



VERDI'S EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN

GIUSEPPINA STREPPONI AND TERESA STOLZ

Caroline Anne Ellsmore



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This investigation offers new perspectives on Giuseppe Verdi's attitudes to women and the functions which they fulfilled for him. The book explores Verdi's professional and personal relationship with women who were exceptional within the traditional socio-sexual structure of *patria potestà*, in the context of women's changing status in nineteenth-century Italian society. It focusses on two women; the singers Giuseppina Strepponi, who supported and enhanced Verdi's creativity at the beginning of his professional life and Teresa Stolz, who sustained his sense of self-worth at its end. Each was an essential emotional benefactor without whom Verdi's career would not have been the same. The subject of the Strepponi–Verdi marriage and the impact of Strepponi's past deserve further detailed and nuanced discussion. This book demonstrates Verdi's shifting power-balance with Strepponi as she sought to retain intellectual self-respect while his success and control increased. The negative stereotypes concerning operatic 'divas' do not withstand scrutiny when applied either to Strepponi or to Stolz. This book presents a revisionist appraisal of Stolz through close examination of her letters. Revealing Stolz's value to Verdi, they also provide contemporary operatic criticism and behind-the-scenes comment, some excerpts of which are published here in English for the first time.

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Caroline Anne Ellsmore

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Preface

This investigation offers new perspectives on Giuseppe Verdi's attitudes to women and the functions which women fulfilled for him. The book explores Verdi's professional and personal relationship with women who were exceptional within the traditional socio-sexual structure of *patria potestà*, in the context of women's changing status in nineteenth-century Italian society. In so doing, it shines a spotlight on several of the persistent myths that once surrounded Verdi's life and career and those of the women with whom he had intimate relationships and on possible reasons for his own part in creating these myths. Until relatively recently, Verdi's self-image as a poor peasant whose success owed nothing to anyone other than his father-in-law, could be accepted as befitting the persona of the self-made man. There was also an unwillingness in some of the scholarly literature to acknowledge any permanent threat to the unassailable solidarity of his marriage to a saintly wife whose past had left no scars. These conflicts between public myth and private reality were bound up with the deference due both to a national treasure and international genius, whose beloved memory required protection from salacious iconoclasm.

Despite rigorously researched investigations which have revealed the humanity of the protagonists, there still persists a tendency to prefer discretion over revelation. Only when the reputation of Teresa Stolz has been at issue, could the protective shield be allowed to drop. It has been relatively easy to allot her the role of home-wrecker, and talented, but imperiously demanding, 'diva', without much fear of refutation.

The book focusses on two of the most important women in Verdi's life, who fulfilled different functions as (coincidentally with their historic and revealing operatic roles) his 'handmaidens'; the singers Giuseppina Strepponi, who supported and enhanced Verdi's creativity at the beginning of his professional life and Teresa Stolz, who sustained his sense of self-worth at its end. The negative 'diva/divo' stereotypes (of questionable value, considering the struggles of these vulnerable professionals for pre-eminence), were the products of many factors. They do not withstand scrutiny when applied either to Strepponi or to Stolz, each woman an essential emotional benefactor without whom Verdi's career would not have been the same.

The subject of the Strepponi–Verdi marriage and the impact of Strepponi’s professional past deserve further detailed and nuanced discussion. This book demonstrates Verdi’s shifting power-balance with Strepponi as she sought to retain intellectual self-respect while his success and control increased. It presents a revisionist appraisal of Stolz through close examination of her letters from 1871 to 1895. Far from showing her to be an unintelligent and sometimes malicious gossip as sometimes stated in the scholarly literature, the letters demonstrate her astute evaluations of operatic performances and her buoyant affection for Verdi. Revealing Stolz’s value to Verdi, which endured over some thirty years, they also provide contemporary operatic criticism and behind-the-scenes comment, some excerpts of which are published here in English for the first time.

C. A. E.
Melbourne, 2017

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Without the gracious permission granted by the Carrara-Verdi Estate, by Dottoressa Maria Mercedes Carrara-Verdi, Presidente onorario of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, Dottore Angiolo Carrara-Verdi, Dottoressa Ludovica Carrara-Verdi and Signora Emanuela Mezzadri Carrara-Verdi for partial quotation of previously unpublished letters held at Villa Verdi, Sant'Agata, some original insights would have remained unavailable to a wider audience.

Permission to reproduce images has been graciously given by Raccolta Bertarelli, Comune di Milano; Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milano; Pinoteca Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milano; Museo del Risorgimento, Milano, Archivio Ricordi, Milano and; Fondazione Cariparma, Parma.

