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2. *Ernani* (1845)

As early as 1844, Henry Fothergill Chorley, whose tastes and beliefs were marked by a strong tint of conservatism, introduced his readers to the operatic composer who was creating a *furor* all over Europe. The critic, who had not yet had the occasion to hear any of Verdi's works, availed himself of the recent publication in London of some of his operatic airs. Chorley felt obliged to turn his attention to the emerging Italian composer because of his increasing popularity and on account of those recent events that "had called attention of our English public to the modern style, or rather no-style, of Italian singing."¹ Popularity, rather than value, had compelled him to take into account the recent rise of the young Verdi. Chorley's conservative attitude emerges as soon as he sets his aesthetic coordinates and defines the criteria determining success in any operatic undertaking.

But first, we must remind the reader that the distinctive basis of Italian Opera, from its outset, has been melody—melody in recitative, in air, in concerted piece, and in chorus; the dramatic expression of the moment being largely left to the singer. Even in the German musical drama, though the voice has been often assigned tasks too ungracious to be ever well performed, under the notion of rendering it a mere instrument in the composer's hands, and the adaptation of sound to sense has been more closely studied, still melody has been indispensable to success—in the orchestra if not on the stage.²

Chorley defined melody not only as the true foundation of Italian Opera, but also as a condition for success in the more rational German musical

1 *The Athenaeum*, August 31, 1844, p. 797.

2 *Ibid.*

drama where melody, even if associated with the orchestra rather than with the voice, could not be neglected. Dramatic expression was to be understood as an additional ingredient left to the singer's acting skills. In his analysis of the current state of the musical and dramatic arts, Chorley referred to what, in his eyes, appeared to be a widespread tendency all over Europe: getting rid of what was essential, melody, and emphasising what he thought to be of secondary importance, shapeless dramatisation. This lamentable tendency was noticeable also in Hector Berlioz and, more interestingly, in Richard Wagner, whose operas, Chorley held, "we have heard rapturously bepraised, because they contain no tunes which any one can carry away."³

Chorley's idea of melody involved form and symmetry, features dear to Rossini but neglected by Bellini and his successors under the pretence of "dramatizing the style." Melodic dramatisation, on the other hand, consisted of vocal passages — shapeless recitatives — which merely functioned as the dramatic expression of the crudest passions and were devoid of any melodic interest; compounding this degradation was the intolerable volume of the orchestra, increased for dramatic effect, which reminded Chorley of the janissary bands, with the strident sound of the wind instruments, the massive boom of the drums and the metallic clash of cymbals. Even when modern composers strove to respect the tenets of canonical composition by adopting symmetrical dispositions of phrases, they failed to reach a sufficient degree of novelty:

Bellini's successors, less vigorous in invention, have outdone him in renouncing all firmness and ordinance of construction, producing, it is true, tunes in the canonical number of bars required by the poetic ear, but without the slightest novelty of combination or phrase. In short, Italian invention seems fast advancing towards a point at which, whether the idea be old or new it matters little, so that the singer has a *spianato* passage to bawl or to sigh out, either *solus* or in unison with his comrades, a semblance of intensity and contrivance being given by a use of the orchestra, licentious enough to make Cimarosa and Paisiello (those colourists as tender but as consummate in their art as Watteau) turn in their graves.⁴

Having outlined the general framework, Chorley moved on to address Verdi's *Ernani*, which did not belie the general trend: as he could see

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

from the score, Verdi's work was devoid of any new melody, while the concerted music struck "as a shade worthier and more individual than his songs."⁵ Despite the presence of the much longed-for ordinance in construction and symmetry, this music was likely to produce a peculiarly monotonous effect because of the intrinsic lack of inventiveness that the continuous repetition of the first melodic idea manifested. Verdi's melodies were worn, hackneyed and meaningless, his harmonies and progressions crude, while only his orchestration appeared to have value. Chorley lamented that Verdi's music lacked that fresh and sweet melody which he considered the true foundation of vocal music. However, Chorley's antagonism was tentative, as he had not been afforded the opportunity to attend any of Verdi's operas at that time.⁶

