 102, 105, etc.).
4. accennare or indicare, hand or head gestures in order to direct the attention of another character—or the audience—to someone or something on stage (e.g., 11, 17, 24, 64, 69, 80, 81, 85, 90, 104, etc.).
5. balzare, scagliarsi, slanciarsi, etc., to express extreme surprise or aggression (e.g., 26, 51, 53, 59, 102, 105, etc.).
6. fissare, to gaze fixedly, for the purposes of close examination, absolute frankness, or the expression of a stunned response (e.g., 40, 50, 51, 58, 60, 62, 81, 98, etc.).
7. immobilità, for various purposes, picturesque, horror-struck, impassible, etc. (e.g., 15, 49, 59, 69, 81, 88, 91, 96, 101-2, etc.).

Certain gestures rely even more firmly on a special, understandable code of standardized emotional postures and poses. Some of the most obvious are:

1. inginocchiarsi: the kneeling for prayers, for oaths, for the invoking of authority, and so on (53, 92, 106). Desdemona intensifies the gesture into its extreme form by leaning her forehead on the inginocchiatoio (93).
2. nascondere il viso fra le mani, coprire il volto colle mani, etc.: the sign of weeping, disgust, despair (40, 53, 61, 63, 76, 108; cf. other indications of weeping, 60, 61, 62, 98, 106, 107).
3. unire [congiungere] le mani: to express prayer, sadness, supplication to others (13, 49, 60, 89, 92, 108). Very similar is:
4. alzare le mani [unite], protendere le mani, etc.: the gesture is made towards heaven or towards other people—a sign of supplication towards a bestower of power; or, more generally, for any deeply heartfelt request (11-13, 40, 40, 47, 62, 79, 84, 92, 93).
5. volgere le spalle a qc.: a sign of rejection (48, 51, 104).
6. scrollare [crollare] le spalle: a display of cynical unconcern for what has just been said—or of puzzlement (37, 76).
7. spingere qc., condurre qc., afferrare qc. [by the arm]: a sign of domination, control over others (17, 19, 21, 38, 64-6, 73)
8. sedere [cadere] accasciato [colle braccia cadenti sulle ginocchia], etc.: an expression of utter dejection (62, 78). (Cf. crollare il capo, 16; inclinare la testa, 31.)
9. [to stand thoughtfully] le mani al petto: a sign of complete absorption in thought (15).

Similarly, many actions in the disposizione scenica are modified adverbially (as was the case with verbs of textual delivery): for instance, with "con gesto [di] —," "con —," or some other adverbial construction. Among the most common or notable of these gestures—or posture modifiers—are (cf. also Plates 8-10):

1. dolore (31, 49, 53, 66, 79, 80, 90, 91 ["come la statua del dolore"]).
2. meraviglia (11, 26, 76, 79, 102, 104); sorpresa (26, 47, 79, 107).
3. gioia (14, 31, 63); soddisfazione (23, 47); compiacimento (23);
trionfo (39, 49, 53, 85); atteggiamento sardonico e fiero (37);
solenne e fiero (76).
4. imperioso, imperiosamente, etc. (32, 40, 48, 54, 61, 83);
tremendo (52).
5. ira, rabbia (30, 75); minaccia (47, 54, 59); furore (95).
6. dispetto (14, 16); gesto sdegnoso di rifiuto (46); sdegnoso (79);
sprezzo (48, 51); cinicamente (53, 104); ribrezzo (61, 63); astuzia
maligna (80); indignazione (104);
7. terrore (11, 13); orrore (61, 78); spavento (29, 83, 84); atterrito
(60); raccapriccio (63, 101).
8. disperazione (82, 99, 103); ansia (13); molta ansietà (103).
9. incredulità (36); fingendo risentimento (52).
10. gesto di parlare sottovoce (67); diniego (47); mezzo diniego (65);
remissione (45).
11. maniere dimesse (30); mossa serpentina (52); mossa quasi automatica (50).
12. pietà (78, 80, 81, 92); atto ossequioso (46).

Obviously related to physical gestures is the question of one's position on-stage, the positions, that is, indicated by the blocking diagrams. In his study of the Otello disposizione scenica Doug Coe perceived what appears to be a significant, recurring pattern of character-arrangement that reflects a traditional symbolic distinction between one's right and left sides. Following a study of the blocking of the Act II Quartet, and now discussing the Act III Desdemona-Otello Duet, Coe writes:

And the musical and dramatic significance of this moment [introducing "Tu di me ti fai gioco," sp., 213/1/3--213/2/2] is underlined by the blocking [disp. sc., p. 59, diagram 3]: Desdemona moves to the left of Otello, a movement whose full meaning cannot be understood until it is put into context. Within this scene, Desdemona has been on Otello's right throughout, so the simple change will register upon the audience as something new. Examining the rest of the intimate scenes between Otello and Desdemona [in previous acts] . . . one finds that Desdemona is always standing on Otello's right. In fact, apart from scenes where there are many people on the stage so that other considerations must take precedence, Desdemona is consistently seen on the right, Otello on the left. This must have been viewed by Verdi as the position of strength and power.⁶⁰

The many instances where right- or left-arm gestures are specified in the manual reinforce Coe's contention. In the disposizione scenica the right arm is the arm of power, and it is called for in gestures that accompany threats, oaths, confident salutes (for example, to the Pleaides at the end of Act I), and the lusty drinking of the Brindisi (see, e.g., pp. 24, 34, 39, 52, 53-4, 60, 61-2, 68, 98). The right arm is also used for supplications that invoke heaven (pp. 51 and 62). The left arm is the weaker or more deceptive arm; it is typically invoked when things are going wrong, or will soon go wrong. Emilia, for instance, holds the handkerchief in her left hand for the first portion of the Act II Quartet (p. 48) before losing it to Iago. With the left arm the drunken Cassio holds onto the table (24); Montano holds onto his mantello in the duel (27); Iago holds Otello down in "Sì, pel ciel" (54); Otello locates Desdemona's presumed dèmon gentil in her (innocent right) palm (58); Otello takes Desdemona by the chin and forces her to gaze at him (60); Otello threatens to hit Desdemona (75); Otello wearily, impotently, salutes heaven for the last time with his "Otello fu" at the end of the opera (106). Similarly, at the height of anger Otello grabs Desdemona by her left arm (60); and Iago conducts Otello to his hiding-place before the Act III Trio by the left arm (63). Perhaps the only clearly positive left-arm gesture—the exception to the rule—is Otello's embrace of Desdemona at the end of the Act I Love Duet (34). The bulk of the evidence, however, suggests that the right and left sides play meaningful roles in the staging of Otello.

The third aspect of stage performance presupposed by the disposizione scenica is a knowledge of fisionomia, or proper facial

gestures. Hence the inclusion of so many phrases such as "colla gioia negli occhi" (p. 39), "il volto quasi piangente" (p. 62), and so on. The creators of Otello particularly relied on the effects of footlight illumination on the faces of the actors (La Scala had been using electric lighting for four years, since 1883)⁶¹; this is clear from such instructions as one finds at the beginning of Act IV, "Mezza luce alla ribalta, sufficiente perchè si vedano bene le fisionomie dei personaggi" (p. 87). And indeed, throughout the fourth act the disposizione scenica continues to reaffirm the importance of appropriate facial expressions for Desdemona during the Willow Song, even though it refrains from providing many specific details ("sorvolando sulle espressioni della fisionomia," p. 89).

It is the role of Iago, however, that relies most heavily on facial expressions. Boito stresses this in his Preface: "Una delle sue arti è la facoltà di mutar aspetto a seconda delle persone colle quali si trova per meglio ingannarle or dominarle" (p. 5). And it is doubtless this crucial ability that underlies the pre-premiere controversy about Victor Maurel's suggestion that Iago be beardless—a suggestion followed at the 1887 premiere.⁶² Therefore one finds in the disposizione scenica frequent injunctions that Iago rely on rapid, meaningful facial changes: the sudden sogghigno, for instance, in the Brindisi as he sings "Un altro sorso / E brillo egli è" (p. 24); the quick change of fisionomia (and accento) called for at the beginning of Iago's Credo, along with the plea for "intelligenti giuochi di fisionomia" (p. 37); the many facial gestures during the ensuing Otello-Iago dialogue, including Iago's rapidi sguardi at the face of Otello, in which "spierà l'effetto

delle proprie parole" (p. 40); the change of Iago's countenance when he pantomimes a dialogue with Desdemona ("poi, cambiando fisionomia, fa qualche passo verso **Desdemona**," p. 50) and upon his immediate return to Otello ("mutando faccia," p. 50); and so on. In his own mise en scène for Otello—a separate document, not endorsed by Verdi (see Section 11 below)—Maurel, too, considers Iago's fisionomia to be one of the keys to the role: "Yago peut laisser voir quelques lueurs de feroce brutalité avec Emilie, mais le corps ne doit pas prendre part à l'action, tout doit être dans l'accent de la voix et l'expression des yeux"—advice that reflected his own interpretation of the role.⁶³ According to Maurel, one might add, Iago's fundamental facial appearance, that from which all else must spring, is one that must be "impénétrable" to others—or better, as Maurel puts it "son expression plastique dominante . . . doit être l'impassibilité."⁶⁴

Iago's ability rapidly to mutar aspetto is one not generally shared by the other characters. Curiously, however, once Otello has submitted to the influence of Iago—once he decays from his earlier, purer self—he begins to employ some of Iago's deceptions. Thus in the Act III Duet with Desdemona the disposizione scenica stresses the importance of Otello's fisionomia and the rapidity with which it alters: he begins "tentando dissimulare l'affanno doloroso da cui è preso" (p. 58); shortly thereafter "un improvviso pensiero si legge sul di lui volto" (p. 58); and at the cruel conclusion of the duet, most Iago-like, "mutando d'un tratto l'ira nella più terribile calma dell'ironia . . . l'obbliga a scoprirsi il volto dicendole: Datemi ancor l'eburnea mano" (p. 61). Indeed, at one point in the Duet Desdemona herself calls upon the skill of

rapid facial changes. When she momentarily believes (and hopes) that Otello must be joking ("Tu di me ti fai gioco"), the disposizione scenica requests that "essa cambia d'un tratto fisionomia," etc. (p. 59). The appropriation of Iago's "talents" in the art of giuochi di fisionomia by Otello—and even unsuspectingly by the pure Desdemona—is yet another way by which one may detect the unrelenting spread of Iago's poison.

11. The Disposizione Scenica and Victor Maurel's Mise en scène.

The most provocative reaction to Ricordi's disposizione scenica was a set of extensive, rival stage directions published in 1888 by the first Iago, Victor Maurel: A propos de la mise en scène du drame lyrique Otello: Étude précédée d'aperçus sur le théâtre chanté en 1887.⁶⁵ This is the work of a celebrated baritone of tremendous self-confidence and ego, of a singer, creative thinker, and stage director at the high point of his career, of a man who could never resist the temptation to alter and "improve" the performance ideas of others. Verdi was well aware of Maurel's egotism, and throughout the planning for both Otello and Falstaff he regarded it as, at best, an annoyance to be endured in order to reap the benefits of the baritone's interpretive intelligence. It is characteristic that once Maurel had arrived in Milan for the Otello rehearsals, the maestro wrote to Ricordi on 24 December 1886 about his suspicions: "Dunque vi siete consultato con Maurel pei costumi? E perchè? . . . passi per il suo, ma per gli altri non v'era bisogno. Non vi sorprenda un giorno o l'altro annunciato sul 'Figaro' che Maurel ha portato la luce sulla mise en scène alla Scala."⁶⁶ Ricordi responded on 25 December with quick reassurances that Maurel's intersection with the Otello planning was minimal (Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 56-8).

Brimming over with proud certainties and new ideas, Maurel's book on Otello treats its subject in full. It runs to 148 pages and is subdivided into four parts: general aperçus on the modern theater and the place of Otello within it; an "Étude des personnages" (a companion-piece to Boito's Preface in the disposizione scenica); a consideration

of "Decors et éclairage"; and a 69-page "Mise en scène" concerned principally with the staging of the first three acts (the last act is provided with only five pages of commentary). Maurel's remarks presuppose a knowledge of the disposizione scenica—and consequently of the La Scala production—and he makes frequent references to it. Although for many of the actions of the opera Maurel is happy to agree with Ricordi's Otello manual, his main interest is in altering certain key points of the original staging, nearly always, as will be seen, to provide what he believes to be increased realism, naturalness, and fidelity to Shakespeare. One must not imagine that Maurel's book reflects the authority of the composer or the librettist (as does Ricordi's manual). On the contrary, its raison d'être lay in its modifications of the original creators' intentions—in its presentation of another, apparently more modern way of staging portions of the opera. Maurel acknowledges this explicitly. After counseling a change in Act I that would have Otello linger briefly on stage after his sortita (see below), Maurel adds a note:

En revoyant avec le maître les changements notés dans notre mise en scène, il nous dit: "Je ne suis pas d'accord avec vous sur ce point, pas plus que je ne l'ai été avec mon collaborateur, M. Boito, qui, lui aussi, avait cru utile de faire adresser par Otello quelques paroles à Cassio, à Montano, à Yago et aux chœurs, après sa phrase de sortie. J'ai trouvé cela trop moderne, et en ai demandé la suppression. Toutefois, comme je puis me tromper, je désire

que vous ne changiez rien a votre travail. Mettez seulement en note mon observation. (Maurel, p. 89)⁶⁷

A similar observation, made and elaborated as respectfully as possible, may be found in the fourth act of Maurel's mise en scène in the context of his suggestion to add more nuances to Desdemona's repetitions of "Salce!": "Le maître nous dit une seconde fois qu'il ne croyait pas utile de chercher d'autres intentions que celles qu'il avait indiquées" (Maurel, p. 145). Those seeking Verdi's authority and suggestions for the staging of Otello are not likely to find it in Maurel's book—or rather, if these things are to be found, they turn up only obliquely. In this sense, the book is only marginally relevant to the present discussion; and, although it deserves a more extended study on its own merits, it need only be summarized here.

