



‘A DUEL OR A DATE?’

an Examination of queer male Eroticism in Gaetano Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor (1835) and Giuseppe Verdi’s La Forza del Destino (1865)



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I declare that this dissertation is all my own work, except as indicated by the text.

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2 ABSTRACT

Academic musicology increasingly acknowledges and uplifts the voices of queer people and their contributions to opera. In performance, many opera houses, from major players such as the Royal Opera House to small local companies are making space for queer perspectives. This includes character interpretations in productions and extra material which highlights the behind-the-scenes contributions of queer composers, directors, musical directors, and so forth. This subfield of musicology is still growing, however, which means that there is a lack of research focusing on trans and nonbinary individuals, especially transmasculine people, in opera. There is also a lack of long-form analyses of the queer subtext of individual operas, and this research aims to attempt to fill both of these gaps in the research literature. The methodology for this is to place within the existing literature a number of queer analyses of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Verdi's *La Forza del Destino*. This is a theoretical experiment which is still rooted in the historical and musicological literature examining Donizetti and Verdi's conceptions of masculinity, sexuality, and male-male relationships. This also includes significant focus on transmasculine experience and identity as it relates to *La Forza del Destino*.

3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 CREATING REPRESENTATION

In an interview with *Advocate* magazine, tenor Russell Thomas, who identifies himself as a Black, queer man, says that what he believes makes opera accessible and not an elitist art form is the fact 'that these stories can be done in ways that are relatable to our present-day lives'.¹ While many people, both opera fans and people who are not interested in or knowledgeable about opera, hold the opinion that opera is something which is for the most part the reserve of people who are in one way or another privileged, Thomas argues the opposite. He goes on to explain that 'these [characters] may be in 17th-century costumes and they may sing in a foreign language but that these experiences are real-life experiences, and people experience them all the time'.² And this is something which, even in a traditional production, an opera can very well exemplify. In fact, I would go further and argue that this is in some cases the origins of opera: after all, when Ezio, the baritone in Verdi's *Attila*, declares during the prologue of the opera in his duet with the title character, '*Avrai tu l'universo, resti l'Italia a me!*'³ ('You may have the universe, but leave Italy to me!'⁴), in its proper historical context -- an opera composed by a man who was not just deeply embroiled in the *Risorgimento* (the period of history during which Italy was coagulating from several independent Kingdoms and smaller states into one contiguous nation) but who served in the Italian Parliament -- is quite clearly not simply an ancient Roman character venting his in-character frustrations divorced from any real-world political landscape. In the *Advocate* interview with Chiedu Egbuniwe, Thomas explains his belief that, by diversifying the people on the stage and behind the scenes, the audience itself also diversifies and in this way becomes larger: 'Even if they don't know a whole lot about [opera], they think, *Hey, there's a Black guy on that poster outside the Met. I wonder what that is, I wonder what that's about. I want to go see what that is*'.⁵

¹ Chiedu Egbuniwe, "Superstar Tenor Russell Thomas on Being a Black Queer Man in Opera," *Advocate*, December 22nd 2022, <https://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/2022/12/09/superstar-tenor-russell-thomas-being-black-queer-man-opera>

² Ibid.

³ Giuseppe Verdi, "ATTILA: Dramma Lirico in un Prologo e Tre Atti," *Libretti d'Opera*, November 28th 2015, http://www.librettidopera.it/zpdf/attila_ts.pdf

⁴ Translation mine

⁵ Egbuniwe, "Superstar Tenor Russell Thomas on Being a Black Queer Man in Opera," 2022

And it is really no secret that the stories of many operas, even those written in previous centuries, can very easily reflect modern-day social justice issues, as well as simply often being relevant to real situations.⁶ Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, for example, is ostensibly a story about an unrepentant man being dragged to hell by a living statue after murdering the father of a woman he assaulted. This contrasts with the source material for Mozart's opera, Tirso de Molina's play *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*) (c.1616-1630).⁷ Partly because De Molina was a monk, the issue at which he was aiming was the idea of somebody committing sins all their life and suddenly repenting on their deathbed and thinking that this guaranteed them absolution.⁸ Thus, Molina's Don Juan claims to repent, but is still carried away to hell by the statue as his 'repentance' for his sins is false in the eyes of the statue.⁹ In Mozart's opera based on de Molina's story, on the other hand, the dinner scene does not feature Don Giovanni repenting. When the statue orders him to repent, Don Giovanni consistently replies 'no'. Instead of having de Molina's focus on obviously false deathbed conversions, Mozart and da Ponte focus more on the consequences of Don Giovanni's behaviour on the people around him.¹⁰