On 17 February 1845, *The Times* announced the programme of the forthcoming ante-Easter opera season at Her Majesty's Theatre: it promised great brilliancy. Giulia Grisi was the *prima donna*, while Napoleone Moriani and Mario, alias Giovanni Matteo De Candia were both engaged as tenors; the tenor Leone Corelli, the inimitable *primo basso* Luigi Lablache and the baritone Luciano Fornasari were also announced. Other names were Marietta Brambilla, Giovanna "Juana" Rossi Caccia, Anaide (Jeanne Anaïs) Castellan, Rita Borio, Felice Bottelli, and Paul-Bernard Barroilhet. Michael Costa would conduct the orchestra. The first opera of the season was *Ernani* by the young composer Giuseppe Verdi, a work that—it was stated—had created a furore on the continent.⁷

A similar announcement was published in *The Athenaeum* on 22 February, an issue which included further previews, among them Verdi's *I Lombardi* and *Nabucco*, Luigi Ricci's *Scaramuccia* and Donizetti's *La favorita*. In conclusion, the piece remarked on the difficulty involved in preparing a successful operatic programme, for the manager must appeal to three different parties: "the fashionable many, who only care for what is the mode of the hour, the amateur few, who are apt to be somewhat impracticable in their requisitions, and the singers, whose name 'as a legion' is Egotism and Indolence."⁸

5 *Ibid.*

6 Robert Bledsoe, "Henry Fothergill Chorley and the Reception of Verdi's Early Operas in England," *Victorian Studies* 28 (1985), pp. 631–55.

7 *The Times*, February 17, 1845, p. 5.

8 *The Athenaeum*, February 22, 1845, p. 204.

Finally, on 8 March, *Ernani* was performed at Her Majesty's Theatre, followed by the ballet *Eoline, ou la Dryade*, taken from Johann Karl August Musäus's *Libussa*. However, as Benjamin Lumley—manager of Her Majesty's Theatre—put it, *Ernani* did not contribute in any marked degree to the theatre's financial prosperity of that year.⁹ The London public, before which it was the manager's duty to bring the greatest novelties of the day, reacted with a sense of indifference that was absolutely consistent with its notoriously conservative habits: "That it excited the general enthusiasm awarded to it so lavishly in Italy, cannot be asserted; that it was a failure, may be emphatically denied. The general result of the first introduction of Verdi to the English public was a feeling of hesitation and doubt."¹⁰



Fig. 3 Benjamin Lumley, in a portrait from the frontispiece of his *Reminiscences of the Opera* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1864).

9 Benjamin Lumley, *Reminiscences of the Opera* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1864), pp. 103–05. The real author of Lumley's *Reminiscences* has been identified as Harriet Grote (see Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, p. 160).

10 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

Chorley's review of *Ernani*, published on 15 March in the columns of *The Athenaeum*, shows no sign of either doubt or hesitation. His review touched on three issues: the operatic libretto and its dramatic implications; Verdi's musical treatment; the singers and their interpretation. The choice of the libretto showed at first sight that Italians were now looking to the French Grand Opéra for their model of serious musical drama. Both the length of the drama, with its four acts, and its treatment revealed a tendency that seemed to explain, at least in part, why such features as melodiousness and melodic ornamentation were no longer to be found in the Italian operatic music. "Violent passions, elaborate groupings and combinations of incident are treated fearlessly; tragical declamation and situation are obviously now thought to be as necessary as the setting-off the singers."¹¹

This new tendency strongly contrasted with the tradition embodied by Domenico Cimarosa, whose *Gli Orazi e i Curiazi* now seemed to belong to another world, a remote past to look at and long for with a sense of nostalgia.¹² However, although much had been recently achieved with regard to both drama and music, the same could not be said about the vocal art. While drama had gained in force, probability and contrast, and the new school had established greater musical scope, vocal art seemed now to signify what Chorley defined as "arms and legs" gesticulation that left no space for proper vocalisation. Chorley even wondered whether the dramas of Victor Hugo were any better than the less complicated traditional plots of such operas as *Norma* or *La sonnambula*.

The scrutiny of Verdi's compositional achievement was not flattering; the critic accused the composer of plagiarism and was able to point out a good number of passages that supported his claim. On the other hand, Verdi showed "a disposition to study new effects in the concerted music, caused possibly by the present depreciated state of Italian vocal accomplishment, and by the consequent disposition to emulate the energy and grandeur of French theatrical music of combination."¹³ The

11 *The Athenaeum*, March 15, 1845, p. 275.

12 Cimarosa's *Gli Orazi e i Curiazi* appeared at the King's Theatre in 1805, with nine performances, and in 1806 with eleven. It was revived again in 1814, 1815 and 1829. See Fenner, *Opera in London*, p. 111.