Underlying many of the baritone's suggestions is the conviction that Verdi and Boito were obliged to simplify their source, the Shakespearean original, for reasons that have to do with operatic tradition and the demands of music itself. According to Maurel, the opera may be enriched—brought closer to its psychologically complex, more logical and "realistic" model—by the addition of extra, if unauthorized, action that will reveal true, but otherwise unnoticed traits of character: "D'ailleurs, il ne faut pas l'oublier, ainsi que nous l'avons dit: la musique, par ses exigences, ayant obligé les auteurs à omettre plusieurs scènes de la tragédie, il faut remédier par des jeux mimiques a ces lacunes" (Maurel, p. 97). Somewhat boldly—and one can scarcely believe that his assertion, however grounded in

experience, is without exaggeration—he cites another, more practical justification for his new suggestions:

La rapidité avec laquelle se montent les ouvrages nouveaux, même les plus importants, au théâtre de la Scala de Milan, est telle, que les auteurs ne peuvent trouver les temps matériel nécessaire pour étudier et régler d'une manière définitive les effets de détail.

En soulignant ici toutes les omissions faites, je n'ai eu d'autre but que de continuer ma première collaboration d'interprète. (Maurel, p. 4)

Although the composer was by no means satisfied with all aspects of the original production (see Section 4 above), one can only imagine how negative his reaction would be to Maurel's words, with their squarely aimed critical implications.

The book is shot through with a strong urge towards réalisme, embraced wholeheartedly as something historically inevitable. Maurel's many alterations demonstrate that he considers his own staging to be more in touch with the "nouvelles tendances" (p. 6) than was that of the original La Scala production. But regardless of how it might have been staged in Milan, he argues, considered as an complete art-work, Otello pushes in the direction of the new realism. The opera is a sterling example of a dramma lirico (drame lyrique), that modern operatic genre in which the concept of "drama" supersedes that of conventional melody. Its predecessors might have been Ernest Reyer's Sigurd and Ambroise

Thomas' Hamlet, but "le modèle fourni par Verdi ouvre une voie toute différente, quoique également basée sur l'idée de soumettre le choix des formes mélodiques aux exigences du drame" (Maurel, pp. 7-8). The crucial argument with regard to the style of acting appropriate to a genre that has abandoned "mélodie exclusive" (pp. 6, 11) in favor of "mélodie declamée" (p. 11) is this:

Pour que l'évolution de l'opéra en drame lyrique donne un résultat parfait, c'est-à-dire pour que les idées reçues changent et que le public s'habitue à des sensations nouvelles, il faut qu'avec les formes musicales, les dispositions scéniques soient aussi modifiées et que soient supprimés la plus grande partie des trucs employés jusqu'à ce jour, leur banalité et leur conventionalisme nuisant même aux exécutions scéniques des oeuvres du genre de l'opéra.

L'unité dans la connaissance des règles techniques pour toutes les parties distinctes d'une oeuvre, où chacun joue un rôle particulier, tout en contribuant à l'ensemble, voilà le principe d'une esthétique théâtrale nouvelle. (p. 9)

Maurel's ultimate criterion in prescribing stage action, that which is regularly evoked as a pièce de touche, is what he refers to as "la vérité positive" or "la vie réelle" (p. 28): "Nous ne pouvons accepter une convention lorsqu'elle a pour conséquence de fausser la vraisemblance" (p. 107). That the original staging of Otello is repeatedly called to task on this point (and that, as mentioned above,

the baritone reports Verdi's own confession that he had found Boito's original plan, and hence Maurel's ideas, for the Otello entrance scene "trop moderne") drives one to the conclusion that Maurel's stage practice was more flexible and naturalistic than was Verdi's. Once again, as has been suggested by totally separate arguments in Sections 6 and 10 above, Verdi's ideal of naturalizza, as specified in the disposizione scenica and in his correspondence, is more grounded in convention and tradition than is this more temporally sensitive realisme. Verdi's conception of operatic acting is more "old-fashioned" than Maurel's. To realize this helps to furnish the perspective needed to interpret the advice in the disposizione scenica.

It is beyond the scope of this study to explicate all of the divergences of Maurel's mise en scène from Ricordi's disposizione scenica. Nevertheless, it might be instructive to consider a few of them—selected, for example, from the first act—to obtain a more concrete sense of the types of reinterpretations involved. Without question, the most provocative modification occurs at the point of Desdemona's entrance after Otello has stopped the Cassio-Montano Duel (sp., p. 92). One should begin by noting the dramatic "problem" here. In the play Desdemona enters only after Othello has demoted Cassio (Othello, II.iii, 230): the Moor's official actions are untainted by his own domestic concerns. In the opera, however, she appears before Otello's decree. This invites one to conclude, perhaps falsely, that her awakening (as the last straw) might be the proximate cause of Cassio's fate—that the latter's punishment might not have been so severe had she not been awakened. And if this conclusion is permitted,

Otello's public person and qualities of judgment are called into question even before Iago begins to manipulate him.

The degree to which Maurel perceived this problem is unknown, but in his mise en scène he provides both Desdemona and Iago with contre-scènes that interpret the demotion event in a very different way. According to this altered staging—which consistently appeals to criteria of psychological consistency and naturalism—after breaking up the duel and learning of Montano's wounds (sp., 92/1/1), Otello is sufficiently enraged to be "prêt à se laisser aller à quelque acte de violence envers Cassio" (Maurel, p. 96). This urge towards physical violence (the "mouvement d'Otello," p. 96) is deflected, however, by the rapid appearance of at least four servants followed by Emilia (an action completely invented by Maurel). Emilia rapidly searches out Otello within the crowd and indicates with a gesture that Desdemona is about to arrive. Otello reacts to the information with surprise: "Che? la mia dolce Desdemona," etc. (sp., 92/3/1). When Desdemona enters immediately thereafter, she steps quickly towards Otello, and, following her essential nature—that of "ange pacificateur" (p. 48)—she intercedes for Cassio (!), pleading through fisionomia and gesto for clemency:

La supplication muette qu'elle adresse à Otello n'a pas seulement l'avantage de fournir à Desdémone un jeu de scène bien net pour son entrée, elle permet encore à Iago une contre-scène, car ce pardon demandé pour Cassio se retrouvera plus tard, parmi toutes les conjectures qu'il a recueillies. . . .

[Yago's reaction has the advantage] de laisser voir au

public qu'il vient de surprendre le regard de sympathie et de regret que Desdémone laisse tomber sur Cassio, ainsi que la prière muette qu'elle adresse à Otello. (Maurel, pp. 97-8)

[As for Otello], sa colère s'apaise, comme par enchantement . . . En arretant son bras prêt à punir barbaquement une offense par une autre offense, il a éclairé son intelligence qui, dégagée subitement des erreurs de la colère, recouvre tout le calme et la justice dont le caractère d'un grand homme de guerre ne doit jamais se départir. (Maurel, pp. 48-9).

Thus Maurel would have us interpret Cassio's fate in Act I as a lenient gesture, the result of a first intercession of Desdemona for Cassio—the very seed of the remainder of the drama. This is a brilliant piece of staging, to be sure, and one that Maurel defends eloquently on the grounds of psychological penetration, dramatic consistency, and general fidelity to the spirit and complexity of the Shakespearean original. But it is clear from Ricordi's disposizione scenica that Verdi and Boito had no such idea in mind, nor is it likely that they would have welcomed a suggestion along these lines (see, for instance, p. 31 of the disposizione scenica, "Otello, nuovamente corrucciato, si avanza verso **Cassio** e gli dice imperiosamente: Cassio, non sei più capitano."

Maurel makes several changes elsewhere in the first act. Many concern a deepening of the minor characters, particularly Cassio and Emilia, and these will not be enumerated here. One should mention, however, that he calls for an even more natural re-grouping and

restaging of the chorus in the opening storm (although he still insists, with Verdi, on some standardized gestures: "La terreur, l'étonnement, les supplications vers le ciel, etc., etc., sont les expressions qu'ils doivent donner à leurs gestes" [p. 84]) and advises that "afin d'obtenir plus de réalisme," Otello's ship should remain visible for a longer period of time (p. 85). He is particularly concerned with the audience's ability to single out Cassio and Iago in the opening storm: even while confessing that the action is unfortunately "illogique," he asks Iago to abandon his position of observation "sur les rochers" to come forward, for the sake of the music, to declaim to the public "L'alvo / Frenetico del mar sia la sua tomba!" (p. 87).

Another alteration is the expansion of Otello's actions after his "Esultate!" entrance. Maurel criticizes the original La Scala decision to have Otello move immediately towards the castle after delivering his lines (this is again "illogique," p. 88). Instead, he argues, the praised hero should remain on stage for a few moments to salute the crowd, to thank them, and so on. These silent gestures are intended to round out Otello's public character, to make it more closely approach the Shakespearean original. The singer of Otello is called upon to "compléter l'impression par des jeux de scène muets, qui remplacent ce qui a dû être omis ou changé [par les auteurs]" (p. 89). Most notably, in a short contre-scène Iago is to approach Otello at this point, "dans l'attitude d'un serviteur dévoué" to receive a hearty handshake, along with pantomimed thanks "pour les soins donnés à Desdemone, dont la garde lui a été confiée pendant le voyage de Venise à Chypre" (p. 89). This

is, of course, the action to which Verdi had specifically objected when Maurel had questioned him about it (see above).

In another characteristic change Maurel takes issue with the manner in which the duel was staged at La Scala, and particularly with its conclusion, the sudden ceasing of the duel at Otello's re-entrance and the first sounds of his command "Abbasso le spade!" (sp., 89/1/2-5). According to the new mise en scène

Il serait plus juste que l'artiste chargé du rôle de Cassio attendit pour donner son dernier coup de taille, qui blesse Montano au flanc et le fait tomber, qu'Otello eût complètement terminé la tenue de la note sur laquelle se trouve le mot "spade". La différence de temps, au point de vue de la durée du combat, serait de quelques secondes en plus, mais cela permettrait de donner une plus grande vraisemblance à la situation.

Il faut ne pas oublier que Cassio est au comble de l'exaspération, et n'entend pas plus la voix d'Otello qu'il n'a compris, quelques instants avant, celle de Montano. Il ne s'arrête qu'en voyant tomber ce dernier, mais il reste toutefois pendant quelques secondes encore dans une attitude de défense. (pp. 92-3)

Moreover, Cassio is not to drop his sword, but rather to re-sheath it: the point is to indicate that he still maintains the right to carry a sword. (Maurel's argument here is evidently linked with his ideas about

Desdemona's ensuing intercession for Cassio.) Maurel also insists that the original costumes be changed for this post-duel scene in order to provide a more realistic sense that Otello and Desdemona have been called out of their bedroom. Otello is now to appear in a coat of mail, hastily pulled on, and Desdemona must appear in suitably informal attire ("une robe peignoir en cachemire crème pincée a la taille, les jupons de dessous non empesés . . . [p. 99]), not opulently dressed with a gold crown, etc. (as she had evidently been at La Scala, a costume that Maurel judges to be "un contre-sens qui ôte toute vérité à la vraisemblance d'une des situations capitales du drame" [p. 99]).

Finally, with regard to the Act I Love Duet, Maurel does not call for an embrace between Otello and Desdemona seven measures before "Già nella notte densa" (sp., 94/5/4; cf. disposizione scenica, p. 33): instead, before Otello begins the duet he merely "s'approchera de Desdémone, qui depuis quelques instants l'admire en silence" (p. 100). Towards the end of the Duet (before the moment of "Un bacio") Maurel must have been critical of Otello's near-fainting—a gesture that, while problematic in certain senses, was evidently approved by Verdi and certainly performed at the 1887 premiere (disposizione scenica, p. 34). In its place he advises a more restrained action:

Otello, d'ailleurs, ne doit que passer la main sur son front, comme pour chasser le vertige qui s'empare de son esprit; toute attitude abandonnée et molle est un contre-sens car elle est un contradiction avec le tempérament du personnage. (p. 101)

To summarize: Maurel's mise en scène is not so much an amplification or clarification of Ricordi's disposizione scenica as it is a critique of the La Scala staging practices. For this reason it must not be taken as authoritative; it does not reflect Verdi's views. This much said, however, one must concede that its value to the operatic or theatrical historian is still considerable. Besides furnishing us with an important moment in the early Rezeptionsgeschichte of Otello, it articulates lucidly how the appearance of Otello was perceived in the context of the polemical struggle between the "melodists" (the partisans of the old operatic traditions) and those who favored a more naturalistic, more fluid drame lyrique. Perhaps most important, Maurel's book exemplifies another phase in the transition from the older, more formal traditions of operatic acting to a more realistic stage practice. Verdi's concept of naturalezza had been an earlier phase of transition, still rooted in many of the earlier conventions. Maurel's book is the product of a temperament more "modern" than Verdi's (although it is also the product of an inveterate meddler, of a person never content unless he was in a position of absolute control), and as such it represents a step further in the direction of the modern theater. For those seeking Verdi's own views of staging, then, its value must be understood to reside in its furnishing a compendium of "realistic" ideas and attitudes of which the maestro, in general, would not have approved. It provides us with a sense of limits, an excursion across a line of realism and directorial operatic interpretation that, to the best of our knowledge, Verdi himself would not have crossed.