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1 To lift the curtain

This has revealed to you my opinions, my actions, my wishes, my public life, as I might say, and as we are in the process of making revelations, I have no difficulty at all in lifting the curtain that veils the mysteries enclosed within four walls, and telling you about my home-life.¹

(Giuseppe Verdi)

When surveying the literature on Verdi it might seem that, in the twenty-first century, there could be little further to add on the subject. The scores and secondary sources of commentary and biographical literature are extensive, running to well over a thousand items in Gregory Harwood's *Guide to Research* even in 1998.² Yet, as Italy's most revered operatic composer and representative of its aspirations for nationhood in the nineteenth century, Verdi continues to elicit analyses, inspire debate and gather a devoted following of audiences throughout the world. As part of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of his birth, the *Verdi's Third Century* conference hosted by the American Institute for Verdi Studies was held at New York University, in October 2013. It demonstrated the variety of discourse on performance practice, technology, historiography and analysis, and also the disagreement, which this composer can draw from eminent scholars. Above all, it clearly showed the loyal affection in which Verdi is held by his countrymen and those who have come to know his music. There is both nostalgia and sincere sentiment in this, and in the literature on Verdi, yet there is also an element of reverent discretion complicit in denying the man's complexities and leaving certain matters undiscussed.

My aim in writing this book has been to investigate or re-evaluate several of the persistent myths that surrounded Verdi's life and career and those of the women with whom he had intimate relationships, and on possible reasons for his own part in creating these myths. The letter from which the epigraph quotation is taken actually hides more than it reveals. It is part of the edifice of privacy carefully constructed by Verdi, and tended by some scholars of Verdi, still standing after 200 years. Preserved within the amber of popular, if not scholarly, public myth, Verdi remains a heroic figure, owing his success to no-one except for his 'surrogate' father, Antonio Barezzi's, early help; Giuseppina Strepponi

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remains a pious and devoted wife, whose past or flaws can safely be glossed over; Teresa Stolz, while being lauded for her singing, remains a typically rapacious 'diva', to be dismissed as such. I have set out to find in what ways these public myths are contradicted by private realities and whether they intersect with Verdi's operatic works.

This book traces the origins and development of Verdi's attitudes to women through his experience of social hierarchies, in his early contacts with church, family and patronage. It explores Verdi's relationships with women who were exceptional within the traditional socio-sexual structure of *patria potestà*. It examines the careers of Giuseppina Strepponi and Teresa Stolz, which marked the earliest and latest periods of Verdi's operatic composition, and how the two women fulfilled different functions in his life. I revisit the serious impact on Verdi of Giuseppina Strepponi's early presence in Busseto and note a tendency in the secondary literature to concede, but pass quickly over, problem areas in their marriage. I examine the shifting power-balance in Strepponi's lifelong campaign, after a life of sexual freedom, to be a 'new woman' in domesticity, while still retaining intellectual self-respect and the emotional understanding of her husband. I also refer to her growing depression and dependence on the religious consolation which Verdi resisted. I re-evaluate Teresa Stolz's more independent friendship with Verdi, showing it to be a positive influence during his final creative years and demonstrate the value of her correspondence with Verdi as a source of contemporary operatic criticism from a perspective other than that of commercial journalism.

A review of the literature

As noted earlier, the material available for research is mountainous, so I shall focus on the most relevant primary sources, background and contextual secondary sources and specific Verdian literature. Not all the literature used in the book is discussed here, as some of it was more profitably treated as my investigations unfolded.

Primary sources

I have consulted a variety of primary sources; archives of original documents, reviews, opera scores and literary works, which inform the musical, social and biographical areas of the book.

Original documents, INSV (Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani) and AIVS (American Institute for Verdi Studies), for digitized images of the Stolz correspondence held at Sant'Agata, and BNCF (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze), for the Strepponi-Lanari correspondence, provided close visual contact with complete letters, without editorial excisions by scholars. Examination of relevant correspondence in these archives has allowed me to assess visual markings in original documents. During my time at the INSV in Parma in 2012 and at the AIVS in 2013, I transcribed letters sent by Teresa Stolz to Verdi. Even digital

or microfilm images of stationery, handwriting, punctuation, crossing-out, blotting and smudging bring immediacy to handwriting, and reveal details such as haste or agitation in writing. Since Italian was not Stolz's first language, however, there are challenges in deciphering intended meaning from her erratic spelling.

At INSV in Parma, information from the index cards, together with document images from the Sant'Agata archive, has been digitized, creating a comprehensive, cross-referenced database of the Verdian correspondence held there. The INSV database is open only to authorized scholars researching on-site, because many images are of original documents, the property of the Carrara-Verdi Estate at Villa Verdi, Sant'Agata. The INSV has not shared its database of images with the AIVS, which still operates on microfilm. I consulted Reels 20 and 21 of the AIVS microfilm archive, which contain images of all known 132 extant documents sent by Teresa Stolz to Verdi, reading and transcribing as many as possible. The microfilm reels, unlike the Parma database, do not have a sequential numbering or labelling system by which individual items could be easily found.