The views of queer people, transgender people, nonbinary people, and those who consider themselves to be adjacent to one of these communities are not missing from opera, either in their roles as performers, composers, directors, librettists, and other professions or in the worlds of the operas themselves. On the stage we see not only queer performers, including Russell Thomas himself, but we also see productions with queer directors, musical directors, and other people whose work we see on the stage even though we do not often see these people on the stage. Performers such as Lucia Lucas, a transgender woman who sings baritone roles (and describes herself as a Baritonistin) may well make their queer identity visible to the audience through their performance.¹¹ However, the presence behind the

⁶ Arnold Whittall, "New Opera, Old Opera: Perspectives on Critical Interpretation," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 21, no. 2 (2009): 182-183

⁷ Julian Rushton, *W.A. Mozart: Don Giovanni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 29-30

⁸ Oscar Mandel, *The Theatre of Don Juan: A Collection of Plays and Views, 1630-1963* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 42-43

⁹ David Bentley Hart, "The Demise of Don Juan," *First Things* (2011): n.p.

¹⁰ Rushton, *Don Giovanni*, 29-30

¹¹ Lucia Lucas: "Lucia Lucas [@lucialucasde]," Twitter. Biography (May 2014). Lucas' biography on Twitter lists her as a 'Baritonistin'.

scenes of queer directors should also not be discounted: Stefan Herheim, a German director, described himself in an interview with the Telegraph as 'an artist first, but also Catholic and homosexual. That should not be left out', and this view is one which I also argue is important.¹² I argue that these people should have their voices uplifted, for the reasons which Russell Thomas laid out in his *Advocate* interview. Anything that leads to more people watching and enjoying opera is overall a good thing for opera as an art form.

Queer interpretation is something which commonly exists in fandom spaces: in 2021, the Organisation for Transformative Works, which runs fanfiction (and other fannish media) repository Archive of our Own published statistics for pairings in fanfiction which showed an overwhelming number of male-male pairings in their top 100. Of their top 100 pairings of all time, 69 were male/male.¹³ This trend was repeated in their top 100 for that year, which showed 60 of their top 100 pairings of 2021 to be male/male.¹⁴ While opera does not have the sort of fandom which we may see for, for example, the BBC's *Sherlock* series, using the term 'fandom' to describe opera fans would still not be inaccurate. In fact, in opera queer interpretation seen in fandom could be taken to the stage, and has been in the form of Aiden Feltkamp, Chloë Schaaf, and Róssa Crean's *The Times are Nightfall*. *The Times are Nightfall* is a sequel to Mozart's *Don Giovanni* which focuses not on Don Giovanni himself but on a romance between Donna Anna and Donna Elvira.¹⁵ Feltkamp, Schaaf, and Crean's work is transformative in that it adds a relationship that is not canonical to the opera. It also opens up the opera's internal 'world' to a queer interpretation which is not textual in Mozart and Da Ponte's original work.

3.2 EXISTING RESEARCH LITERATURE

The introduction of Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar's book *Opera's Second Death* makes a fascinating argument about not just the reason that opera has been argued to be 'dead', but whether, and in what way, this is true. Rather than arguing for opera's continued life and

¹² Rupert Christiansen, "Stefan Harheim Interview: 'Opera is not about giving people a good time'," *The Daily Telegraph*, January 9, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opera/what-to-see/stefan-herheim-interview-opera-not-giving-people-good-time/>

¹³ Organization for Transformative Works, "AO3 Ship Stats 2021," *Archive of our Own*. July 31, 2021, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/32940190/chapters/81752386>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Aiden K. Feltkamp, "The Times are Nightfall," *Aiden K. Feltkamp*. 2018, <https://www.aidenfeltkamp.com/the-times-are-nightfall.html>

vitality, Žižek and Dolar argue for exactly the opposite point, which they then take as a starting point for ways of breathing new life into the art form. 'Because, from its very beginning, opera was dead, a stillborn child of musical art. [...] Instead of denying the change, one should undermine it by radicalizing it: opera *never* was in accord with its time -- from its very beginnings, it was perceived as something outdated, as a retroactive solution to a certain inherent crisis in music and as an impure art'.¹⁶ By virtue of its origins -- in its drawing from Ancient Greek tragedies and from English masques and court ballets of Louis XIV -- opera was never truly 'alive'.