12. The Disposizione Scenica and the Autograph Manuscript of Otello.

Those investigating the disposizione scenica in order to ascertain what Verdi's "original" staging intentions might have been will quite naturally have questions about the stage directions contained in the autograph score of Otello, now located in the Archivio Storico of G. Ricordi & C., Milan. One might imagine, for instance, that because these latter instructions exist in Verdi's hand within a major document, they must be definitive. But this is not the case. Indeed, from a practical—and editorial—point of view they are among the least reliable aspects of the autograph score. They make a fascinating study in themselves, but one must realize both that they are incomplete and, more important, that they advise many settings and actions that were later altered by Boito and Verdi.

To interpret the relative authority of the autograph score's rather sparse stage directions one must understand the general chronology of the composition and publication of the opera. Otello was produced in the following order (and the following sequence does not list every stage of production):⁶⁸

- 1) The writing of the libretto, 1879–1884—with a few later revisions (Boito's manuscripts are currently the property of Verdi's heirs at Sant'Agata).
- 2) Verdi's various sketches and drafts of the opera, March 1884–October 1885 (at present unavailable for consultation, although it is unlikely that they would contain stage directions of any importance).

- 3) Verdi's entering of the basic reading of the autograph score, early October 1885—1 November 1886. In July 1886, however—before the full completion of the autograph score, that is—preparations for the typesetting and printing of the libretto were already underway. The whole project of establishing a definitive text, it appears, was (with Verdi's approval) largely in the hands of Boito, although the maestro did make a few suggestions;⁶⁹
- 4) The combined efforts of the Ricordi firm and Michele Saladino in the preparation of the piano reduction (to be approved by Verdi before the printing), early September 1886—mid-November 1886. This task—crucial to the formation of the final wording of the staging—evidently involved a synthesis of Boito's corrected libretto and stage directions and with Verdi's autograph score, along with a few other clarifying remarks and stage directions, although that synthesis is not yet complete.⁷⁰
- 5) Ricordi's printing of the vocal score (now containing many more stage directions than did the autograph score) and Verdi's checking of the proofs, early November—late December 1886;
- 6) Verdi's corrections and changes in the autograph score made during the period of the Milanese rehearsals, January 1886: very few of these deal with the "outdated" stage directions.
- 7) Verdi's alteration in the autograph score of the conclusion of "Si, pel ciel" in Act II, 1–2 May 1887;⁷¹
- 8) Ricordi's preparation of the partitura (whose stage directions were probably taken from the vocal score) and the disposizione scenica, Summer 1887.

Two features of critical importance emerge from the study of the genesis of Otello. First, the autograph score by no means represents the final stages of Verdi's thought about all aspects of the opera. This is particularly true with regard to its verbal text, which contains errors and marked differences from the text later agreed upon as correct.⁷² And, second, Verdi appears to have delegated the responsibility for establishing the fine points of the text and stage directions to Boito. An examination of the available relevant documents suggests that Verdi was not concerned about "definitive" stage directions (and text) in his autograph score. Presumably, he realized that somebody else would attend to these details at the proof- and printing-stages of score production.

In general, one finds many fewer stage directions in the autograph score than in either the printed libretto or the printed scores: a rough estimate might be that at least half or more of the printed directions have no sources in Verdi's hand. Examples could be cited at length: in Act IV, for instance, the manuscript contains no general stage directions at the beginning (cf. sp., p. 324); it does have the indications "s'alza la tela" (sp., 325/5/1) and "sedendo macchinalmente davanti allo specchio" (sp., 327/3/2), but lacks "Emilia eseguisce" (sp., 326/3/2) and "ad Emilia" (sp., 328/1/3, fols. 323-30); and so on. (For the sake of comparison one might mention that Saladino's September 1886 manuscript reduction of Act IV does have the full stage directions at the beginning of the act along with the "sedendo macchinalmente" instructions. "Emilia eseguisce" also appears here, but as a later

entry in a "Casa Ricordi" hand. "S'alza la tela" and "ad Emilia" are lacking altogether. A later, separate note on the first folio--also made at Casa Ricordi--reads: "manca indicazione ϕ alzare la tela.")

Perhaps the most important thing to realize about the stage directions of Verdi's manuscript score is that they generally follow Boito's manuscript libretto, from which, of course, the opera was composed. Although several shorter examples could also be cited to fortify the point, this reliance upon the early libretto, many of whose details were later altered by Boito with the consent of Verdi, is most clearly seen in the opening directions to Acts II and III. Boito's manuscript libretto directions at the beginning of Act II are:

Una sala terrena ottagonale, nel castello. Due vastissimi veroni occupano quasi per intero l'uno e l'altro lato obliquo dell'ottagono. I veroni sono praticabili. Il fondale rappresenta un giardino cortile pieno d'alberi frondosi. Al verone sinistro Cassio e Iago stanno conversando; e parlano Cassio dal di fuori della sala e Iago dal di dentro. . . . Nel fondo una porta. Altre due porte ai due lati paralleli. Un divano, parecchi sedili, un tavolo. Scena parapettata. Iago al di quà del verone, Cassio al di là.

On fols. 114-6 of the autograph score Verdi wrote the following abbreviated directions:

Sala terrena ottagonale nel castello. Due vastissimi veroni....
I veroni sono praticabili. Al verone sinistro Cassio e Iago
stanno conversando; e parlano Cassio dal di fuori della Sala,
Iago dal di dentro.

Both of the above sets of directions differ from the definitive, printed version: "Una sala terrena nel castello. Una invetriata la divide da un grande giardino. Un verone" (sp., 109/1/1). Thus at some point the manuscript stage directions—and many others in the autograph score—were superseded by later textual considerations, and Verdi (less concerned with verbal than with musical precision in his manuscripts) never bothered to alter them. A similar instance occurs with the opening remarks in Act III: Verdi's handwritten stage directions differ from the published versions and are again traceable to Boito's non-definitive manuscript libretto. Thus on fols. 210-12^v of the autograph score, the beginning of Act III, Verdi consulted Boito's manuscript at the early stages of the orchestration and wrote:

Gran sala del Castello. La scena è divisa... La linea delle colonne tagliano il palco scenico in due parti ma i personaggi attraversano quella quella [sic] linea come aggirandosi in un unico locale.

Once again, these are merely transcriptions of Boito's early thoughts about the staging—not binding, definitive instructions. In brief, the stage directions as found in the autograph score are informative in a

historical sense, that is, with regard to the issue of their genesis, but in no instance should they be presumed to override the authority of the comments in either the printed score or the disposizione scenica. (It goes without saying that this should be borne in mind by future editors of Otello.)

In two instances, however, the autograph score provides us with particularly interesting information about Verdi's intentions, and both should be briefly considered here: the question of how long the pedal point in the organ should sound at the beginning of Act I, and the original conception of Otello's pantomimed entrance in Act IV. The first matter, the organ pedal, may be summarized as follows. The first stage in the composer's thinking is found on fol. 1 of the autograph manuscript, where one may read in black ink (i.e., in "original" ink) that the organ is to be sounded "durante tutta la tempesta fino al momento della scena d'Otello Esultate"; correspondingly, just before Otello's first words Verdi wrote on fol. 20, "Cessa l'organo." His original idea, therefore, was to have the organ played only up until this moment. He changed his mind, however, during the January 1886 rehearsals. Now he wished the organ to re-enter after Otello's words and to last throughout the Victory Chorus. This provoked five additional entries into the autograph score: all of them were made in violet ink, an ink clearly distinguishable from the "original" black ink, and one that is reasonably datable from other evidence—other, datable changes, most particularly in the Willow Song—as stemming from January 1887 ink.⁷⁴ The five entries are: added (violet) words to the prior, pre-Esultate directions on fol. 20, so that it now reads, "Qui

Cessa l'organo per 12 battute"; near the end of the Victory Chorus, fol. 28^v, "Levate qualche registro all'Organo per far più piano" (the equivalent passage is sp., 29/1/4, after the last "Evviva!"); four measures later, on fol. 29, "più piano" (sp., 29/3/1); five measures later, on fol. 29^v, "l'organo sempre più piano" (sp., 29/4/3); and finally, on fol. 31, just before the words "Si calma la bufera", "l'organo cessa del tutto" (sp., 30/4/2).

These January 1887 autograph-score instructions, however, are still not those found in the partitura or, apparently, in the disposizione scenica—both of which reflect a third stage in Verdi's thinking about this matter. (And this final stage, therefore, is not represented in the autograph manuscript.) This called for simplifying the instructions and extending the organ pedal through Otello's sortita. Thus on p. 10 of the disposizione scenica one reads, "il maestro all'organo aprirà questi registri, sulle prime note dell'orchestra, e manterrà il suono senza interruzione sino alla fine dell'uragano" (that is, presumably up to "Si calma la bufera," but cf. the wording of the autograph score, fol. 1). In fact, this instruction is carried out in the partitura: "Sino alla lettera T" (and the partitura also includes the second, fourth, and fifth of the composer's January 1887 violet-ink entries). Verdi's initial fears that the organ pedal point would have to be suppressed during the "Esultate!" had evidently been allayed by direct experiment and experience. Since it had been a point directly addressed during the rehearsals (at least in the second-stage changes mentioned above, and quite probably in the later, third stage) it is unlikely either that Ricordi would have erred in his instructions in

either the partitura or the disposizione scenica or that Verdi would not have noticed it in his reading of both documents. Despite the autograph-score reading, it is likely that both the published score and the disposizione scenica represent Verdi's last word on the matter.

The second larger issue illuminated by the autograph score concerns Otello's elaborate Act IV entrance in the disposizione scenica, pp. 93-6—a pantomime that elaborates upon that printed in the spartito. In the disposizione scenica Otello's actions are closely synchronized with passages of music: individual musical nuances may therefore be taken to evoke certain stage gestures or postures in either representational or expressive ways. The evidence in the autograph score helps one to explicate the point. Verdi's stage directions here are carefully written into the manuscript (and, with exception of a word here or there—"la spada" for "una scimitarra," and so forth—his final handwritten instructions are essentially those of the printed score). But their most telling feature is that the composer first entered them in pencil, lightly and tentatively, before rewriting them in ink. This procedure suggests that he wished to be absolutely certain about the bar-to-bar appropriateness of the pantomime before establishing anything that would be permanent. On the one hand, this could be an indication that he considered them to be important; on the other hand, it may mean only that he considered the details of the pantomime, while "important," to be alterable. (It might be useful to mention that Verdi also used the procedure of light pencil suggestions giving way to a later stage of ink-decision as the standard method of entering metronome markings in

Otello.) It cannot be reasonably argued, however, that Verdi's choices of motives, timbres, pitches, and registers were expressive in only a general sense, unrelated to his specific vision of the stage-action.⁷⁵

Within the entrance-pantomime in the autograph score one may discern at least three layers of stage directions, although not every stage direction exhibits all three: light blue pencil (Verdi's earliest thoughts); black pencil (sometimes omitted); black ink (sometimes directly on top of the partially erased pencil reading[s]). Most provocatively, some of the early, blue-pencil pantomime actions differ from those called for in the ink version (and certainly also from those found in the disposizione scenica). The barely legible "blue-pencil pantomime" provides us with an earlier, rejected action, but one that may be closer to the sense of the notes as originally written into the autograph score. The six relevant Verdian "blue-pencil" entries are:

1. Fol. 354: at the first note of the double basses (cf. sp., 341/4/1), "Si vede la testa [?] d'Otello."
2. Fol. 354^v: at the point where one now reads "si avanza" (sp., 342/1/1), "Ot. entra fermandosi sulla soglia." It would thus appear that in Verdi's original conception Otello was to enter more slowly.
3. Fol. 355: "depone la spada sul tavolo" (Verdi also later wrote these words in the same place, unchanged, in ink; cf. sp., 342/2/1-2).
4. Fol. 355: instead of wondering whether to blow out the candle or not (sp., 342/2/3-4; cf. disp. sc., p. 94), "guarda Desdemona."
5. Fols. 355^v-56: written at two different points, in blue pencil,

"spegne la face" (sp., 342/3/2 and 342/4/1). Could the original pantomime have included two candles, or (more likely) was Verdi at first uncertain where the candle should be extinguished?