The biographer Franco Abbiati³ had virtually unlimited access to Sant'Agata's archives and Verdi scholar Frank Walker also professed to having been allowed great freedom and support there.⁴ Phillips-Matz's more recent book on Verdi often cites Abbiati, noting that he is of great value when used in conjunction with the INSV index cards.⁵ Hans Busch was also given authorization by Dr Alberto Carrara Verdi and his family to publish previously unpublished autographs.⁶

While technology has made certain aspects of research easier, legalities have circumscribed the flexibilities of earlier research. Documents from Sant'Agata may now be transcribed, but not automatically published verbatim in full in Italian or English translation, even within a doctoral thesis. Unless direct quotation has already been published in a previously authorized work, only paraphrase or summary of the contents of a letter, for example, is permissible, unless authority is given directly by the Carrara-Verdi family as heirs to his real property and literary estate.

Access is only via INSV or AIVS and direct communication with the heirs, as a doctoral researcher, was not available to me. The family receive communications through their Villa Verdi website, but will not necessarily be in a position to respond even to approaches from the AIVS. There are four heirs to the Verdi estate, each with their respective spouses and children – Maria Mercedes, honorary president of the INSV, her brother Angiolo, and their sisters Emanuela and Ludovica, for whom agreement to further release of original correspondence for publication has presented difficulties.

Under a headline announcing, 'Verdi's Heirs Thrash the Living Daylights Out of Each Other', *Il Giornale* alleged that the four siblings seemed to have no better way of celebrating the bi-centenary of Verdi's birth than to put his house up for auction. The report referred to it as Verdi's 'twenty-eighth' opera. It alleged that Emanuela and Ludovica wanted to divide ownership four ways and

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create a foundation to turn the villa into a museum; Angiolo and Maria Mercedes, supported by the testimony of an aunt, maintained that a will left all to Angiolo, the male heir. According to the Italian press reports, the Villa was in the hands of a Superintendent and a consortium of experts; the Italian State had a pre-emptive right to acquire the property, failing which, Villa Verdi would go under the auctioneer's hammer and could be closed to the public permanently. Meanwhile, whatever the entertaining reports might claim, the original documents remained in Villa Verdi and the researcher needed authorization to see them, or publish them in transcription.⁷

On 24 July 2014, I requested permission from Dottoressa Maria Mercedes Carrara Verdi, Honorary President of INSV, to quote, in full or in part, the letters of Giuseppina Strepponi and of Teresa Stolz held at Sant'Agata, in the original Italian and in English translation. On 1 September 2014, I received an email from Michela Crovi of the INSV to the effect that authorization was only needed for publication of photographic reproductions of the letters, but not for 'simple quotation of parts of the letters', thus enabling my use of the texts in doctoral dissertation. Further scholarly publication of unexpurgated letters in English translation may be a matter for future resolution. Any fears on my part concerning permission for commercial publication of quotations, however, have been laid to rest in 2017 by each of the supportive and encouraging heirs.

Edited correspondence

While new publications in English remain problematical, there is an ever-growing collection of recent scholarly editions of letters in Italian. These have provided the benefit of their commentary, as well as enabling occasional comparative evaluations of sources. Critical editions of Verdi's correspondence are being published by INSV⁸ and, together with Eduardo Rescigno's *Giuseppe Verdi: Lettere* are the latest reliable sources, providing much contextual information in their extensive annotations.⁹ Marcello Conati's *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence*, in English, thanks to William Weaver's translation, vividly sets forth Verdi's creative resurgence and the last active involvement of Strepponi after 1880.¹⁰ His *La bottega della musica: Verdi e La Fenice* is also valuable in tracing Verdi's professional relationship with Sophia Loewe.¹¹

Another valuable source is the 'Dossier Strepponi' in *Le carte dell'impresario: Melodramma e costume teatrale nell'ottocento* by Marcello De Angelis, which reproduces correspondence between Alessandro Lanari and Giuseppina Strepponi, excerpts from the impresario's memoirs and other documentation relevant to Strepponi's career.¹² A source of correspondence between Verdi and three close friends is Arturo Di Ascoli's *Quartetto milanese ottocentesco: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi, Giuseppina Strepponi, Clara Maffei e Carlo Tenca*.¹³ Di Ascoli's editorial voice does not intrude unduly and the selection of 491 complete letters, from 1837 to 1892, reveals a great deal about this complex network of friendships. Cristina Gastel Chiarelli has covered some of the same correspondence in *Niente zucchero nel calamajo: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi a Clara Maffei*, concentrating on a single

relationship.¹⁴ She interweaves three chronological sections of contextual information about Milanese social, artistic and political life, biographical narrative and quotations, each followed by relevant letters. Her book focusses on Verdi's relationship with Clara and provides a useful complement to the *Quartetto milanese*.