This may seem, initially at least, to be a contradictory way for a person to approach an art form that they love. It may also especially seem to be an odd way to approach trying to revitalise it and its image. Despite this, I argue that Žižek and Dolar's view concerning the death of opera is not just arresting but that it makes for an excellent starting point for trying to create a modern opera. I also argue, therefore, that in writing *Opera's Second Death*, Žižek and Dolar release opera as a concept and as an art form, and this allows for a far broader set of interpretations. Queerness does not form part of Dolar and Žižek's argument or any of the content of *Opera's Second Death*, but it is something which should be discussed more when discussing opera academically. I believe and will argue that queerness not only has a place in opera but is something that can reveal interesting things about the story of a particular opera, even if this was not necessarily the intended reading of the piece.

I use the term 'queer' here in a deliberately broad sense, in which the term is often used by people who consider their gender identity or their sexuality to not be able to be boiled down to a single label, or who find their sexuality or gender to be too flexible for just one term. I use it to refer to people attracted to the same gender as their own, or many genders, or no genders, as well as people whose gender identity either falls outside of the binary of male and female or is simply different to that which they were assigned at birth.

3.3 THE GOTHIC, HOMOEROTICISM, AND OPERA

During the 19th century the Industrial Revolution brought about an ease of access of travel for wider and wider swathes of society, and this brought about a corresponding era of mass

¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge, 2002), viii

change.¹⁷ This was the case in virtually all of the world at this point and there were many different aspects of life changing – ‘pioneering’ in America’s west, for example – but for the purposes of this research I will be focusing mostly on Europe. Within Europe I will be tightening my focus to look at the arts, and especially at the gothic period in literature, as while the gothic period was not caused solely by the American Revolution most historians agree that the Industrial Revolution and scientific development was a major catalyst. I will also be focusing primarily on the gothic ‘aesthetic’ in fiction, and where this aesthetic as seen in literature intersects with other fiction, especially theatre and especially opera. Where necessary I will be touching on the wider context around the world that fed into certain events but the focus of my analysis of all the points which I will be discussing in this section will focus on Europe. I will also, for obvious reasons, be focusing my analysis on the effects that the gothic had specifically on opera.

In literature, the first piece of gothic fiction is generally considered to be *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole and first published in 1764.¹⁸ The popularity of the genre grew increasingly over the next few decades and while it reached its peak before the Victorian age, gothic fiction retained its popularity, and subsequently regained a lot of mainstream popularity in America thanks to the works of Edgar Allen Poe.¹⁹ The most major link between opera and the gothic, however, comes from Friedrich Schiller, and in ‘*Gothic Opera in Britain and France: Genre, Nationalism, and Trans-Cultural Angst*’, Diane Hoeveler and Sarah Davies Cordova suggest a reason for this. ‘And that ideological material [of hostility in 18th-century England towards Italian opera]—fear of violent revolution and its effects on what had been a stable class system—is largely the same content that was developed in [...] gothic novels, and then in [...] gothic dramas. These gothic novels and dramas most frequently took as their subjects the unlawful imprisonments of innocent victims of tyranny, released after heroic efforts by disinherited men who regain their rightful lands and title only after proving their worth’.²⁰ This paper focuses mostly on English and

¹⁷ Hartmut Kaelble, “Eras of Social Mobility in 19th and 20th Century Europe,” *Journal of Social History* 17, no. 3 (1984): 489

¹⁸ John Mullan, “The origins of the Gothic,” *The British Library*. May 15 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-the-gothic>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ (Hoeveler and Cordova 2004, n.p.) Diane Hoeveler and Sarah Davies Cordova, “Gothic Opera in Britain and France: Genre, Nationalism, and Trans-Cultural Angst,” *Romanticism on the Net*, Number 34-35 (2004), <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/ron/2004-n34-35-ron824/009435ar/>

French opera, and especially on 'rescue' operas of the late eighteenth century, but the popularity of these tropes in English and French opera of this period is not something which existed in a vacuum.