6. Fol. 356^v (sp., 342/5/1-2; cf. disp. sc., p. 95): "movimento di furore" and "si avvicina all'alcova." One should also mention that the ink version of the last direction is "si avvicina all'alcova ~~rialza le cortine~~." It seems possible that the sudden, accented, forte gesture, sp., 342/5/2, was originally planned to accompany Otello's impetuous raising of the bed-curtains. In both blue-pencil and ink-overlay, one also reads "s'arresta" in the following measure (sp., 343/1/1).

None of these are large differences, to be sure, but the autograph score reveals that the precision of the disposizione scenica with regard to this pantomime is not entirely to be attributed to, say, Boito's obsession with detail (cf., for instance, Sections 1 and 2 above, and particularly Plate 1): Verdi himself had had a considerable interest in the synchronization of music and gesture. And the blue-pencil pantomime, which would have Otello enter slightly more slowly and raise the bed-curtains sooner—presumably for an even longer contemplation of the sleeping Desdemona—might help us to interpret the meanings of the musical symbols that are actually there.

As far as its stage directions are concerned, then, the autograph score is primarily a historical document. It helps us to understand how, when, and by whom certain decisions were made. Along with many "definitive" gestures it provides several early suggestions once

considered and rejected. And, above all, it reminds us of the degree to which Verdi was willing to cede a substantial measure of control to others in the actual laying-down of precise stage-detail. The staging of Otello, in short, must be seen as a truly collaborative venture. Under no circumstances should the general authority of the disposizione scenica be undermined by the uncovering of the numerous discrepancies and variants in the autograph score.

13. Appendix: Marginalia and Other Handwritten Commentary in Boito's Personal Copies of the Disposizione Scenica and the Libretto.

Arrigo Boito's personal library, now housed (but still uncatalogued at the time of this writing) in the Biblioteca Palatina of the Conservatorio di Musica Statale in Parma, includes two documents annotated by Boito that bear directly on our study: individual copies of the disposizione scenica and the first printed libretto. In both cases it seems likely that Boito annotated the books in connection with some performance that he was planning or intending to supervise—although it must be admitted that at present one cannot connect either document with an actual performance. Nevertheless, the large number of handwritten entries that one finds here—mostly confirmations of the disposizione scenica, along with a few small changes—bear some attention as a primary source. It is fitting, therefore, that we conclude this study with transcriptions of those comments in Boito's hand.

With regard to its printed format, Boito's disposizione scenica (see Plates 11 and 12) is in all respects normal, and it bears a blind stamp of 9/1887. It is not a set of corrected proofs. The librettist was probably given this copy shortly after September 1887, although it is not known at which later point he actually began to enter his comments. The remarks within the disposizione scenica may be related to those found in the libretto: both seem to share, for instance, the same ink and black pencil. If Boito annotated the two documents in roughly the same period, one may push the terminus post quem further ahead by a few years: the blind stamp of the libretto is 8/1892. A post-1892 date

would mean that Boito's comments are unrelated to any of the first three productions of Otello at La Scala (1887, 1889, 1892); it remains possible, however, that he was consulted—or was planning ahead for—either of the next two productions, those of 1900 and 1913. It is unlikely that the comments refer to the 1894 Parisian Otello, since the annotations and textual quotations are in Italian.

Plate 11

[Boito's Personal Copy of the Disposizione Scenica, p. 12
(Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Conservatorio di Musica Statale)]

Plate 12

[Boito's Personal Copy of the Disposizione Scenica, p. 38
(Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Conservatorio di Musica Statale)]

Almost all of Boito's remarks within the disposizione scenica concern the first act. He seems to have subjected that act to a thorough examination, then to have proceeded hastily through the remaining acts. The handwritten entries occur in black pencil, green pencil, and ink—three layers, whose chronological order is uncertain. The black-pencil entries are found primarily in his marginal remarks in Acts I, II, and III, although a few stage directions are altered in pencil as well; the green-pencil entries occur mostly in Act IV; the ink entries generally signal slight alterations within the text or amplifications of the blocking diagrams of Acts I and II. The following transcriptions are separated into two categories: 1) simple textual underlay of or commentary upon certain blocking diagrams (that is,

Boito's fixing of the textual moment to which an individual blocking diagram refers); and 2) changes in the text of the disposizione scenica, along with supplementary remarks that do not necessarily imply an alteration. A number of smaller, ambiguous entries, particularly Boito's typical marginal carats (large circumflexes) and vertical lines, are not transcribed or mentioned further here. Within the transcriptions below the column at the left refers to the relevant page of the disposizione scenica, and (n), (v), or (i) refers to the use of black pencil, green pencil, or ink. The second column specifies the line or blocking diagram involved on that page; in the case of diagrams, no. 1 is the uppermost diagram on the page; no. 2 the second from the top, and so on. In the second column of Table Two one finds either words that have been crossed out (sometimes abbreviated here by ellipses) or bracketed locations on the page that specify where a comment is to be found. The third column is a transcription of what Boito actually wrote in that portion of the disposizione scenica. Additional, clarifying commentary is sometimes provided in brackets.

Table One: Blocking Diagrams: Text Underlay, etc.

Page	Bl. Diagram	Boito's Underlay (or other remark)
10 (i)	Diagram 1	Una vela! Una vela! Un vessillo un vessillo. [NB: also changes "Coro Uomini"—just below Cassio and Montano—to "Bassi," crosses out the symbols for Jago and Roderigo (in pencil), labels the stage-right "Coro Uomini" as "IO" and "IIO," and adds an additional comment below: see Table Two.]
11 (i)	Diagram 1	Uno squillo! uno squillo! [NB: also crosses out the symbols for Jago and Roderigo]
12 (i)	Diagram 1	Lampi! tuoni! gorghi! [NB: see Table Two for the new entrance of Iago and Roderigo]
12 (i)	Diagram 2	Fende l'etra un torvo e cieco spirto di vertigine [chorus, stage right] Ah! [chorus, stage left]
13 (n)	Diagram 1	[Changes "Un Porta-Bandiera" to "3 Porta-Bandiera." Also writes above this: "una bandiera veneta e due turche."]
14 (i)	Diagram 1	L'alvo frenetico del mar sia la sua tomba
14 (i)	Diagram 2	Evviva! Evviva Esultate
15 (i)	Diagram 1	l'accordo in mi Maggiore Vittoria! Vittoria!
16 (i)	Diagram 1	dopo l'ultimo evviva! del coro
17 (i)	Diagram 2 (large)	e una cagion dell'ira eccola,
19 (i)	Diagram 1	Ei io rimango di sua moresca Signoria l'alfiere (sino a: Vedemi non vorrei d'attorno un Iago)
19 (i)	Diagram 2	Fuoco di giojal
20 (i)	Diagram 2	appena finito il Coro
21 (i)	Diagram 1	Roderigo, beviam!
22 (i)	Diagram 1	Esca infiera queste lide (Lo ascolta) Alle nozze d'Otello e Desdemona

22 (i)	Diagram 2	Ti guarda da quel Cassio
23 (i)	Diagram 1	Quà, ragazzi del vino
23 (i)	Diagram 2	Chi all'esca ha morso
24 (i)	Diagram 1	Egli è briaco fradicio, ti scuoti lo trascina a contesa
25 (i)	Diagram 1	Bevil bevil con me!...
25 (i)	Diagram 2	Capitano, v'attende la fazione
26 (i)	Diagram 1	Ogni notte in tal guisa Cassio preludia al sonno
26 (i)	Diagram 2	Bada alle tue spalle
26 (i)	Diagram 3	Frenate la mano signor ve ne prego
26 (i)	Diagram 4	Ti spacco il cerèbro
27 (i)	Diagram 1	D'un ebro? [under Cassio] Va al porto con quanta più possa [under Iago and Roderigo]
27 (i)	Diagram 2	Prima posizione della sfida
30 (i)	Diagram 1	Abbasso le spade
30 (i)	Diagram 2	non so...qui tutti eran cortesi amici
31 (i)	Diagram 1	Che? la mia dolce Desdemona
31 (i)	Diagram 2	Cassio non sei più Capitano
31 (i)	Diagram 3	Iago tu va nella città sgomenta

Table Two: Textual Changes, Added Actions, etc.

Page	Original Text Deleted [or Position of Comment]	Boito's New text (in margins, etc.)		
9 (i)	dal praticabile, si darà un poco di luce alla sola ribalta	un poco di luce nelle quinte all'entrata d'Otello colle fiaccole	20 (i)	[left of underlined "in vari atteggiamenti"] parte adagiate parte sedute per terra parte in ginocchioni parte in piedi.
10 (n)	2 sedili	una due panche	21 (n)	[right of underlined "siede sul sedile presso al proscenio"] si scelgano i tre del Coro e una due [?] belle corifee
10 (i)	[under Diagram 1]	Il coro intiero degli uomini entra subito dopo il grande scoppio di fulmine.	23 (i)	[right of "scena per dire . . . si avvicina"] (rivolto al Coro)
11 (n)	Appena alzato . . . sinistra pei praticabili.	Più tardi alle p al forte sulle parole lampi, tuoni, gorgi..	24 (n)	[left of underlined "In fondo all'anima ciascun mi guarda"] col gesto di sincerità generosa [?] che hanno certi ubriachi
11 (n)	a quelli sotto il . . . esclamano, come sopra.	[No additional words]	26 (n)	[left of "ride? Roderigo provocandolo . . . tue spalle! Furfante!"] con una colla sedia in mano
12 (n)	[left of Diagram 1]	Iago e Rodrigo entrano dopo le parole <u>è la nave del Duce</u>	29 (i)	[right of "delle masse e dei gruppi del Coro . . ." to the bottom of the page] ai subito dopo il primo fuggiam i soprani corrono sugli spalti. Subito dopo il secondo fuggiam i mezzai soprani contralti idem. e al terzo fuggiam i ee mezzo-soprani[.] Le parole: s'uccidono devono esser gridate da tutte le donne sullo spalto più vicino e così sino all'ultima parola: Soccorso dopo la quale fuggono dentro le quinte opposte al castello.
13 (i)	[right of "Appena dette . . . le: Voci interne "]	Iago e Roderigo parlano sullo spalto del fondo e seguono collo sguardo il corso della nave	32 (n)	[delle porte del Castello] e dell'osteria ["e dell'osteria" crossed out]
13 (i)	[right of " Jago si volge . . . <u>rostro picmba su quello</u> "]	dallo spalto del fondo	36 (n)	[left of Diagram 2] ? [i.e., the sign of a question mark]
14 (n)	[ansiosamente verso] destra	[ansiosamente verso] sinistra	38 (n)	[on Diagram 1] [alters the positions of the characters in the blocking diagram, although rather unclearly. Also: an erased "Cassio" in the left margin]
15 (i)	impetuosamente al proscenio per dire	subito entri dopo l'ultimo Vittoria diretto ancora ad Otello (che sarà entrato nella fortezza) con molta animazione a gruppi compatti [illegibile] tenori con tenori, bassi con bassi.	38 (n)	[left of Diagram 2] ?
16 (n)	[left of "Dalla rampa . . . entrano nel Castello."]	con fiaccole	41 (n)	[right of the "Maestro" and the "Oboe" in Diagram 1] ?
19 (i)	[right of Diagram 2]	davanti alla botola sei [?] ragazze corifee mescolate a tre tramagnini	42 (n)	[on Diagram 1] [alters the motion of Emilia? Boito's alteration, however, is unclear]
20 (n)	[le 6] comparse [si sdraieranno]	[le 6] ballerine [si sdraieranno]		

42 (i)	[left of "Alla penultima battuta . . .destra di Desdemona "]	due mandolini una chitarra
78 (n)	[cade esterrefatta]	["esterrefatta" is either underlined or crossed-out]
91 (v)	[Buona notte! Lo dice risolutamente, [salutando]	["risolutamente" crossed-out]
92 (i)	[left of "inginocchia in atteggiamento . . . mezza voce: Ave Maria"]	giungendo le mani e chinando il capo prima d'inginocchiar
93 (i)	[right of "nell'ora della morte"]	nell'ora della morte alza la testa poi tutta la persona
97 (v)	[quindi passerà] dall' indignazione [al terrore]	["dall'indignazione" crossed out]
98 (v)	[attraversa,] quasi [fuggente, da destra]	["quasi" crossed out]

Boito's copy of the printed libretto (see Plate 13), also available in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, contains many handwritten stage-indications. As is the case with the disposizione scenica described above, nearly all of the comments are to be found in the first act. Again, the occasion that prompted Boito's annotations is unclear; but it might be mentioned once more that the late blind-stamp date (8/1892) assures us that the libretto does not pre-date the disposizione scenica itself (cf. n. 2 above). Inside the back cover Boito scribbled a few words that are virtually illegible: they seem to read something like "rico[r]do" [?] and "Lisa d'au[s]tria [???"]. In addition to his remarks inside the libretto there are the usual Boitian carats (in pencil) in the margins, along with line-numberings, and other purely textual concerns, none of which seem particularly significant. On p.

62, in the Act III concertato, however, Boito did actually change two lines of text. In Roderigo's quatrain "Per me s'oscura il mondo" became "S'apre per me l'avello," and "L'angiol soave e biondo" became "L'angiol soave e bello."