13 *The Athenaeum*, March 15, 1845, p. 275.

tendency to imitate the Grand Opéra depended, to a large extent, on the poor condition of vocal music in what was once the Land of Song. Verdi's choruses were spirited and able to move the audience, and in fact a certain number of pieces were encored; still, Chorley reproached the way Verdi treated the voice:

Music without uncouthness of interval more ruinous to the voice than Signor Verdi's has, probably, never been produced. The *soprano* part is perpetually above the stave;—requiring, moreover, force and declamation, and not such silvery warblings as Cimarosa and the more considerate elder Italians delighted to allot to the *soprano sfogato*. To make matters worse, the orchestra is for the most part at full strength—very frequently *fortissimo*, leaving the poor *prima donna* no choice, save scream or pantomime.¹⁴

Again, Chorley longed for those palmy days in which Cimarosa was able to string pearls of flourishing music by accommodating a captivating melody to the natural compass of the voice, in opposition to the ruinous treatment Verdi now reserved for it. Furthermore, the noisiness of the orchestra left singers in a state of exhaustion and frustrated all their efforts to make their voices audible. Chorley's review concluded with a survey of the performers, addressing both the dramatic and vocal skills of each individual and explicitly suggesting that the older school of singing and interpreting had been replaced by that "stout and naked method of the new Italians, which is meant to do duty as grand expression."¹⁵

Chorley's verdict is consistent with the fears and doubts anticipated in his first scrutiny of the opera: Verdi, who belonged to the new Italian school, seemed to favour crude and bloody dramatic plots; his preference for declamation, to which melody was sacrificed, was consistent with that inclination, since the device was particularly effectual insofar as the strongest emotions were involved; his treatment of the voice, now forced to extremes for the sake of dramatic effect, was simply ruinous; the noisiness of the orchestra was such as to force singers to shout and scream all the time; the French model seemed now to prevail upon the Italian classical tradition represented by Cimarosa. So far, Chorley's criticism does not appear to pay particular attention to the reaction

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, p. 276.

of the general public: despite his reference to the number of encores allotted to a single aria or duet, and to that feeling of curiosity that he said had accompanied the production of *Ernani* in London, it would be difficult to deduce from his words the extent to which the judgment of the knowledgeable few diverged from that of the fashionable many.

On 25 October 1845, *The Athenaeum* published an article in the columns of the foreign correspondence, calling the reader's attention to the dramatic change taking place in the Italian operatic theatre: a new generation of noisy composers were imposing themselves on those classics among whom Rossini was now to find his place. In that class of newcomers, Verdi's name emerged uncontested although his merits appeared to be highly questionable. The correspondent, in all probability Chorley himself, who was in Florence at that time,¹⁶ having attended a performance of *I Lombardi* at the Teatro dei Solleciti, complained about the disproportion between the orchestral and vocal forces and about the small space in which they were confined. The accomplishments of those new composers who aimed at the dramatic grandeur of the French operas and tried to replicate it in the much smaller Italian theatres, the correspondent held, resulted in an absurd parade. The verdict on Verdi was unequivocal:

The grand opera of the French must no longer be grumbled at by the Southerners as an arena where fine voices are butchered to make a Paris holiday! Signor Verdi being the most desperate tearer and taxer of his singers who has yet appeared. I think the characteristics of his music are easily mastered; amounting to a certain largeness of outline and *brio* in his slow concerted music,—a picturesque feeling for instrumentation, and a curious absence of fresh melody. Almost all his *cabaletti* proceed by the starts and stops and syncopations, which Pacini introduced so happily, and wore threadbare; since the device,—however effective it sounded in 'I tuoi frequenti palpiti' [*Niobe*, 1826], and 'Lungi dal caro ben' [*La sposa fedele*, 1819]—loses all piquancy, when it becomes an understood thing, that the phrase must begin on the second note of the bar, and the accents fall cross-wise. Then, in the mere filling up of *appoggiatura* and passage, Signor Verdi does not appear to have made the smallest discovery.¹⁷

In short, Verdi offered a few elements of variety, in a continuous attempt to reach one exaggerated climax after the other; unless he

16 Hewlett, *Henry Fothergill Chorley*, 2: 63–64.

17 *The Athenaeum*, October 25, 1845, p. 25.

showed himself capable of composing in a way that would appeal to the educated ear, a short and unsuccessful career would be the result. A similar judgment was presented again in a contribution published in the column “Music and the Drama” on 17 January 1846: *The Verdi-Mania*. The publication of Verdi’s *6 Romanze* in London in 1845, by Addison & Hodson, afforded the critic a further opportunity of elaborating on the most popular Italian living composer, even though this effort was a degrading concession. Again, the antagonism between popularity and true value in music was perceived as one of the causes that had led to the disgraceful condition in which musical art currently lay. The verdict was negative—only one of the six vocal pieces was considered acceptable—and failed to conceal the critic’s animosity, notwithstanding a final attempt to defend his presumed objectivity.