The only available source of letters by Verdi to Teresa Stolz is Giovanni Cenzato's *Itinerari verdiani*, which gives a tantalizing view of Verdi's relationship with her, particularly after Strepponi's death in 1897.¹⁵ The letters were apparently seen by Cenzato during the 1930s. They have been unavailable for inspection since the 1950s, and the short quotations, usually dated, are unfortunately without precise attribution. Umberto Zoppi's *Angelo Mariani, Giuseppe Verdi e Teresa Stolz in un carteggio inedito*, an older source, with a decided bias towards reinstating Mariani's reputation, does have the virtue of reproducing letters in full.¹⁶

Where letters have already been published in Walker or Phillips-Matz, I have used their translations, or compared the nuances within them. English translations of previously unpublished letters or excerpts, or those from Rescigno, Zoppi, Cenzato or the published *Carteggi* are my own.

Scores

Some sources cross over the divide between primary and secondary, for instance the following scores: The Chicago University/Ricordi Critical Editions of Verdi's operas, in the scores of *La traviata*¹⁷ and *Nabucco*,¹⁸ have allowed me to study the soprano parts of Abigaille and Violetta and use the editor's valuable contemporary scholarly annotations, sketches and alternative versions. For *Aida*, since a critical edition is not yet published, the Dover edition reprint of the Ricordi score has assisted in filling the gap.¹⁹

Reviews

Reviews from contemporary music journals are available in digital format from CIRPeM (Centro Internazionale Periodici Musicali) and RIPM (Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals (1760–1966)). Journals examined include *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, *L'Italia musicale*, *Teatri arti e letteratura*, *Strenna teatrale europea* and *Figaro*. Rodolfo Celletti has included some reviews in his entries on Giuseppina Strepponi and Teresa Stolz in *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*.²⁰ Selected German reviews of *Nabucco*, *La Traviata* and *Aida* from journals such as *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, *Sonntagsblätter*, *Hamburgische Staats- und Gelehrten-Zeitung* and *Didaskalia*, can be found in Günter Engler's anthology, *Über Verdi: Von Freunden und Gegnern, Musikern und Schriftstellern*. In *Verdi: 'D'amor sull'ali rose'*, Gustavo Marchesi provides both positive and negative reviews of Stolz's voice.²¹ Unfortunately, as this is not a scholarly work, details of sources are not always given.

Significant writings on Strepponi and Stolz are contained in the various reviews by Francesco Regli, in *Strenna teatrale europea*,²² G. Romani in 'Appendice teatrale', in *Figaro*,²³ Hector Berlioz as reproduced in *Il pirata*,²⁴ and

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Blanche Roosevelt in the *Chicago Times*.²⁵ All give some idea of audience response to a particular singer from the critic's perspective. Reviews written by singers themselves, however, as found in Teresa Stolz's letters, convey the experience, *fra le quinte*, or behind the scenes.

Many reviews must be treated with caution; a journal such as the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, published by Ricordi, promoted the performances of Verdi's works; as the publishers of his scores, they had a vested interest in hiring parts and selling piano reductions and instrumental arrangements. As John Rosselli notes, some journals also published or withheld favourable notices depending on whether a singer paid their subscription for the publication.²⁶

Research into the press, for this book, has been confined mainly to reviews in music journals. It must be remembered, however, that these journals also reprinted music reviews from the general press, which were all widely read and very influential at the time.

Literary works

Other primary sources examined include contemporary literary works of fiction and social commentary. Cristina di Belgiojoso's essay, 'Della presente condizione delle donne e del loro avvenire',²⁷ gives a realistic view of the position of women who continued to forfeit self-determination in moving from paternal rule to the security of marriage. Verdi greatly admired the devout Jansenist, Alessandro Manzoni whose novel, *The Betrothed and History of the Column of Infamy* informed my understanding of Verdi's ethical viewpoint.²⁸ Familiarity with Alexandre Dumas fils's play *La Dame aux camélias*, is essential in discussing *La traviata* and its contentious connection with Giuseppina Strepponi.²⁹