Plate 13

[Boito's Personal Copy of the Otello Libretto, pp. 16-17, Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Conservatorio di Musica Statale]

All of the staging-comments are written in black ink, except for two pencil comments in the Act III concertato, probably written at a different time. Curiously, of all the comments, only the second pencil comment (p. 61, see Table Three below) disagrees in any significant way with the instructions in the printed disposizione scenica: here Boito requests that Desdemona rise to her feet aided by Emilia and Lodovico; in the disposizione scenica (p. 81), she rises apparently unaided. Generally considered, however, this libretto alters virtually nothing of the original staging; it seems to have been prepared more as a pro memoria than as a re-thinking of the staging. That Boito drew some eleven blocking diagrams into the libretto is of some interest, but it is clear that his brief, non-elaborate diagrams are essentially identical with those in the relevant portion of the disposizione scenica. They may, in fact, have been copied from that document. But whatever their origins, they present nothing new.

Table 3 transcribes or describes Boito's handwritten entries about the staging in this libretto.

Table Three: Boito's Personal Copy of the Printed Libretto: Handwritten Comments

Page	Textual Line	Boito's Comment		
			13	Qua, ragazzi, del vino! [draws a blocking diagram]
			14	[Iago's first] Chi all'esca ha morso / Del ditirambo al Coro
8	Fende l'etra un torvo e cieco spirito di vertigine	s'avanzano i bassi [to the left of the line] Sortita delle donne [to the right of the line]	14	[Chorus' first] Chi all'esca ha morso / Del ditirambo (controcena)
8	Posi l'ancora fedel.	si volgono verso il mare e s'avvicinano a Jago a Montano a Rodrigo / Si staccano i bassi delle voci interne.	16	T'offenderà...ne seguirà tumulto! [draws a blocking diagram]
9	Esultate! L'orgoglio musulmano	(largo a Otello)	16	Capitano, / V'attende la fazione ai baluardi. Cassio si sarà seduto
10	Roderigo, / Ebben, che pensi?	(non troppo avanti)	16	[idem] [draws a blocking diagram]
10	E chi s'affoga per amor di donna	tutto il Coro nel fondo a vedere il bottino.	16	Andiam! per alzarsi
10	Che quella donna sarà tua. M'ascolta / Bench'io finga d'amarlo, odio quel Moro...	traendolo ancora più [poi?] in disparte molto vicino al proscenio / entrano quelli delle cataste / Per Due punti occupano il Coro 1° il bottino musulmano 2° la formazione della catasta 3° i preparativi dell'osteria	16	(Ogni notte in tal guisa / Cassio preludia al sonno. [draws a blocking diagram])
11	E una cagion dell'ira, eccola, guarda	I contralti e i tenori molti a coppie si avvicinano alla catasta	17	Bada alle tue spalle! [draws a blocking diagram]
11	Ma, come è ver che tu Rodrigo sei	(tutti a posto pel coro)	17	Frenate la mano, [draws a blocking diagram]
11	Canta la sposa — col suo fedel	intanto si forma il gruppo di Cassio e le corifee e i soldati all'osteria. Cassio sarà entrato nell'osteria e poi escito.	17	Ti spacco il cerèbro [draws a blocking diagram]
12	Roderigo, beviam! qua la tazza,	[draws a blocking diagram]	17	D'un ebro?! [draws a blocking diagram]
12	Essa infiora / Questo lido	alzandosi	17	(Va al porto, con quanta più possa (via sedie lanterne e tavole)
13	(Ti guarda / Da quel Cassio.	[draws a blocking diagram]	19	Abbasso le spade! [draws a blocking diagram]
			61	A terra!...si...nel livido / Fango... non vuole alzarsi
			61	E un dì sul mio sorriso Si alza sorretta da Emilia e da Lodovico

Notes

¹ Although Giulio Ricordi may never have written a disposizione scenica for Falstaff, he certainly planned to do so: on 25 [July] 1893, several months after the opera's premiere (9 February 1893), he assigned it a future plate number, 96585, in a catalogue (the libroni) still preserved in the Archivio Storico of G. Ricordi & C., Milan.

² It has been argued that Ricordi's disposizione scenica for Aida was at least partially based on Verdi's rather extensive handwritten comments in an 1872 printed libretto—comments perhaps made for the Verdi-supervised ripresa of the opera in Parma following its first performances at La Scala. See Luciano Alberti, "I progressi attuali [1872] del dramma musicale," Il melodramma italiano dell'Ottocento: Studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila (Torino, 1977), pp. 125-55; Hans Busch, Verdi's Aida: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1978), p. 499; Gino Roncaglia, "Giuseppe Verdi, la regia e un libretto di Aida con annotazioni e schizzi del musicista," Galleria verdiana (Milan, 1959), pp. 49-75. Apparently erroneously, some have argued that the libretto was annotated by Verdi at the time of the first La Scala production: see Franco Abbiati, Giuseppe Verdi (Milan, 1959), III, 546-52; and Harvey Bordowitz, "Verdi's Disposizioni Sceniche: The Stage Manuals for Some Verdi Operas" (M.A. Thesis, Brooklyn College, 1976), pp. 5-10. The libretto, now located in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City, has been completely reproduced in facsimile in Busch, pp. 500-53. From the above discussions, however,

it would appear that the precise dating of the libretto—and in particular, that it without question dates from a period earlier than that of the printing of the disposizione scenica—needs yet to be demonstrated. Cf. especially Boito's personal, annotated copy of the Otello libretto, discussed in Section 13 below.

³ See, e.g., Ricordi to Verdi, 18 November 1881, Giuseppe Verdi—Giulio Ricordi: Corrispondenza e immagini 1881/1890, ed. Franca Cella and Pierluigi Petrobelli (Milan, 1982), pp. 36-7; Ricordi to Verdi 23 October 1886, 4 December 1886, and 25 December 1886, in Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 51-2, 55, and 56-8. Many of Ricordi's other letters contain similar passages.

⁴ See Verdi to Piroli, 23 June 1887 (misdated 23 July by Luzio) and 28 June 1887, in Alessandro Luzio, Carteggi verdiani [Rome: 1935-47], III, 182-4; and Abbiati, IV, 341-2.

⁵ The author of important materials on Verdi in both of the special issues of L'Illustrazione italiana—that is, those on Otello and Falstaff—Ugo Pesci remains a rather shadowy figure. To judge from some of his other writings, he appears not to have been primarily a musician or man of the theater at all, but rather a political and military historian: Come siamo entrati in Roma (1895); Firenze capitale, 1865-1870 (1894?); I primi anni di Roma capitale (1870-1878); Il re martire. La vita e il regno di Umberto I (1901); and Il generale Carlo Mezzacapo e il suo tempo (1908). Pesci had also contributed to a special issue of L'Illustrazione italiana in 1886 devoted to "Amor: poema coreografico di L. Manzotti messo in scena al Teatro alla Scala nel Carnevale del 1886."

⁶ Monaldi, Cantanti celebri (1829-1929) (Rome, 1929), p. 226.

⁷ Cf. the report in the Gazzetta musicale di Milano of 14 May 1893, p. 334, of Verdi instructing Adelina Stehle and Edoardo Carbin (Nannetta and Fenton) how to kiss during the Falstaff rehearsals: "La spigliatezza non c'è. Allora Verdi si alza di scatto e dice: Sono due giovani innamorati, e sono due baci che si vogliono fare?...perchè stiamo qui ad almanaccare? fateli davvero questi due baci...e vi sarà la naturalezza che si cerca!—Qua Nannetta: io sarò per un momento Fenton: si fa così e così." For more information on Verdi at the Falstaff rehearsals, see James A. Hepokoski, "Under the Eye of the Verdian Bear: Notes on the Rehearsals and Première of Falstaff," The Musical Quarterly, 71 (1985), 135-56.

⁸ Ricordi also mentions the thunder in his letters to Verdi of 23 October 1886 and 4 December 1886, Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 51-2, 55.

⁹ The individual set-diagrams at the Ricordi Archivio Storico (Plates 4-6) differ in a few small ways from those of the disposizione scenica. The sets for Acts I and III, however, are closer to the "final" disposizione scenica versions than they are to the versions of those sets printed in the February 1887 Verdi e l'Otello. The Archivio Storico diagrams probably represent an intermediate stage of set-planning—a stage after the January 1887 rehearsals but before the printing of the Otello manual. (The alternative, that they were printed as revisions after the appearance of the disposizione scenica, seems unlikely.)

¹⁰ With regard to the possible props originally envisioned by Boito for this concertato, cf. Boito to Verdi, 24 August 1881, as this scene was beginning to take shape in his mind: "Otello ha la sua posa

indicata, voluta dal dramma. L'abbiamo visto accasciato accanto al tavolo dopo le parole: A terra! e piangil e così accasciato deve restare senza alzarsi anche quando risponde a Jago finché dura tutto il pezzo d'insieme Non s'alzerà che per urlare: Fuggitel e poi piomberà al suolo" (Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 59).

¹¹ See Verdi to Piroli, 28 June 1887, n. 4 above.

¹² Gazzetta musicale di Milano, 17 April 1887, pp. 120-1. The last Milanese performance of Otello occurred on 9 April.

¹³ In the latter half of May Maurel was in Venice for a performance of Otello (Carteggio Verdi-Boito, II, 362). By 31 May or very shortly thereafter, however, he seems to have been in Paris and was planning on participating in a benefit concert on behalf of Salle Favart of the Opera Comique, which had been destroyed by fire on 25 May (Abbiati, IV, 340-1). It is not known where Maurel spent the following months. In any event, he appears to have had no further correspondence with either Ricordi or Verdi in the Summer of 1887.

¹⁴ See especially Verdi's comments to Ricordi about Maurel, 24 December 1886, partially quoted in Section 11 below, and completely transcribed in Abbiati, IV, 304-5

¹⁵ Verdi to Ricordi, 14 March 1887 (Abbiati, IV, 328-9). And see especially Ricordi's 15 March response, in which he mentions the sets for Acts II, III, and IV, all of which had been redone by Zuccarelli (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 17).

¹⁶ Verdi mentions the Pantaleoni crisis in several of his letters from April and May 1887, but see especially the important letter from Verdi to Pantaleoni from this period (undated in Luzio, IV, 86), along

with Verdi to Faccio, 29 April 1887 (Abbiati, IV, 333-4), and Verdi to Ricordi, also 29 April 1887 (Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 59-60).

17 The two later letters are printed in Abbiati, IV, 371-2; Verdi was also concerned, of course, about the projection of Iago's crucial words during the Act III concertato, a concern that would lead to his revision of that ensemble in 1894.

18 Ricordi to Verdi, 8 February 1889 (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 68).

19 The costume designer for Otello, Alfredo Edel, had been sent to the art galleries and museums of Venice in the Summer of 1886 to study historically authentic Venetian costumes and props. See Boito to Verdi, 16 May 1886, in Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 106-7, and the notice on the costumes and props in the Corriere della sera, 27-8 October 1886, reprinted in Carteggio Verdi-Boito, II, 354.

20 See, e.g., Verdi to Boito, 8 May 1886 and Boito's reply of 10 May, in Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 103-4. One might also add that Verdi owned—and presumably used—a copy of Giulio Carcano's translation (1852, first publ. 1858), which included an introduction quoting not Schlegel, but Samuel Johnson and Francois Guizot. A general introduction to Verdi's Shakespeare library is provided in William Weaver, "The Shakespeare Verdi Knew," Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook, ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter (New York, 1984), pp. 144-148.

21 Its call number is TEP.20/2. Boito also owned at least two other editions of Hugo, one without date, the other from 1868. Although they are uncatalogued, these "extra" copies may be consulted at the Biblioteca Palatina in the Parma Conservatory: one of them contains a few marginal annotations. (The Biblioteca Palatina also houses three of

Boito's English-language editions of Shakespeare.) Boito's reliance on Francois-Victor Hugo was first brought to the attention of scholars by Piero Nardi, ed., Tutti gli scritti (Verona, 1942), p. 1541. But cf. the report of an 1887 interview with Boito, in Blanche Roosevelt, Verdi: Milan and "Othello" (London, 1887), p. 240: "Of course, [Boito] is at his best in the Italian or French authors; he reads Shakespeare very well in English, but he told me he had learned Othello by heart in 'Francois Hugo's magnificent translation and that of the Italian author Maffei.'" See also James A. Hepokoski, Giuseppe Verdi: Otello (Cambridge, 1987), Chapters 2 and 8.

22 Hilary Gatti, "Ernesto Rossi (1827-1896)" and "Tommaso Salvini (1829-1915)," Shakespeare nei teatri milanesi dell'ottocento (Bari, 1968), pp. 63-85, 111-34; and Anna Busi, Otello in Italia (1777-1972) (Bari, 1973), pp. 161-205.

23 Verdi's first thoughts in September 1881 may have been of an Otello "vestito da etiopie, senza il solito turbante" (letter to Morelli, Abbiati, IV, 183-4), but by 1886, after composing the opera, he objected to any costume for Otello that suggested the exotic or the primitive instead of the noble Venetian: see Verdi to Ricordi 18 October and 3 November 1886 (Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 51, 54) and Verdi to Boito, 29 October 1886 (Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 116-7). Whether consciously or not, Verdi's costume-choices seem virtually to echo the argument of Hugo (strenuously opposed to a "racial" interpretation of Othello) in the introduction to his Othello translation. Victor Maurel's reaction to all of this, written after the La Scala premiere, is particularly interesting: on the one hand he wishes for more frequent appearances of

an exotically costumed Otello; on the other hand, he insists that Otello's facial makeup be rather light (Apropos de la mise en scène du drame lyrique Otello . . . [1887-8; rpt. 1897], pp. 34-7). See also Hepokoski, Giuseppe Verdi: Otello, Chapter 8.