German author Friedrich Schiller's (1759-1805) works proved, both during his life and into the 19th century, to be a particularly popular subject for adaptation into opera (*Don Carlos*, the source material for Verdi's *Don Carlo*; *Die Rauber*, the source material for Verdi's *Masnadieri*).²¹ His influence on the librettists of opera is not limited just to these examples, however, and nor is it always as direct as the examples here. Amongst the operas where the influence of Schiller can be felt, although far from the only opera that can be described as such, is *The Bride of Lammermoor*, the source material of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*.²²

One common theme of gothic fiction written by male authors is intense male-male relationships, which modern scholars have often argued to be an expression of anxiety from the authors about their own attraction to men.²³ A particularly famous example of this comes from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, both because of how generally well-known the novel itself is, and because the subtext between Jonathan Harker and Dracula himself is something which multiple academics have examined.²⁴ Amongst these are Christopher Craft, whose analysis of the relationship between the Count, Jonathan, and the Count's three brides not just as a desire on the Count's side but on Jonathan's.²⁵ This sense of anxiety contrasts with the portrayal of such relationships in some other gothic fiction – Oscar Wilde, for example, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – where the theme is less anxiety about one's own feelings and more anxiety about the feelings of others about those feelings.²⁶ There are several comparisons which I would draw here between the

²¹ R.M. Longyear, "Schiller and Opera," *The Musical Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (1966): 182

²² Michael Wood, "On Form and Feeling: German Drama and the Young Walter Scott," *German Life and Letters* 71 (2018): 395

²³ Olivia M. Estes, "Sexuality Exposed: Homosexual Stereotypes and the Victorian Gothic Horror Novel," *Honors Theses*, 2017, 22

²⁴ Talia Schaffer, "'A Wilde Desire Took Me': the Homoerotic History of Dracula," *ELH*, vol. 61 no. 2 (1994): 388-389

²⁵ Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Representations*, no. 8 (1984): 108

²⁶ Simon Stern, "Wilde's Obscenity Effect: Influence and Immorality in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 68, no. 286 (2017): 768-769

homoeroticism that we see in many works of gothic literature, which is certainly not confined either to *Dracula* or to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and opera.

3.4 QUEER DESIRE, THE OTHER, AND THE 'MONSTER'

It is noticeable that the relationships which I am looking at in my research are all in some way unhealthy, and also that my focus on negative rather than positive relationships could play into negative and regressive stereotypes of queer individuals and queer relationships. While this clearly is not my intention these issues still deserve to be addressed thoroughly. I will look at this in two ways: first I will look at the relationships in *Lucia* and *Forza* in the context of other operas and media of the time (and more modern media). Second, I will look at the power which marginalised individuals may find in not just accepting but embracing and reclaiming negative stereotypes.

Putting it as simply as possible, a 'healthy' fictional relationship between two characters able to calmly talk over their issues with each other would not be interesting on its own, and, more than that, would not be a plot. E.M. Forster described the difference between a story and a plot in simple terms: while 'the king died and then the queen died' is a story, it is not a plot. On the other hand, 'the king died and then the queen died of grief' is a plot.²⁷ Taking the view that the characters in fiction are just tools for the author (or, in the case of opera, the director and performers) to use as they will this is a good explanation of itself for my views. Even though a homoerotic interpretation of Carlo and Alvaro's relationship may not be what either Verdi and Piave or a director intended, it is still the response that a viewer may have. While the fact that Carlo and Alvaro spend much of the opera engaged in trying to kill each other this also does not necessarily mean that their relationship cannot be compellingly read in this way. Sedgwick's analysis of 19th century male-male relationships of itself can support this argument, with her argument that desire between characters, whether to destroy each other or romantic or erotic, is still desire.²⁸

Additionally, the reclamation of negative stereotypes and depictions of a marginalised community by that community is not new. While not all LGBTQ+ people use the term 'queer' for themselves, the term was originally used as a slur, meaning 'strange', as was the

²⁷ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2022), 52

²⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 106

term 'gay'.²⁹ People who reclaim these terms for themselves are not harming themselves or the broader community in doing so: only by forcibly applying a term to somebody who did not identify with it would they be doing harm. I do not, however, object to somebody disliking the idea of seeing a relationship as objectively unpleasant as that between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro as romantic. To explain the reason that I continue to argue my point brings me, once again, to the gothic and to the concept of the 'other'. Gothic fiction often uses an 'other' as a symbolic representation of contemporary concerns, and this is something which has been carried into other media, including opera. One example is the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* representing anxieties about scientific process, and another, as explored previously, is the Count in Stoker's *Dracula*.³⁰