Let it not be thought that we have been needlessly severe, or “breaking a butterfly on the wheel.” We too often speak in uncompromising phrases of our own young composers striving for popularity to have any excuse, did we spare those who, having obtained it, prove themselves so destitute of sustaining power as Sig. Verdi.¹⁸

In 1897 Frederick Crowest (1850–1927), author of monographs on *Cherubini* (1890) and *Beethoven* (1903), and of historical essays like *The Great Tone Poets: Being Short Memoirs of the Greater Musical Composers* (1908) and *The Story of the Art of Music* (1912), published his *Verdi: Man and Musician, his Biography with Especial Reference to his English Experiences*. A glance at Crowest’s account leads us to suspect that the severity of some critics did not reflect the apparently much more appreciative reaction manifested by the general public.

The Audience, if not the critics, were delighted with the work [*Ernani*]. The characters so musically individualised, the new and attractive orchestration, the *motive* distinguishing the singer, the perfect *ensemble*, the well-proportioned whole opera—all these thoroughly Verdinian [*sic*] characteristics were seized upon and admired.¹⁹

Crowest also reproduced a couple of passages taken from *The Illustrated London News* of 15 March 1845, in which an even more enthusiastic report made its appearance: “Encore followed encore from the rising

18 *The Athenaeum*, January 17, 1846, p. 73.

19 Frederick F. Crowest, *Verdi: Man and Musician, His Biography with Especial Reference to his English Experience* (London: John Milton, 1897), p. 63.

of the curtain [...] Solos, duets, and trios were applauded with equal fervour, but the concerted pieces created the most surprise and admiration [...] The ensembles possess a novelty and an impassioned fervour unprecedented."²⁰

The critic of *The Illustrated London News* had already tried to do full justice to the young composer in the previous issue, where he had acknowledged Verdi's attempt to formulate a new definition of the operatic genre. Even though he was lacking in some of those traditionally cherished qualities that were considered typical of the Italian tradition, the composer was clearly possessed of a true dramatic power. Moreover, the objection raised by some critics, that Verdi was unable to compose nice melodies, was incorrect, for occasional hints of captivating melody were also present in his compositions.

From the very first bars of this opera [*Ernani*], you feel the power the composer possesses of evoking and describing the deepest sensations of the human breast. There is a massive grandeur in the introduction, followed almost immediately by a spirited chorus, which far surpasses the old form of an overture. Throughout this lyrical composition, the author has principally relied for effect on dramatic situations, combined with concerted pieces. This does not preclude snatches of bewitching melody, which, from time to time, relieve the ear from the pressure of the combined power of voices, whilst each principal singer has assigned to him more than one solo, in which to display the range, the depth, and the fascinating sleights of his voice.²¹

On 15 March the same journal commented positively on the concerted pieces and the marked individuality in the treatment of the voices, and paid the composer a great compliment regarding the distribution of the vocal parts. These, together with the impassioned fervour that characterised the whole composition, were pronounced the composer's best achievements.

The composer has managed his score in the introductions to his concerted pieces so as to allow each singer in his turn to develop the resources and beauties of his voice—the diversity of feeling by which the personages are agitated is constantly felt, and thus the *ensembles* possess a novelty and an impassioned fervour unprecedented. Verdi has been unusually

²⁰ *The Illustrated London News*, March 15, 1845, p. 167.

²¹ "The Opening of Her Majesty's Theatre," *The Illustrated London News*, March 8, 1845, p. 151.

felicitous in his distribution of the vocal parts. The various characters are so musically individualised, and so peculiarly accompanied by the orchestra, that the voice of the singer becomes as easily recognisable by the *motivi*, as he does by his costume. To secure this is the highest achievement of the dramatic composer.²²

Later that year the same critic confirmed his judgment. The sad state in which Italian opera lay was to be redeemed by the only living composer of genius.