²⁴ Verdi to Ricordi, 22 January 1886 (Abbiati, IV, 274) and 4 February 1886 (Cella-Petrobelli, p. 65).

²⁵ Boito to Verdi, 21 December 1886, in Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 119. See also the laudatory (and obviously approved) remarks about Salvini by Ugo Pesci in the "numero unico" of L'illustrazione italiana, Verdi e l'Otello, p. 34; and for Salvini's own positive reaction to Verdi's Otello, see his letter to Verdi, 24 February 1887 (Abbiati, IV, 327-8, reproduced in facsimile facing p. 512). Cf. n. 22 above.

²⁶ From Salvini, "Interpretazioni e ragionamenti su talune opere e personaggi di Shakespeare: Otello," in Fanfulla della Domenica, anno V, n. 43, Roma 28 ottobre 1883, p. 3; quoted in Busi, p. 189.

²⁷ In the margin of these portions of his own copy of the Hugo translation Boito responded to the various arguments of Hugo by writing: "eppure è un negro" (in Hugo, p. 58) and "dunque poteva anche essere un negro" (p. 62, to Hugo's quotation of Desdemona's "I saw Othello's visage in his mind," Oth., I.iii, 248; cf. Boito's adaptation of this line in the Act I Love Duet, "Ei io veda fra le tue tempie oscure / Splendor del genio l'eterea beltà"). Cf. n. 23 above.

²⁸ That Boito understated Iago's specific motivations for his hatred of Otello is clear. Indeed, he even removed one of the motivations provided, albeit problematically, by Shakespeare: Iago's suspicion that "'twixt my sheets / He's done my office" (Oth., I.iii,

369-70). But, as will emerge once again, many of Boito's central ideas were common in Continental nineteenth-century criticism.

²⁹ Cf. the text originally given to Iago for his monologue in Act II (that is, before its replacement with the "Credo"), which included the initial lines: "Tesa è l'insidia — ho in man le frodi, / Ti gonfia, Invidia — che mi corrodi!" (complete text in Luzio, II, 110).

³⁰ Francesco Degrada, "Otello: da Boito a Verdi" [1976], Il palazzo incantato: studi sulla tradizione del melodramma dal Barocco al Romanticismo (Fiesole, 1979), II, 159-61; Stefan Kunze, "Der Verfall des Helden: Über Verdis 'Otello,'" Giuseppe Verdi: Othello: Texte, Materialien, Kommentare, ed. Attila Csampai and Dietmar Holland [Rororo Opernbücher] (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1981), pp. 29-30.

³¹ See also Verdi to Faccio, 2 September 1886 and 29 October 1886 (in G. Morazzoni, Verdi: Lettere inedite . . . [Milan, 1929], pp. 44-5); Verdi to Boito 29 October 1886 (Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 116-7); Verdi to Ricordi, 5 May 1887 and 11 May 1887 (Abbiati, IV, 335-7).

³² See especially Bordowitz, pp. 34-7, 49-53, and Doug Coe, "The Original Production Book for Otello: An Introduction," 19th-Century Music, 2 (1978-9), 148-58. Cf. also the stressed values of "continuità" and "fluidità" in the disposizione scenica for Aida, as discussed by Luciano Alberti (see n. 2 above).

³³ See, for example, the remarks on the Act III Otello-Desdemona Duet, p. 59, and on the Act III Terzetto, pp. 64-5. For the word naturalizza, see., e.g., pp. 67, 72, and 93. Cf. Hugo Pesci's report on Verdi at the Otello rehearsals "Raccomanda la massima naturalizza . . ."

("Le prove dell'Otello'," in Verdi e l'Otello, p. 39 [quoted more extensively in Section 2 above; see also nn. 5 and 25 above]).

³⁴ Coe, p. 153.

³⁵ In Ricordi, aneddoti e impressioni (Milan, 1895), quoted in Busi, p. 208.

³⁶ Busi, pp. 206-7.

³⁷ Emanuel, letter to the Director of the Fieramosca, 12 January 1887; quoted in Busi, pp. 212-3.

³⁸ See, e.g., Gatti, pp. 111-20; Busi, pp. 161-6, 180-7.

³⁹ Gatti, p. 157.

⁴⁰ On this point see especially Degrada, II, 163-4:

"Significativamente, rispetto al dramma dei protagonisti, il coro suggerisce costantemente un'alterità, un'estraneità, una frattura inconciliabile. . . . l'opera conferma come motivo di fondo l'idea della tragica estraneazione dell'individuo da se stesso, dal proprio passato, dal proprio contesto storico-sociale."

⁴¹ See especially the remarks of Coe, p. 150.

⁴² For more on this crucial point of Iago-Emilia relations, see Coe, p. 152.

⁴³ See, e.g., Boito to Verdi 6 May 1886 and 16 May 1886, in Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 101-2, 106-8. Similarly, the staggering amount of historical research undertaken by Boito for his own opera Nerone is apparent from his materials relating to that opera, now preserved in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma.

⁴⁴ Such seems to be the idea, for instance, behind his letter to Ricordi on 13 June 1892 about the planning for the upcoming Falstaff

premiere: "Voi mi parlate di scene, di mandare pittori a Londra (a che fare?), di costumi, di macchinismi, d'illuminazioni? Per far scene di Teatro ci vogliono pittori di Teatro. Pittori che non abbiano la vanità di far valere soprattutto la loro bravura, ma di servire il Dramma. E, per amor di Dio, non facciamo come si fece per Otello che per voler far troppo bene, si è strafatto" (in Abbiati, IV, 442-4: the entire letter is an important statement from Verdi about performance). Cf. the similar remarks in Verdi to Ricordi, 5 August 1892: "Il troppo anche nel bene produce il male! Hohenstein [the costume designer] a Londra ed a Parigi?! Anche questo è un po' troppo!" (in Abbiati, IV, 451).

⁴⁵ The disposizione scenica recommends a similarly planned embrace (Desdemona-Emilia) at the moment before Emilia's exit after the Willow Song in Act IV: "Si calcolino questi vari movimenti in modo che l'abbraccio abbia luogo precisamente sul secondo: Emilia, addio" (p. 91). With regard to the Act I embrace, cf. n. 7 above and the text to which it refers in Section 2.

⁴⁶ Busi, pp. 175 (Rossi) and 192 (Salvini).

⁴⁷ Luzio, II, 97.

⁴⁸ Carutti, "Duncan muore: Un pensiero sulle disposizioni sceniche da Verdi a Puccini," Museo teatrale alla Scala 1880/1890: Momenti della messa in scena, n. pag.

⁴⁹ Verdi to Boito, 23 June 1881, in Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 57

⁵⁰ Degrada, II, 160.

⁵¹ Boito proposed the addition of these lines in his letter to Verdi of 21 July 1886, and Verdi accepted them the following day. See Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 111-2.

52 Verdi to Ricordi, 3 November 1886, in Cella-Petrobelli, p. 54.

53 Fonotipia 39042, Milan; the recording has been frequently re-issued as an item on long-playing recorded anthologies.

54 Cf. Verdi's remarks on the three voices required for the Willow Song in his letter to Faccio, 2 September 1886, in Morazzoni, pp. 44-5 (see n. 31 above). The three voices indicated are that of Desdemona herself; that of Barbara for the Willow Song; and that of the exclamation, "Salcel!" The disposizione scenica (p. 89) specifies four voices by splitting Desdemona's "natural" voice into two, one to express that which is realistically present (to be used, for example, for her orders to Emilia), another for memories of the past ("un accento spiccato, benchè tranquillo").

55 Tamagno's recordings from Otello comprise two of "Esultate" (1903 and 1905); two of "Ora e per sempre addio" (1903 and 1905); and two of the "Morte d'Otello" (1903 and 1904). See, e.g., Roberto Bauer, The New Catalogue of Historical Records 1898-1908/9 (London, 1947), pp. 434-5.

56 See, e.g., Carl Dahlhaus, Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte (Cologne, 1977), pp. 38-50, 123-8; transl. by J. B. Robinson as Foundations of Music History (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 20-9, 74-8.

57 Cf. the remarks of Bordowitz, p. 11: "The earlier disposizioni display a great perfunctoriness about acting. For example, when a set piece, such as an aria or duet, is reached in the Giovanna de Guzman manual, all description ceases, and the simple word "Aria" or "Duetto" must suffice, with no stage business described during the piece."

58 Bordowitz, p. 34; see especially the entire discussion of personalized moments in Aida, pp. 31-4.

59 Delle Sedie, Estetica del canto e dell'arte melodrammatica (Livorno, 1885), pp. 24-6. In these passages Delle Sedie is quoting from Lesson 20 of his own L'Arte e fisiologia del canto (L'Art lyrique, 1874).

60 Coe, p. 155-6.

61 On lighting, see Bordowitz, p. 86: "The Teatro alla Scala in Milan installed gas lighting in 1860, and in 1883 was one of the first theaters in the world to install electric lighting." See also The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, 3rd ed. (London, 1967), pp. 559-77, and cf. Ricordi's letter to Verdi, 18 November 1881, in Cella-Petrobelli, p. 36.

62 See Muzio to Ricordi, 22 November, in Abbiati, IV, 296-7; and Ricordi to Verdi, 25 December 1886, along with Verdi's response of 26 December, in Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 56-9. Photographs of Maurel as Iago in 1887 show him without beard: see, e.g., Cella-Petrobelli, p. 57; Roosevelt, between pp. 196-7. Cf. Filippo Filippi's remark about Maurel in his review of the Otello premiere: "sbarbato com'è ora è irrecognoscibile" (La perseveranza, rpt. in Otello . . . Giudizi della stampa italiana e straniera, 2nd ed. (Milan, 1887), p. 6); and Maurel's "historical" argument for a beardless Iago ("bien que les auteurs fussent d'avis contraire") in his own mise en scène, Maurel, pp. 42-3.

63 Maurel, p. 43. Cf. the 1887 description of Maurel's La Scala Iago in the Parisian Le matin: "Maurel a chanté ce long blasphème [the Credo] avec une puissance stridente admirable. C'est d'ailleurs le seul passage de son rôle où il cesse de se contenir. Tout le reste, il le

dit les coudes au corps, sans gestes, sans éclat, et son talent consiste précisément à produire l'émotion dramatique par une sorte de force intérieure qui se prive volontairement du secours du geste et même des éclats de la voix" (in Otello . . . Giudizi della stampa, p. 105).

⁶⁴ Maurel, pp. 41-2. Cf. especially Verdi to Domenico Morelli, 7 February 1880 and 24 September 1881 (Abbiati, IV, 111, 183-4), partially quoted in Section 5 above.

⁶⁵ Maurel's mise en scène is most widely available in a collection of his writings, Dix Ans de Carrière (Paris, 1897), pp. 1-148; this collection is currently available in a reprint by the Arno Press (New York, 1977). With regard to the dating of the original book, one should notice that the beginning of the "Première Partie" ("Aperçus sur le théâtre chante en 1887"), one finds a footnote suggesting an 1887 date for at least the first section of the book: "Rome, chez Bocca frères (1887).—A Paris, chez Fischbacher, rue de Seine." It is clear, however, that there were individual editions of Apropos de la mise en scène du drame lyrique Otello published in Rome in 1888 (Romana, 183 pp., a copy of which exists in the Boston Public Library).

⁶⁶ Abbiati, IV, 305. In fact, after the premiere Maurel did have much to say about the costumes used for the premiere, and in his mise en scène he advised several costume changes. With regard to Verdi's general reactions to Maurel's interventions see also the composer's bigliettino about Maurel's proposal of an "Otello seduto," Section 3 (Plate 7) above. Cf. also Verdi's reactions in May and June 1894 to Maurel's cutting of portions of Act III of Falstaff, in Abbiati, IV, 544.

⁶⁷ The incident to which Verdi refers is mentioned in his letter to Boito, 14 May 1886, in Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 105; Boito's original text for Otello's entrance is provided in Luzio, II, 104.

⁶⁸ For a closer chronology of the composition of Otello see Hepokoski, Giuseppe Verdi: Otello, Chapters 3-4.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Verdi to Boito, 17 July 1886 and Boito to Verdi, 21 July 1886, in Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 108-12. Ricordi was able to send Verdi some of the libretto-proofs in early September 1886, by which time Verdi had already consigned to Ricordi as completed only the fourth act of his opera: see Ricordi to Verdi, 9 September 1886, in Cella-Petrobelli, p. 49.

⁷⁰ Saladino's manuscript reduction of Act IV still exists in the Archivio Storico of G. Ricordi & C., Milan. It contains material written by the Ricordi copying staff (the vocal line, many of the stage directions, etc.), by Saladino (the piano reduction, in contrasting violet ink), and by Verdi (corrections and suggestions). Its stage directions, however, are not complete with regard to the score eventually printed, and one may presume that additional stage directions were added either by Ricordi or by members of his staff at a later, pre-proof date (and Verdi, one must recall, did check and correct the proofs in November and December 1886).