Historical context

It has also been necessary to trawl a wide area for relevant contextual information on social, religious and political matters, one of the most important of these influences on Verdi's early life being the Catholic Church. In researching the effects of 'Bonapartism', the slow development of Catholic humanism, the constraining effects of Catholicism on sexuality and the religious practices tolerated by the official Church, several books were of particular value. In *Church and Society in Catholic Europe of the Eighteenth Century*, edited by William J. Callahan and David Higgs, are chapters dealing with situations still existing in Verdi's early years. Mario Rosa's chapter, 'The Italian Churches', gives succinct information on parish structure, the church's ownership of land and its provision of financial credit through confraternities.³⁰ Marc Venard's chapter, 'Popular religion in the eighteenth century', reveals the extent of superstitious practices co-existing with those officially recognized by the Church.³¹ The most useful overview on the Catholic Church and its interaction with the Napoleonic regime has, for my purposes, however, been E. E. Y. Hales's *Revolution and Papacy 1769–1846*.³² It gives an account of the policies of successive popes and

high-ranking clergy in dealing with liberalizing forces unleashed by the French Revolution and clarifies the conflicts motivating various phases of the *Risorgimento* in Italy. Another source, Michael P. Carroll's *Madonnas That Maim: Popular Catholicism in Italy Since the Fifteenth Century*, explores the extraordinary allegiances which Italian Catholics owed to Mary, the saints and to Christ.³³ Although later specialized analyses of Italian Catholic life during the nineteenth century have appeared since 1992, I found these three sources, supplemented by David I. Kertzer's informative 'Religion and Society, 1798–1892', in the excellent, brief reference book, *The Short Oxford History of Italy: Italy in the Nineteenth Century*, well suited to my purpose.³⁴ Andreas Giger's 'Social Control and the Censorship of Giuseppe Verdi's Operas in Rome (1844–1859)'³⁵ and Francesco Izzo's 'Verdi, the Virgin and the Censor: The Politics of the Cult of Mary in I Lombardi alla prima crociata and Giovanna d'Arco',³⁶ provided valuable material on opera censorship.

Much of Verdi's early success was fostered by the aristocratic class with whom, as a liberal supporter of independence from Austria, he had an ambiguous relationship. I have sought knowledge of the structure and dynamics of this class through various sources. Anthony L. Cardoza's, *Aristocrats in Bourgeois Italy: The Piedmontese Nobility, 1861–1930* puts into perspective the huge gulf that existed between men such as Verdi and members of the Italian nobility.³⁷ Verdi's dealings with members of the aristocracy are also dealt with in Anselm Gerhard's two-part study, "'Cortigiani, vil razza bramata!': reti aristocratiche e fervori risorgimentali nella biografia del giovane Verdi'. This reveals the extensive network of Austrian-connected patronage and support on which Verdi relied, and from which he later distanced himself.³⁸ Gerhard's work expands on earlier scholarship. Roger Parker's 'Verdi and the Gazzetta Privilegiata di Milano' and his later dissertation, opened this line of investigation by demonstrating that the official Austrian journal was willing to publicize performances of the relatively unknown Verdi's early compositions because he had become something of a protégé of pro-Austrian members of the Società Filarmonica.³⁹

In gaining a perspective on the status of women in nineteenth-century Italy, I found Susan Rutherford's recent work, *Verdi, Opera, Women*,⁴⁰ to be a masterly synthesis of Italian social history, gender studies, Verdian biography, and opera analysis. Rutherford deals with situations and activities in which women are involved, such as war, marriage, romance, prayer etc., discussing them in a sociological context, while interweaving consideration of how Verdi chose to depict women in these situations. In dealing with such a broad overview, however, Rutherford is allowed little scope to investigate why Verdi may have made these choices. She mentions some well-established biographical points concerning Strepponi and Stolz, but neither discusses in detail how these might have influenced Verdi, nor ventures beyond deferential discretion into the areas relevant to my study. Rutherford makes minimal use of original letters. These are all issues with which I engage in this book.

Michel Foucault's, *Madness and Civilization*, and *The History of Sexuality, Vol I, Introduction*; Elaine Showalter's, *The Female Malady*; and Bram

Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siècle Culture*, prepared and informed my understanding of nineteenth-century male attitudes to women and sexuality as a potential form of pathology, and the artistic representations based on these attitudes.⁴¹ David A. Richards in *Tragic Manhood and Democracy: Verdi's Voice and the Powers of Musical Art*, gives earlier studies a more broadly construed meaning, putting women within the same context of alienation as gay men and discussing Verdi's own alienation through subjection to the *patria potestà* of his father. He connects what he calls Verdi's 'suppressed voice' in his mid-century operas with patriarchal relationships. This was of value to my investigation of Verdi's subservience to *patria potestà* and its consequent impact on his relationships with women.⁴² A similar point is made by Leo Karl Gerhartz in 'Klangplädoyer für die humane Gesellschaft Der Sonderfall *La traviata* in Verdis Schaffen' in "*Die Wirklichkeit erfinden ist besser*".⁴³ David I. Kertzer's research has been of particular relevance to analysing Giuseppina Strepponi's career, in particular his chapter 'Syphilis, Foundlings, and Wetnurses in Nineteenth-Century Italy'.⁴⁴