A better state of things is, however, we trust, approaching. The appearance of a composer of so much originality of genius as Verdi heralds, it may be hoped, that of a new and more ambitious school, whose masters will not be satisfied with tickling the ear and pleasing the fancy, but will seek for the more permanent and legitimate sources of effect.²³

The critic restated his opinion in August that year, when he elaborated upon the novelties presented over the past season.

It [*Ernani*] presents the real type of the lyrical tragedy, where feeling finds its appropriate expression in music. Musical judges allotted to it the palm of sterling merit, but the leaning to public taste was against the probabilities of its obtaining here high favour it has elsewhere enjoyed [...] The meretricious sentimental style of the modern school to which, of late years, we have become so accustomed was a bad preparation for the full appreciation of such work as this. *Ernani*, however, at first only half understood, gradually worked its way into the public favour, and was given a greater number of times than any opera of the season; finally, it might be pronounced completely successful.²⁴

Even if this attitude, as printed in *The Illustrated London News*, led some to suspect that puffery hid behind such positive judgments, it is possible that the general public, although hesitant and undecided when first exposed to Verdi's new dramatic style, came to accept and even appreciate *Ernani*. Benjamin Lumley's *Reminiscences* call attention to a couple of relevant points. Verdi, who had at his command passion, fire and strong dramatic effect, was confronted with a public that did not seem to be prepared to give its own verdict as to his merits. Widespread feelings of resistance and hostility had qualified the

22 *The Illustrated London News*, March 15, 1845, p. 167.

23 *The Illustrated London News*, July 5, 1845, p. 10.

24 "Her Majesty's. Last night.—Retrospect of the Season," *The Illustrated London News*, August 23, 1845, p. 122.

reception of all previous Italian composers when compared with their immediate predecessors. Rossini had been the object of general condemnation when compared with Domenico Cimarosa and Giovanni Battista Pergolesi; Bellini had been condemned when compared with Rossini; Donizetti had been pronounced the unworthy plagiarist of the “now admired” Bellini. Now it was Verdi’s turn to be compared with his predecessors and to suffer the consequences of such an unequal confrontation. Verdi’s music was promoting novelty to a degree that was guaranteed to provoke the harsh reactions of English classicists, who were distinguished by “a great spirit of opposition to all novelty and an assertion of excellence existing only in the past.”²⁵ According to Lumley, *Ernani* ran for several nights with a moderate degree of success and even such popular favourites as Napoleone Moriani and Luciano Fornasari struggled to gather fresh laurels.

On 10 March 1845 the critic of *The Times*, probably still Charles Lamb Kenney, dedicated a long and articulate piece to the first performance of *Ernani* in London. The critic described Verdi as the most innovative composer of the moment, the one creating a musical epoch, and informed his readers of rumours regarding a new Italian school of opera. The rumours, he maintained, were totally groundless. The reason became evident as soon as one listened to the first air sung by the tenor (the Cavatina “Come rugiada al cespite”) which, he wrote, maintained a continuity with any other work heard over the previous years.²⁶ Then the critic referred to the balance between the voices and the orchestra in terms that sound encouraging, if not positive.

In his instrumentation he shows himself superior to many of his contemporaries. It is tasteful and judicious, and does not overwhelm the voices, with a hurricane of noise. His concerted pieces are managed with skill, and the septet which occurs in the finale to the first act is one of

25 Benjamin Lumley, *Reminiscences of the Opera* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1864), p. 104. Lumley’s analysis was correct; some of Chorley’s arguments against Verdi seem to echo the objections Richard Edgcumbe (1764–1839) raised against Rossini in the 1820s. For instance, Edgcumbe expressed his strong dislike of Rossini’s noisy orchestration and claimed that he abused the voice: “It is really distressing to hear the leading voice strained almost to cracking in order to be audible over a full chorus and full orchestra, strengthened often by trumpets, trombones, kettle-drums and all the noisiest instruments.” Richard Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences of an Old Amateur, Chiefly Respecting the Italian Opera in England for Fifty Years, From 1773 to 1823* (London: W. Clarke, 1827), pp. 118–29.

26 *The Times*, March 10, 1845, p. 5.

the best pieces in the opera. His melodies are pleasing, but neither very original nor very striking, and the work is certainly more effective as an *ensemble* than on account of isolated portions.²⁷

The review proceeds with a description of the plot, with which some members of the London public would have been already familiar, an English version having been prepared by James Kenney and produced at Covent Garden years before under the title of *The Pledge*. In conclusion, a short review of the performers was provided, giving an account of the quality of the singers involved in the principal roles.