⁷¹ See Verdi to Ricordi, 29 April and 2 May 1887, in Cella-Petrobelli, pp. 59-60.

⁷² Some of these non-definitive textual variants are mentioned in Hepokoski, Giuseppe Verdi: Otello, Chapter 2.

⁷³ Throughout Act IV of Verdi's autograph score it is evident that in late 1886 someone from Casa Ricordi (largely following the libretto) pencilled in certain stage directions very lightly—doubtless as reminders for Verdi to add them at a later date. This the composer did—in violet ink (January 1887 ink: see n. 74 below)—almost surely during the period of the rehearsals for Otello in early 1887. One such stage direction (violet ink with original pencil underneath) occurs on fol. 329, "sedendo macchinalmente davanti allo specchio" (cf. sp., 327/3/2): a stage direction, curiously enough, not followed in the disposizione scenica (pp. 87-8).

⁷⁴ The violet ink is discussed in Hepokoski, Giuseppe Verdi: Otello, Ch. 3, n. 6.

⁷⁵ One might recall in this regard Verdi's letter to Boito of 21 January 1886, which concerns not this passage but one near the end of the opera. Even though the precise moment of Otello differs here, the compositional process to which he alludes was surely one that he frequently followed: "Non credo, che Egli [Tamagno] potrebbe dire con effetto quella corta melodia . . . tanto più che fra questo secondo bacio ed il terzo vi sono 4 battute d'orchestra sola, che bisogna riempire con un'azione delicata, commovente che io immaginava scrivendo le note" (Carteggio Verdi-Boito, I, 99).

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Alla nona battuta, pag. 197, Margherita si scuote leggermente, alza la testa, e invasa da un tremore gira intorno lo sguardo desolato come una demente, appoggiando il corpo sul braccio destro che sarà steso e sostenuto dal palmo della mano sul suolo.

Onde spiegare meglio all'artista i molti dettagli di questa scena, credesi opportuno di trascrivere la parte musicale, indicando di mano in mano i movimenti e le espressioni del canto.

Sempre sul giaciglio, nella posizione indicata. appoggiando queste note con grande

L'altra notte in fondo al mare il mio bimbo hanno git.

sù questo la tutta la persona sarà in piedi

ta to, or per farmi dire il rancore di con ch'io l'abbia affo.

guardandosi attorno e stringendo le braccia al corpo come persona intrivizita dal freddo. col sorris

ga to. L'aura è fredda, il carcere fosco, e la mesta anima mia come il.

so sulle labbra e seguendo cogli occhi e col grido un volo immaginario, sempre più sorridente, con accento quasi di

pas se ro del bosco vo la.

lieta serenità. qui ad un tratto espressione di dolore immenso, ineffabile. fa qualche passo e si porta nel centro del proscenio.

Ah! pietà di me!

si coloriscen questa frase senza angoscia ma con espressione di dolce languore, guardando il proprio giaciglio e indicandolo come se vi vedesse persona addormentata

In funere sopore è mia madre addormentata.

sommessamente e dolcemente quasi con timore di svegliarla. con graduata espressione di dolore al culmo dell'atter.

ta ta, e per colmo dell'orrore di con.

rimento. a mezza voce quasi tenendo si possa udire.

ch'io l'abbia attoscata. L'aura è fredda, il carcere fosco.

Segue riavvicinandosi a poco a poco al giaciglio, e cogli identici colori della prima volta. Esclamando nella massima disperazione: *Ah! pietà di me*, ricade sul giaciglio e vi resta distesa come corpo morto.

Alla prima battuta, pag. 201, comparisce Faust (tav. 1), poi Mefistofele (tav. 11) dietro il cancello con un mazzo di chiavi: Faust vede

orogevolissimi: il
Otello tiranno di
 orro; il libretto
 uelli dell'*Amleto*

ne, asfottato dal
 — per il: quale
 e scriveva il più
 rimanendo fedele
 mento era tolto.
 va ad una pro-
 gran conoscenza

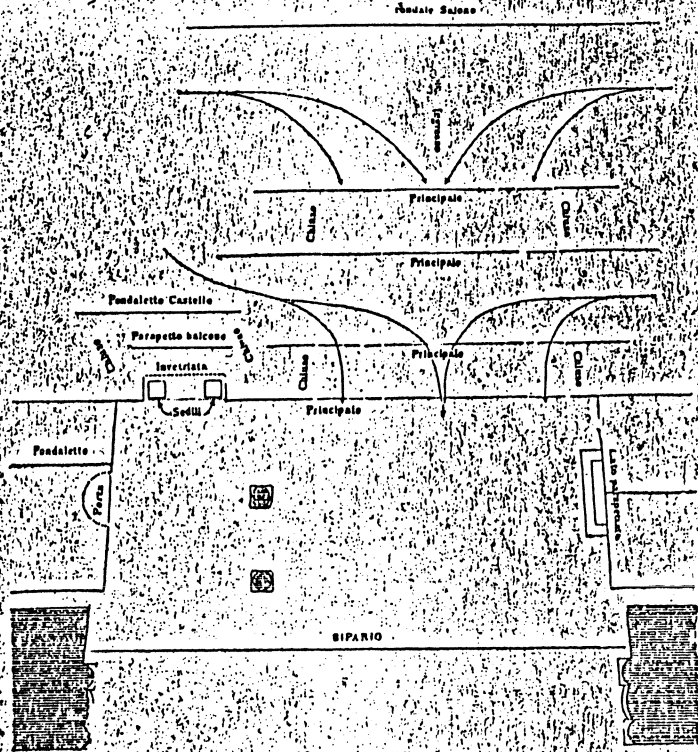
Shakespeare fa
 sato invece, alla
 onto non storico

ona, vale a dire
 non è mai in
 personaggi sono:
 — *Un Araldo*

dove si scorge
 tempesta. Otello
 o. Jago, dopo un
 a, aizza col bic-
 aggiunge Otello
 a Otello e Desde-

suo successore; poi preso dal furore allora furiosamente Desdemona
 Segue un pezzo d'insieme: Jago consiglia Otello d'affrettare la vendetta; egli
 sarà a Cassio. Otello è preso da un nuovo impeto d'ira; tutti escono: ino-
 mentre egli cade tramortito e Jago lo contempla con un gesto di orrendo

Plate 2



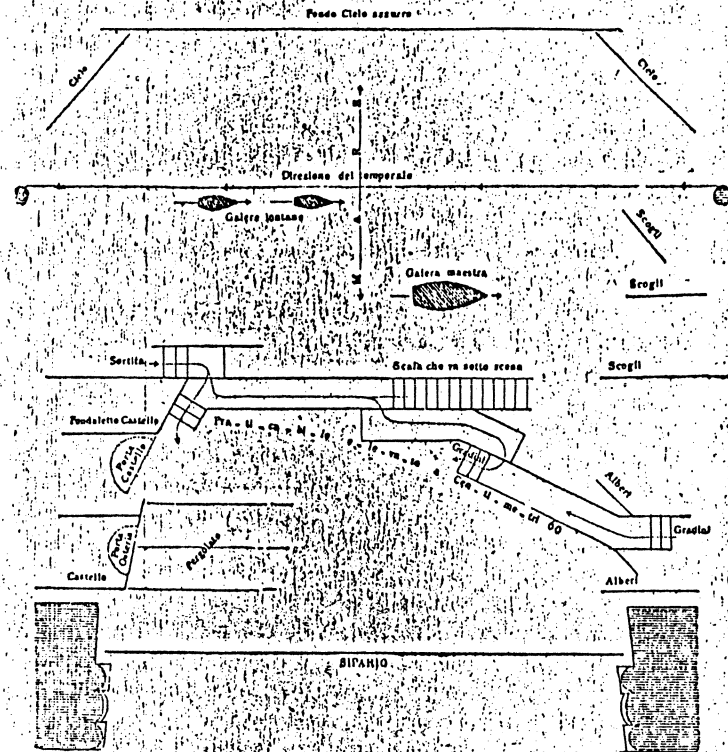
DISPOSIZIONE SCENICA DEL FINALE DELL'ATTO III.

Il quarto atto è nella camera di Desdemona. Emilia l'aiuta a spogliarsi; spogliarsi Desdemona canta la canzone del salice; imparata dalla vecchia Barbara, interrompendola di tanto in tanto per rivolgere la parola ad Emilia. R sola, Desdemona recita l'Ave Maria; poi va a coricarsi. Otello entra: lo doma ha detto le solite preci perchè vuole ucciderla: la rimprovera d'amar Cassio; avergli donato il fazzoletto. Desdemona nega, vorrebbe difendersi: Otello la s'odo bussare alla porta: Emilia entra dicendo che Cassio ha ucciso Rodrigo; odono ancora nell'alcova i lamenti di Desdemona; Otello confessa di averla perchè infedele. Alle grida d'Emilia accorrono Ludovico, Cassio, Jago: M dice che Rodrigo morente svelò le arti nefande di Jago.

Gero primo atto della tragedia inglese, è scomparso: la scena non è mai in
 zia ma sempre in una città di mare dell'isola di Cipro. I personaggi sono:
Otello — Jago — Cassio — Roderigo — Lodovico — Montano — Un Araldo
Desdemona — Emilia — i principali della tragedia.

Nel primo atto la scena rappresenta l'esterno del castello da dove si scorge
 mare. Le galee veneziane sono alle viste, combattute dalla tempesta. Otello
 age incolume in porto, dopo aver fiaccato l'orgoglio mussulmano. Jago, dopo un
 to con Roderigo nel quale gli promette che Desdemona sarà sua, aizza col bic-
 re alla mano Cassio contro Montano, che rimane ferito. Sopraggiunge Otello
 priva Cassio del grado. L'atto termina con un duetto d'amore fra Otello e Desde-
 ma che s'avviano abbracciati verso il castello.

Plate 3



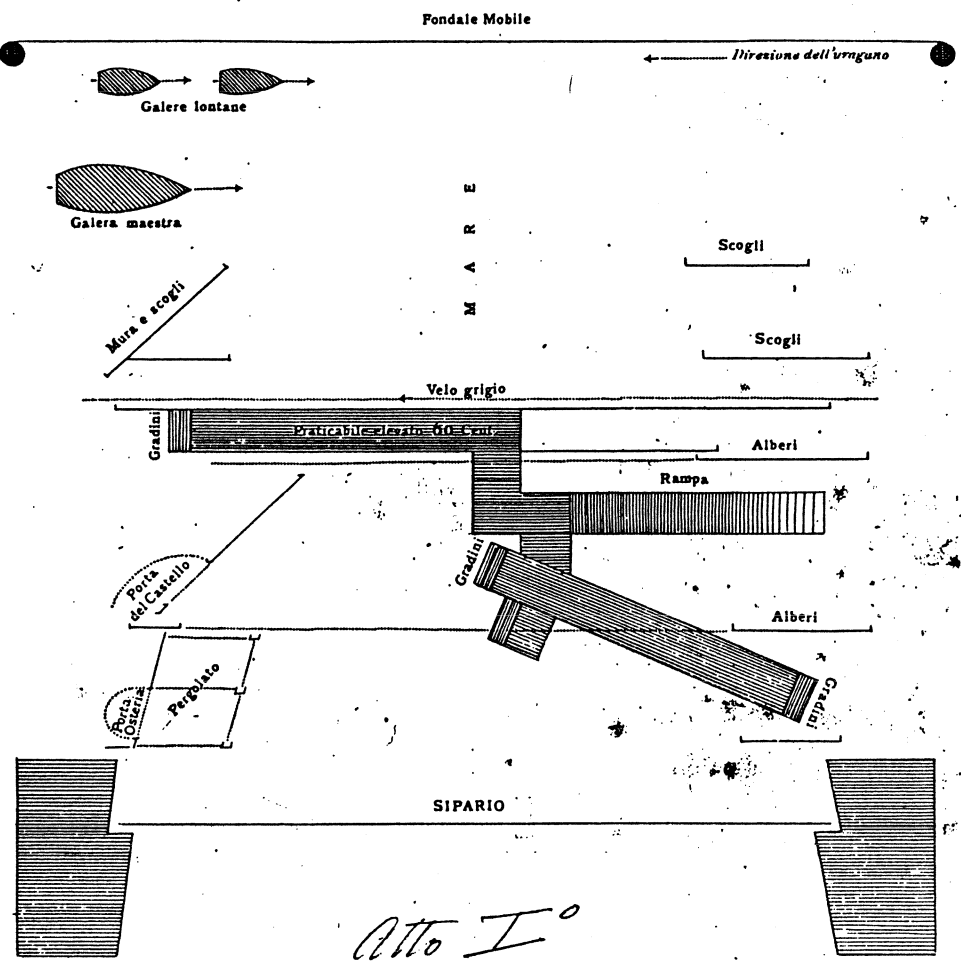
DISPOSIZIONE SCENICA DELLA SCENA I DELL'ATTO I.