The long history of the relationship of courtesans to female theatrical performers has been extensively discussed in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*.⁴⁵ This study reveals that female opera singers could be regarded with some of the same suspicion as courtesans. John Rosselli, whose *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario*,⁴⁶ explores the exploitation experienced by singers, gives more information on the performers themselves in *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession*.⁴⁷ Susan Rutherford in *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930*, also provides instances of individual singers who 'straddled uneasily the fault-lines between "diva" and "whore"'.⁴⁸

Further to the historical concept of the 'diva' and its attendant negative stereotypes, the work of Hilary Poriss, specifically, 'Divas and Divos' in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*,⁴⁹ of J. Q. Davies, 'Gautier's "Diva": The First French Uses of the Word', in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*,⁵⁰ and Mary Ann Smart's article, 'The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz',⁵¹ have been valuable in putting into historical perspective the professional and emotional costs of operatic celebrity. In addition, works such as Julian Rushton's 'The Prima Donna Creates', also in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*,⁵² Poriss's article, 'A Madwoman's Choice: Aria Substitution in "Lucia di Lammermoor"',⁵³ Karen Henson's 'Verdi, Victor Maurel and fin-de-siècle Operatic Performance',⁵⁴ Juliet Forshaw's 'Osip Petrov, Anna Petrova-Vorobyova and the Development of Low-Voiced Character Types in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera',⁵⁵ and Claudio Vellutini's 'Adina *par excellence*: Eugenia Tadolini and the Performing Tradition of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* in Vienna',⁵⁶ have informed my knowledge of the collaborative and selective contributions made by singers who thereby earned unacknowledged creative credit for their involvement in operatic works.

Bruna Bertolo's *Donne del Risorgimento: Le eroine invisibili dell'unità d'Italia* is a broad-ranging volume redressing the male-oriented imbalance of

Risorgimento literature.⁵⁷ A short section devoted to the Maffei salon and an extensive chapter on Cristina Di Belgiojoso, are helpful as a preliminary guide.

The comparative study of voice types and roles, some taken by Giuseppina Strepponi, and designated as ‘assoluta’ roles by Geoffrey S. Riggs in *The Assoluta Voice in Opera, 1797–1847*, brings to light a uniquely strenuous class of soprano repertoire.⁵⁸ This exhaustive study has been invaluable in comparing aspects of the vocal career of Giuseppina Strepponi with that of Teresa Stolz. Emilio Sala’s *The Sounds of Paris in Verdi’s La Traviata* also draws intriguing connections between the music of this opera and Verdi’s experience of Parisian boulevard theatre at times relevant to his relationship with Strepponi.⁵⁹ The historical and musical analyses provided by Julian Budden’s *The Operas of Verdi*, have proved invaluable as an integrated resource for investigating and comparing how the operas developed and referring to première casts. In the case of *Aida*, it provides more background information than that contained in the Dover score and also complements Hans Busch’s documentary history.⁶⁰

Biographies

The biographical literature on Verdi is extensive. In particular, those works by the two major scholars, Philip Gossett, whose meticulous research on Verdian compositional intention and authentic performance underpins the Critical Edition, and Roger Parker, whose revelations clarify the dynamics of Verdi’s early career, necessarily inform a study of Verdi’s life and works. For my research, however, the two most important secondary sources, notwithstanding their age in academic publishing terms, were Frank Walker’s *The Man Verdi*,⁶¹ and Mary Jane Phillips-Matz’s, *Verdi: A Biography*.⁶² A modern, comprehensive biography has yet to supersede them. Neither book, however, analyses Verdi’s music. While opening invaluable avenues of investigation, these works also possess inherent weaknesses which will be discussed during the course of my book.

Walker’s book focusses on important times and relationships in Verdi’s life, without recourse to a chronological format. Yet he does provide chronological tables of the performance careers of Giuseppina Strepponi and Teresa Stolz, derived from contemporary journals and programmes, which are of inestimable value. Walker is indulgent towards Giuseppina Strepponi and his comments on Teresa Stolz leave much scope for a reassessment of a woman so influential in Verdi’s latter years.⁶³

Since its publication in 1993, Phillips-Matz’s book has stood as the most comprehensive chronological biography of Verdi in English. She has been at pains to support her assertions with forensic detail, uncovering clues unobserved by Walker. She also makes many speculations regarding Verdi’s life which are viewed with suspicion by some Verdi scholars.⁶⁴ Whether or not substantiation for her speculations comes to light, Phillips-Matz’s well-researched chapters and useful chronology of Verdi’s financial transactions constitute a *vade mecum* for English-speaking researchers.