The verdict concerning the quality of Verdi's music was not negative, and it was accompanied by a couple of observations which invited listeners to adopt a more benevolent disposition. The critic intended to draw attention to the significance of the cultural context in which this music originated, and consequently to the critical attitude and aesthetic categories that should be adopted when assessing its value.

It is by the quality of their melody that the Italian composers must chiefly be judged. To require from them the scientific harmony of Germany, or the dramatic varied expression of France, would be to summon them before a tribunal which they themselves do not recognize; but judging of Verdi by his melody alone, we may fairly say, from the specimen we have heard, that he is not yet equal to the better works of Donizetti. There is in him, however, something of character—as, for instance, in the duet between Silvio and Ernani, when the fatal vow is made which places the life of the latter at the disposal of the former—that gives promise of better things.²⁸

A similar notion concerning the kind of cultural relativism that should inform a correct critical approach towards both a composer and his music was presented on the occasion of a later performance of *Ernani*. In our critic's opinion, both composers and music lovers were divided according to geographically-oriented inclinations; among the members of this last group he recognised two distinct classes, "those who reflect upon it [music], and those who regard it as a mere amusement."²⁹ While the first class admired the works of the Germans, the second, and more numerous, was composed of lovers of the Italian school. But the critic cautioned his readers against a mistake that, presumably, occurred

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *The Times*, March 17, 1845, p. 4.

often among music lovers and marred the judgment of both amateur and connoisseur.

The mischief is that there are enthusiasts on both schools, that cannot discover any merit in the compositions of the opposite party, and hence every work is constantly in danger of being judged by a false standard. The fact is that every work ought to be judged from its own point of view, according to the school in which it is composed. If the German taste be applied in judging of the Italian, or the Italian in judging of the German, nothing but fallacy can be the result. In considering the merits of the new composer, Giuseppe Verdi, it is necessary to admit the condition of Italian music, and to waive the contest between rival schools.³⁰

The critic was moderately appreciative of *Ernani* but also keen to point out a couple of shortcomings in Verdi's musical treatment of its dramatic subject. The first consisted in a lack of dramatic consistency in the "Scena e terzetto" that precedes the "Finale I," where the three characters sing in unison while expressing different feelings. The second concerned the gap between the dramatic situation and the quality of the music underpinning it in the concluding scene, the "Duetto—Finale Secondo" between Silva and Ernani. However, he ended his review with words of encouragement for the most promising representative of the school of Donizetti. "As a young composer he deserves to be encouraged, rather than to be judged with severity, and from what he has already done, we have a right to hope for something better."³¹

On 22 August the critic of *The Times* took leave of the past opera season with a short summary. This time his comments concerning the degree of novelty introduced by Lumley from Italy are less encouraging; the issue of melodiousness, or the lack thereof, is given as the reason why *Ernani* should not be considered a true, genuine long-lasting success.

The success of *Ernani* in this country was "fair," but not extraordinary; the "new school," of which Italian journalists had prated so much, proved a mere fiction; and while the skill of the composer was quietly commended, the want of that melody which has contributed so much to the success of all Italian *maestri*, was enough to prevent it from becoming a great favourite. [...] Verdi's name was brought to this country as that of some one very great and original, yet, as we have said, his *Ernani* produced a very trifling effect, and people were glad enough to return

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

to the operas to which they had grown accustomed. There is no Italian composer of the present day who makes a stand in this country, with the single exception of Donizetti; and between the *Lucrezia Borgia* (1839) and the *Linda di Chamouni* [sic] (1843) no one operatic novelty that can fairly be called successful has been produced.³²

When compared to the review that appeared on 17 March, this concluding observation suggests a slight, but still noticeable change in the critic's attitude; now he seems to be less inclined to recognise the composer's value and more prone to evoking Donizetti and the past generation.

As far as the periodicals taken into consideration are concerned, in 1845 Chorley was the only critic who uttered words of strong disapproval, while other commentators offered a range of milder, if not positive, opinions. Verdi's *Ernani* brought a high degree of novelty in both dramatic content and melodic treatment to the London stage, and a sense of amazement was to be expected from those less inclined to welcome novelty in any form. However, the public seem to have responded to Verdi's new opera with unbiased curiosity.



Fig. 4 Giuseppe Verdi in *The Illustrated London News*, 30 May 1846.

32 *The Times*, August 22, 1845, p. 5. Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* premiered in Milan in 1833, while *Linda di Chamounix* premiered in Vienna in 1842.