The Count has been argued to be a symbol of Stoker's anxiety about his own sexual and romantic feelings for other men, which we see in his depiction on-page when he attempts to drink Jonathan Harker's blood. The double-meaning of the count's 'penetrating' of Harker with his teeth and other sorts of penetration is too clear to ignore, doubly so when the subversion of who ordinarily penetrates and is penetrated in a relationship is later stressed when Lucy is turned into a vampire.³¹ I also see this double-entendre in depictions of penetration in both *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *La Forza del Destino*, as well as plenty of other opera. In Verdi and Piave's *Ernani*, for example, Silva's cabaletta, *Infin che un brando vindice* is about how Silva is still able to wield a sword despite his age.³² The double meaning of 'wielding a sword' is heightened by the fact that he sings this in response to discovering his much younger fiancée being fought over by two considerably younger men. Swearing on or by a sword has similar connotations in connection with the medieval meaning of the term to testify, meaning textually to swear on one's 'thigh', but with 'thigh' acting as a stand-in for 'testicles'.³³

My mentioning of Frankenstein and the Monster brings me neatly to the concept of the monster and its importance in narratives of reclamation. In *A Letter to my Mother that she*

²⁹ (Coles 2016, 424-446) Gregory Coles, "The Exorcism of Language: Reclaimed Derogatory Terms and Their Limits," *College English*, vol. 78, no. 5 (2016): 426

³⁰ Craft, "Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," 111

³¹ *Ibid.*, 111

³² Giovanni Christen, *Stanford University Opera*. Stanford University, June 11 1995, <http://opera.stanford.edu/Verdi/Ernani/synopsis.html>

³³ Barbara L. Herlihy, *The Human Body in Health and Illness* (Philadelphia: Elsevier Saunders, 2014): 491

will Never Read, Ocean Vuong has the following to say about the monster: ‘a monster is not just a terrible thing to be. From the Latin root *monstrum*, a divine messenger of catastrophe, then adapted by the Old French to mean an animal of myriad origins’.³⁴ Vuong does not just see the ‘negative’ in what he is portrayed as but glories in and identifies with the idea of the monster, saying that being a monster is ‘to be a hybrid signal, a lighthouse: both shelter and warning at once’.³⁵ Having some sort of experience or identity that can lead a person to become ‘monstered’ as it were can easily lead to despair, but it can equally lead the person to identify with or reclaim the ‘monster’, or even to question whether they really are monstrous.³⁶ And the arts are an excellent place to explore what it means to be seen as a monster – Vuong’s ‘divine messenger or catastrophe’.

Many art forms, from opera to video games, have some aspect of their story which is about confronting the controversial and finding yourself in it. Ice Pick Lodge’s 2005 video game *Pathologic*, for example, gives us a potent example of this confrontation of the controversial. ‘A hole in any body is a very intimate thing. Even your natural orifices are better off closed or covered. [...] It's the orifices rather than people that make all those processes taboo’.³⁷ Sometimes to confront the monster is enough but at other times what is really necessary is to celebrate it. In my writing about *Lucia* and *Forza* my intention is not to contribute to negative stereotypes and pejoratives but to celebrate parts of some queer experiences and stories – my own included – which many people might shy away from discussing or depicting. Intense emotions are a part of the human experience and desire in any form is characterised by intense emotions, and this is something which I do not believe it benefits anybody to shy away from.

³⁴ Vuong, Ocean, “A Letter to my Mother that she will Never Read,” *The New Yorker*, May 13 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/a-letter-to-my-mother-that-she-will-never-read>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ (Higgins 2020, 132-145) Ryan S. Higgins, “The Good, the God, and the Ugly: The Role of the Beloved Monster in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2020)

³⁷ Ice Pick Lodge, “Pathologic: Pathologic Classic HD,” *Ice Pick Lodge*, 2005

3.5 RESEARCH OVERVIEW

I am aware of the need to explain not just the details of the research that I will be doing and what this research is but the reason that I am doing this research. To do this, I will be explaining why I believe that this research is something that is important.