Marcello Conati's *Encounters with Verdi* provides a wealth of impressions from people who met Verdi between 1845 and 1900.⁶⁵ Conati's footnotes are as valuable as the reports themselves. William Weaver's *Verdi: A Documentary Study* provides facsimiles of documents, images and transcriptions and is the best visual 'biography' available.⁶⁶ Julian Budden's *Verdi*, in Part II, offers astute analyses of libretti and music, as compressed versions of his monumental trilogy, *The Operas of Verdi*.⁶⁷

As a postscript to rigorous research, it has been instructive to read the more journalistic *Giuseppe Verdi a Montecatini: L'ultima grande stagione creativa del Maestro (1880–1901)* by Mauro Lubrani and Vasco Ferretti.⁶⁸ Conceived as a public relations exercise for the resort town of Montecatini Terme, the book's text and images bring to life Verdi's last creative season (often in Stolz's company) in a genial although unscholarly fashion.

There are two Czechoslovakian biographies of Stolz, J. Solin's *T. Stolzová: První a nejslavnější Aida* and Otaka Specinger's *Nové o Tereza Stolzová*, neither of which was available to me. Christine Fischer's short entry within 'Von gefallenen Engeln und Amazonen: Geschlecht als ästhetische und soziale Kategorie im Werk Verdis' in *Verdi Handbuch* discusses the influence of Teresa Stolz, Margherita Barezzi and Giuseppina Strepponi on Verdi and his work. Gustavo Marchesi in *Verdi: D'amor sull'ali rosee*, also investigates the three women and their relationships with Verdi.⁶⁹ Other than these writings, there exist only the four-page article by Stanislav Jares (also giving biographical sketches of Verdi, Margherita Barezzi and Giuseppina Strepponi)⁷⁰ and Günter Engler's *Über Verdi: Von Freunden und Gegnern, Musikern und Schriftstellern – Eine Anthologie*, which includes comment on Verdi by Teresa Stolz.⁷¹ As most of these sources simply rehearse well-known facts and opinions, a thoroughly researched English-language biography of Stolz, having had access to all documentation, still awaits.

Of the two Italian biographies of Giuseppina Strepponi, Mercedes Mundula's *La moglie di Verdi*⁷² is an intriguing, but sentimental and not always reliable portrait of Verdi and his wife, drawing much from Alessandro Luzio's *Carteggi*,⁷³ but also quoting Giuseppina without attribution. The book is undocumented. Elena Cazzulani's *Giuseppina Strepponi: Biografia*,⁷⁴ though offering a bibliography and appendices on Giuseppina's performances and vocal ability, reads more like historical fiction than authoritative biography, giving subjective commentary and quoting imagined conversations. Marcello Conati's articles, 'Giuseppina in Paris',⁷⁵ and 'La sensibilità sociale e culturale di Giuseppina Strepponi Verdi',⁷⁶ add to our knowledge of sections of Strepponi's life, but without quite engaging in hagiography, still keep a respectful distance from potential controversy. Gaia Servadio's *The Real Traviata* is still the only English-language biography of Giuseppina Strepponi and, while relying on many scholarly sources and having an index, does not provide endnotes in its 'Acknowledgments and Bibliography' section on each chapter.⁷⁷ Though slightly sensational in tone, it gives a well-constructed chronological account and remains a biography to which scholars turn in their studies on Strepponi.⁷⁸ This

fact indicates that an academically rigorous English-language biography of Giuseppina Strepponi Verdi is well past its due date.

The workings of another person's mind can never be fully known, nor fully account for his artistic creations. Persistent sympathy with certain themes can, however, suggest a biographical link to creative preoccupations. One such link, in Verdi's case, appears to have been an abiding sensitivity to being controlled by others. In Chapter 2, therefore, I investigate Verdi's 'ethical world' and the extent to which, from his early years, he was indebted to, and thus to some extent controlled by, the Church, his home community of Busseto, family, patrons, and the Austrian and other authorities. In addition, he was constrained by professional and musical conventions, and audience expectations, during the early part of his career. Having established this background, I consider how such forces conflicted with Verdi's need for self-assertive control over others as master, protector or patron. This discussion leads to a consideration of the female section of nineteenth-century Italy's population, deemed by default to be inferior.