Nell'atto secondo siamo in una sala terrena del castello. Jago consiglia a Cassio
 pregare Desdemona ad intercedere per lui. Cassio vedendola lo va incontro e
 s'aggia con lei nel giardino. Simulando di non aver visto Otello che gli si

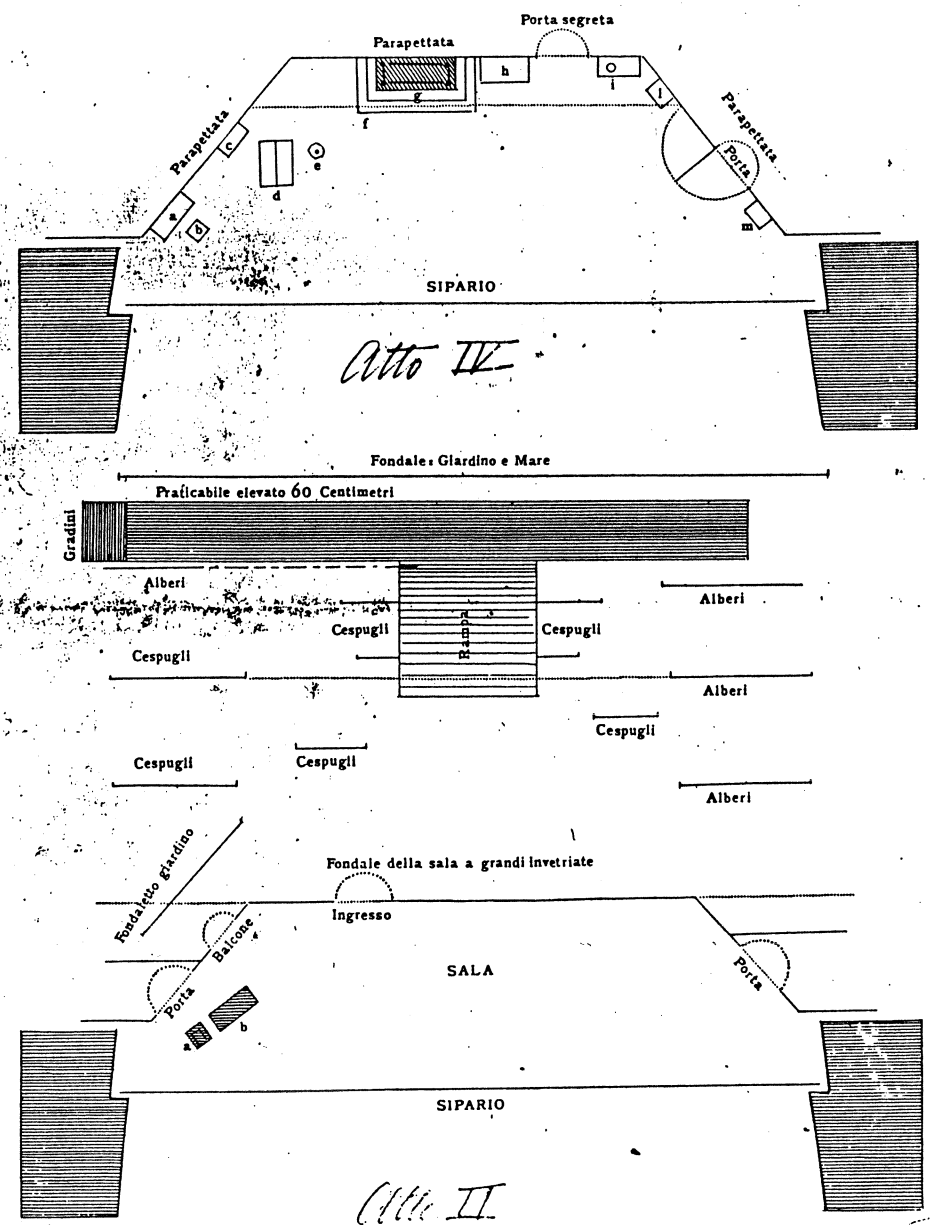
Il
 spogliarsi
 Barbara,
 sola, Des
 ha detto
 avergli
 S'odo bu
 odono an
 perchè i
 dice che
 Me

No
 del fazzo
 scena gr
 del salice
 Desdemon
 tore di V

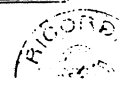
Gli
 di quest
 intellige
 una affet
 . Gio
 s'ingenu
 degli Ar



M. I. altre copie
the copy

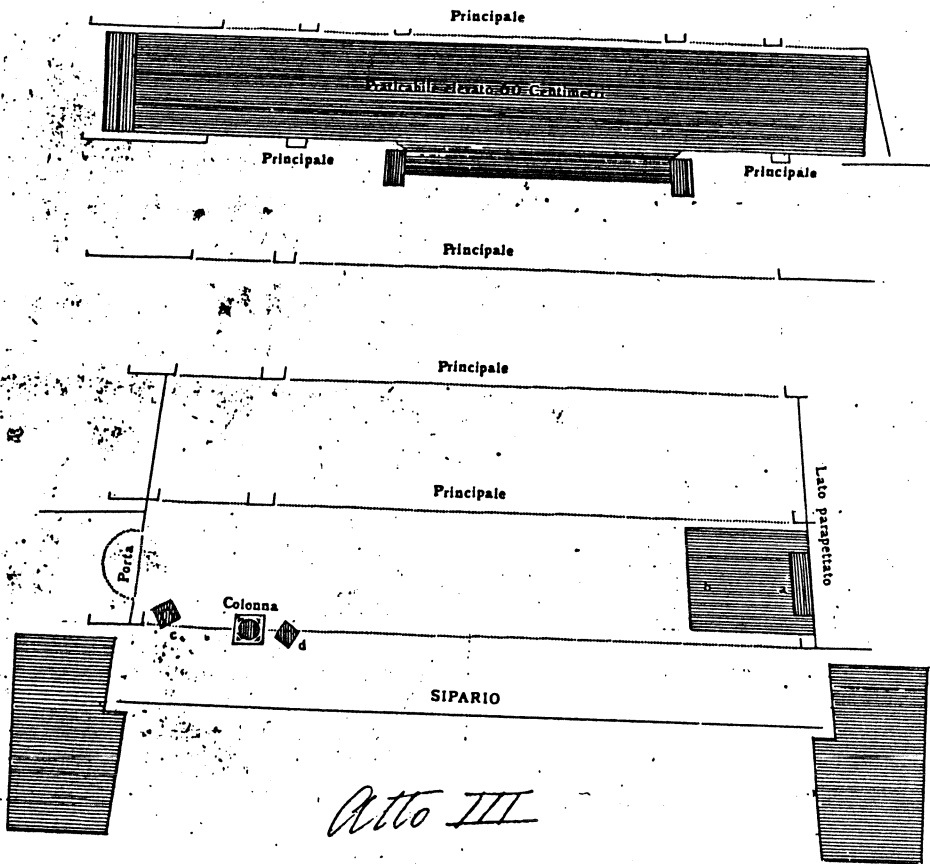


Atto II



sk 6

Fondale - Fianco del Castello e Mare



Atto III

Plate 7

3 PIN-HOLES

he' hanno detto che Manuel vuol
 proporre di progettare Atto jedato!!
 che arava i...
 Immaginate lo stato d'animo d'Atto
 in quel momento. Deve fare apparenza
~~grava~~ tante re, tante quassanti;
 e diteci se in tale stato un uomo
 può far jedato e sobbarbari stravalto
 come se magari con un po' di
 Belle di S. Vito, ma jedato!!... Oh!!



Plate 8: Selected Pose from Enrico Della Sedia, Estetica del canto... (1885)



Affermativa (p.35)



Afflizione (seduta) (p.35); o
Contemplazione malinconica (p.35)



Dubbio (mutato in diffidenza,
timore, o tristezza) (p.40)



Agitazione (si eccita alla
vendetta) (p.36); o
Collera estrema (p.39)



Ansietà (condotta ai suoi
limiti estremi) (p.36); o
Dolore (p.39)



Agitazione (che obbliga l'attore
a lasciarsi cadere seduto...) (p.36); o
Desolazione (disperazione) (p.39)

Plate 9: Selected Pose from Enrico Della Sedia, Estetica del canto... (1885)



Collera; minaccia (pp.38-9)



Dolore; sofferenze fisiche (pp.38-9)



Preghiera: esclamazione d'ambascia
facendo appello a Dio (anche:
dichiarazione d'amore) (pp.41-2)



Afflizione e pianto (tre pose) (p.50)





Sdegno e minaccia (tre pose) (p.54)



Anelito, angoscia (tre pose) (pp.55-6)

12
Fondale mobile

Galea Maggiore

Mura e Scogli

Scogli

Scogli

CASSIO MORTANO

DZANO

RODERIGO

Lampi, tuoni, grigi

Fende l'aria un
raffico e un
vergine

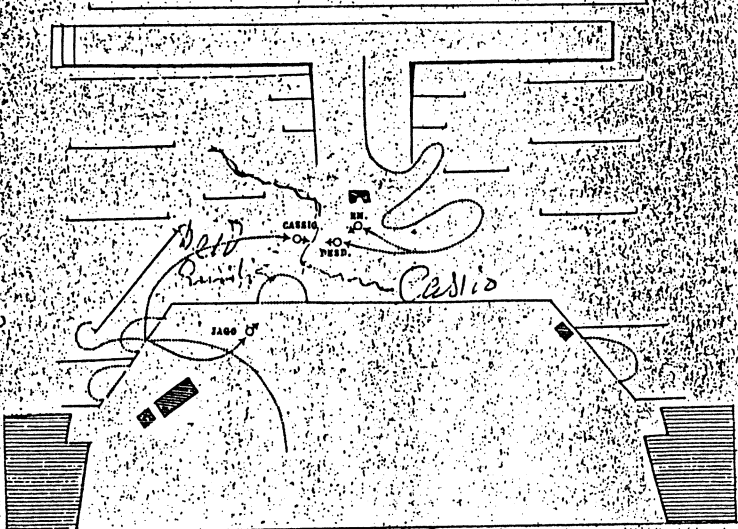
Ah

Yago e Rodrigo
entano dopo
lo sparare
la nave
del Duca

Alle parole: *Fende l'aria*, attaccate fortissimo, il Coro fa tre passi innanzi immediatamente quella parte del Coro Donne che si trova fra le quinte a destra esce correndo, traversa la scena dietro il Coro Uomini, e forma un gruppo a sinistra: alzando spaventate le braccia al cielo, prorompono nel grido: *Ah!* I tenori del Coro si uniscono a questo grido, alzando pur essi le braccia: la parte del Coro Donne fra le quinte a sinistra esce unitamente di quello a destra e forma gruppo assieme alle altre.

Plate 12

Jago scorge Desdemona (la quale sarà scesa dalla rampa e s'aggirerà fra i cespugli, parlando e sorridendo con Emilia, movendo lentamente il ventaglio) esclama: *Eccola...* corre al balcone e con un cenno chiama Cassio, il quale subito apparirà sul balcone: dicendogli *Cassio, a te... Quest'è il momento... Ti sciolli...* Jago gli accenna Desdemona, e vincendo la riluttanza di Cassio, lo spinge fuori nel giardino. Cassio va verso Desdemona, la quale in quel momento si sarà voltata verso destra: la saluta rispettosamente, le si accosta Desdemona risponde cortesemente al saluto ed ascolta sorridendo, quanto le dice Cassio: presso a loro Emilia.



Dopo le parole: *E s'avvicina*, Jago scende un poco a sinistra per dire: *Or qui si tragga Otello*: intanto Desdemona s'incamminerà verso destra. Cassio la segue, continuando a parlarle: quando Jago dice: *Già conversano insieme*, Desdemona e Cassio si vedranno un momento fermi al di là del balcone: Desdemona di nuovo sorridendo, inclinerà il capo, come per annuire alla domanda di Cassio:



Plate 13

Ed è ciò che mi spinge.)
 MONTANO (venendo a rivolgersi a Cassio)
 Capitano, è...
 CASSIO (Avvicinandosi)
 Andiam! Andiam!
 Che vedo?)
 JAGO (a Montano)
 (Ogni notte in tal guisa
 Cassio prelude al sonno.)
 MONTANO
 Otello il seppia.)
 CASSIO (senza saperlo)
 RODERICO, per tutti
 Ah! ah!
 CASSIO
 Chi ride?

Rido d'un ero...
 CASSIO (sugliandosi contro Roderigo)
 Bada alle tue spalle!
 RODERICO (diffidatissimo)
 Badao ribaldo!
 CASSIO
 Marranto!
 Nessun più ti salva.
 MONTANO (separandosi a forza e dirigendosi a Cassio)
 Frenate la mano,
 Messer, ve ne prego.
 CASSIO (a Montano)
 Ti spacco il cerchio
 Se qui s'interponi.
 MONTANO
 Parole d'un ero...
 CASSIO
 D'un ero?)
 (Cassio ripulsa la spada. Montano s'arma anch'egli. Anche Ferruccio. La sala si stempera.)
 JAGO
 (Va al porto, con quanta più possa
 Ti resta, gridando: sommosa! sommosa!
 Vai spargi il tumulto, l'orrore. Le campagne
 Risuonano a stormo.)
 (Roderigo esce commosso)
 Opre li combattenti, escluso)
 Fratelli! l'innamere.
 Confinito cessateci!