Part of the reason that this research is important is that queer people should have their stories and experiences reflected in media. And as opera is not only a form of media but one often focused on injustice, I also argue that opera is an excellent venue for showing these stories.³⁸ One way in which opera, and every form of media, can modernise itself is to reflect modern people and modern experiences more easily, which is also not something which opera has historically been unable to do. Many modern productions of Verdi's *La Traviata* are set in the 19th century or earlier, but the intention of Verdi and his librettist was not that it be set in the past but that the costumes and setting be modern.³⁹

In their decision to depict Violetta, who is canonically a sex worker, not only as somebody who is deserving of sympathy and empathy but as somebody who, to their first audiences, might well have been recognisable on a personal level, *La Traviata* exemplifies opera's ability to depict and humanise the 'other'. I argue that this is something that opera can do as a result of its common storytelling conventions and its perspective, comparable to a novel written in third-person omniscient perspective. By writing an aria, a composer and a librettist can allow the narrative to briefly embody the thoughts of a particular character, and in this way the audience are able not just to understand another perspective on them but to understand their own view of the action. Operas by Giuseppe Verdi contain several potent examples of this – such as Filippo's *Ella giammai m'amo* (*Don Carlo*), Fiesco's *A te l'estremo addio... Il lacerato spirito* (*Simon Boccanegra*), both arias which place us as the audience into the head of somebody who, until this point, has been depicted as thoroughly unpleasant and villainous.⁴⁰⁴¹

³⁸ English National Opera, "Operas that Shook Society," *English National Opera*. September 19 2009, <https://www.eno.org/discover-opera/operas-that-shook-society/>

³⁹ Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 322-323

⁴⁰ The Metropolitan Opera, "Synopsis: Simon Boccanegra," *The Metropolitan Opera*. n.d., <https://www.metopera.org/user-information/synopses-archive/simon-boccanegra>

⁴¹ The Kennedy Center, "Don Carlo," *The Kennedy Center*, n.d., <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/opera/don-carlo/>

In other words, until their arias, the libretto of each opera allows the audience to dehumanise each of these two characters in their minds. In Fiesco's case, since his aria is the first time he appears on stage, this is far more literal than in Filippo's – *Ella giammai m'amo* is in Act IV of the opera and Filippo has already appeared on stage in both previous acts. On the other hand, prior to *A te l'estremo addio*, Fiesco has been mentioned but mostly as an obstruction to our hero's hopes of being able to marry his lover, Fiesco's daughter. Since we have until this point not seen a human who is playing Fiesco but heard other characters – Simone, Paolo, and Pietro – discussing him, he has been dehumanised. Fiesco not just having an aria but the first aria in the opera allows the audience far more space to relate to and empathise with an antagonistic character.

3.6 WHY LUCIA AND FORZA?

There are several reasons behind my choice of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *La Forza del Destino*, rather than two other operas. The first of these reasons is simple: they are both operas with which I am familiar and in a language with which I am familiar. Multiple recordings, both audio and video, of both *Lucia* and *Forza* are available easily online and both operas have scores which can be accessed readily online. Additionally, plenty of research on masculinity and gender in Italy in the times when both *Lucia* and *Forza* were written is available, enabling me not only to easily access the operas themselves but to easily research the social background around them. This does not mean that all the possible research has been conducted concerning either work. I believe that especially my interpretation of trans subtext as it pertains to *La Forza del Destino* will fill a gap in the literature. As a transmasculine individual with an interest in and knowledge of opera this is an area where I am uniquely placed to comment. In addition, while both *Lucia* and *Forza* are both operas which have been widely written about in a research context my background research has suggested that looking specifically at either opera in a queer light is a gap in research. This especially applies to *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

Between the early history of opera and composers such as Jean-Baptiste Lully and 20th century composers such as Benjamin Britten, there is no lack of research in general on opera as a queer subject. Examination of composers such as the two mentioned above, and the culture of gay men in the 19th and 20th centuries and the importance of opera in certain of these circles, has provided me with ample background research. Likewise, certain operas

themselves which have been interpreted to have queer subtext, including *La Forza del Destino*, have also had queer interpretations applied to them. No less, in my research around the subject I noticed that, while both operas occasionally garnered mention, *Lucia di Lammermoor* has not been looked at in depth as a piece with queer subtext. Thus, my research is also an attempt to close this particular gap which I have identified in the research literature.