In Chapter 3, I examine the subservient status of women which existed in Italy during Verdi's time, and the manifestations of his attitude to their role. Among the groups of women who stood outside the norm were those involved in the *Risorgimento* and those of the wealthy aristocracy, some of whose relationships with the ambitious Verdi I also investigate. Another group of exceptional women included those who attained special status as theatrical and operatic performers. In Chapter 4, therefore, I explore Verdi's relationships with selected members of this group, and, as for Chapter 3, his search for deference from those he deemed worthy of friendship.

The 'exceptional women' who figure in the chapters following, were not only found deserving of Verdi's intimate friendship, but found him worthy of theirs, and were able to act on this at vital junctures in his career and over extended periods thereafter. In Chapters 5 and 6, I provide a detailed examination of the biography and career of Verdi's wife, Giuseppina Strepponi and in Chapters 7 and 8, those of the soprano, Teresa Stolz. I discuss and compare aspects of their professional careers and relationships with Verdi, drawing on analogies from Verdian roles with which they were involved at salient points in his career. I investigate the part played by the letters and personal friendship of Teresa Stolz in Verdi's final creative phase.

In my conclusion, I note the subservient status within the social hierarchy under which Verdi laboured during his early career and the pressure which this exerted on him to assert his superiority. Keeping in view the culture of purity and submission imposed upon women in nineteenth-century Catholic Italy by the Marian ideal, and their subservience to men within the overall social structure, I note Verdi's preference for relationships with women worthy of him, by virtue of wealth, aristocratic birth, intellectual or professional accomplishment, but still expected by him to show deference because of the perceived intrinsic 'inferiority' of their sex. Having explored Strepponi's high intellectual and professional accomplishment, but low moral repute and physical status at

career's end, making her worthy of Verdi, but susceptible to his dominance, I assert that her union with him entailed a forfeiture of independence against which she continuously struggled. In comparison, I have adduced evidence of Stolz's more detached, uncomplicated, less cerebral and less guilt-ridden friendship. I conclude that, through the immediacy of her letters and her personal companionship, undervalued in past scholarship, she provided Verdi with a stimulating conduit to the active operatic life and carefree attributes which he found sustaining in his final creative years.

Of the public myths which remain on the outskirts of Verdian lore, that concerning vapid and arrogant operatic 'divas', cannot withstand close scrutiny when applied in the case of either Strepponi or Stolz. Each of these professionally skilled women functioned as a supportive 'handmaiden', coincidentally tied to identification with theatrical portrayals of submission at crucial points in Verdi's career. A vestigial myth of the ideally happy couple, totally disassociated from the burden of Strepponi's past and able to conquer the temporary interruption of the Stolz 'episode', a myth so carefully preserved by *i coniugi Verdi*, still surfaces occasionally, despite Phillips-Matz's investigations. Least of all can the myth of Verdi as the 'self-made man' (already debunked by scholars), find acceptance any longer. Nor yet can that of the totally self-mastered man, 'not anyone's slave', confidently at ease with himself and free of resentment, until his final years. As we shall see, Verdi's success owed much, not only to others with whom he was professionally associated, but to those two exceptional women with whom he was intimate.

Notes

- 1 Verdi to Antonio Barezzi, 21 January 1852, quoted in Rescigno, 260:

Ciò ha svelato le mie opinioni, le mie azioni, le mie volontà, la mia vita, quasi direi, pubblica, e poiché siamo in via di fare rivalazioni non ho difficoltà alcuna alzare la cortina che vela i misteri racchiusi fra quattro mura, e dirle della mia vita di casa.

- 2 Gregory Harwood, *Giuseppe Verdi: A Guide to Research*.
 3 Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi*.
 4 Frank Walker, Introduction to *The Man Verdi*, xvi.
 5 Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, Introduction to *Verdi: A Biography*, xii.
 6 Hans Busch, Introduction to *Verdi's Aida: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents*, xxi.
 7 Lucia Galli, 'Gli eredi di Giuseppe Verdi se le suonano di santa ragione', *Il Giornale*, it 29 April 2013, 05524110961. See also, Anon, 'Villa Verdi a rischio asta. Corte d'Appello, l'eredità a tutti i nipoti', *Bassa Piacentina Cronaca*, 22 February 2014.
 8 INSV collections to which I have referred are: *Carteggio Verdi-Cammarano (1843-1852)*; *Carteggio Verdi-Ricordi 1880-1881*; *Carteggio Verdi-Somma*; *Carteggio Verdi-Luccardi*; *Carteggio Verdi-Morosini 1842-1901*.
 9 Eduardo Rescigno, *Giuseppe Verdi: Lettere*.
 10 Marcello Conati and Mario Medici, *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence*.
 11 Marcello Conati, *La bottega della musica: Verdi e la Fenice*.
 12 Marcello De Angelis, *Le carte dell'impresario: Melodramma e costume teatrale nell'ottocento*.