Finally, there are similarities between the plots of the two operas which make for interesting ground for comparison. The antagonist of both operas is the brother of the soprano who, after the death of one of their parents, sets out to make the tenor and soprano's relationship more difficult. In both operas the relationship between the baritone and the tenor, while one of considerable animosity, was no less extremely emotionally charged in a way that is not only dramatically compelling but which I argue is similar to Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's writing about the relationships between male characters in both *Epistemology of the Closet* and *Between Men: English Literature and Male Desire*.⁴²⁴³ Additionally to this important point I argue that in comparing and contrasting not just the relationship between Carlo and Alvaro and Enrico and Edgardo and (separately) Enrico and Arturo as separate units but with each other a picture of masculinity and male-male relationships which is both interesting and perhaps unexpected emerges.

Neither *Lucia di Lammermoor* nor *La Forza del Destino* is a story which, in the unperformed score and libretto completely, is explicitly and intentionally a queer one. No less, I argue that whether the stories were 'intended' to be queer is not wholly relevant. The first reason is quite simply that, because the audience were and are not the composers and librettists of the operas, and therefore did not have the same experiences and thoughts as the creators, their interpretations of the operas would have been different.⁴⁴ When the operas premiered, the audiences and the creators would have had similar experiences, because they existed at the same time. In the 21st century, on the other hand, culture has drifted far enough from how it would have been in the 19th century that it is at the very least unlikely that a person in the present day would have had the same experiences as somebody from

⁴² Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴³ Sedgwick, *Between Men*

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, trans. Robert Hurley, "What Is an Author?" in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 205-222

the 19th century.⁴⁵ As a result, the interpretation of a modern audience, or director, or performer, of a nineteenth-century opera would differ radically from how a person in a similar position in the 19th century would have interpreted the same input. This leads me onto my second explanation as to why this is not relevant, which concerns not just the audience's reaction but the general culture of operatic performance in the modern day.

In the 19th century, performance practices tended to centre to a lesser or greater degree around accuracy to the vision and ideas of the composer and librettist. But this began to change starting in the early 20th century. There are several possible reasons for this – but the one most relevant to my argument is the advent of *Regietheater* during the early 20th century.⁴⁶ As much as the concept of *Regietheater* sometimes meets with derision I argue that it fulfils an important role in allowing members of marginalised communities to see themselves on stage.⁴⁷

3.7 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The first term which requires definition is LGBTQ+. This initialism stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), with the plus sign signifying any others who use a term other than those already mentioned and are part of this community.⁴⁸ Some of these other terms include pansexual, intersex, asexual, agender, and nonbinary.⁴⁹

The number of different identities which can be added to the LGBTQ+ acronym means that LGBTQ+ is just one way of representing this community. This also means that the term is too concrete to use in the context that I would need to. Because of this I will be using 'queer' as an umbrella term, while also using specific identifiers when necessary. Queer is a useful term in both a modern and historical context as it allows for inclusion of individuals whose sexuality or gender identity does not fall under either a single concrete label or any labels.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana Press), 142-148

⁴⁶ Marvin Carlson, *Theatre is More Beautiful than War: German Stage Directing the Late Twentieth Century* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), ix-x

⁴⁷ Jonas Tinias, "Aesthetic, Ethics, and Engagement: Self-cultivation as the Politics of Refugee Theatre," in *Anthropology, Theatre, and Development*, eds. Alex Flynn and Jonas Tinias (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 171-202

⁴⁸ Sefton Sexual Health Service, "What does LGBTQ+ stand for?" *Sefton Sexual Health Service*, July 18 2019, <https://www.seftonsexualhealth.nhs.uk/lgbtqi/what-does-lgbtq-stand-for/>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Karl Whittington, "QUEER," *Studies in Iconography*, vol. 33 (2012): 171

'Queer' is also a useful term from an historicist perspective. Terms such as 'people who may have considered themselves to be gay' are clunky, but describing historical figures who would not have recognised the term as gay or transgender is revisionist. Additionally, terminology like 'people who may have considered themselves to be gay' could be misconstrued as denial of this person's identity. This is not my intention, so in the absence of a more elegant solution, I will use the term 'queer' as a catch-all when speaking about history.⁵¹

The terms transgender and nonbinary both refer to people whose gender identity now differs from their sex assigned at birth, often referred to amongst trans and nonbinary people as their AGAB, which stands for assigned/assumed gender at birth.⁵² However, the two terms are not interchangeable, as while many nonbinary people consider themselves to be trans some do not, and there are binary transgender people (for example, somebody assigned female at birth who transitioned and now describes his gender as exclusively male).

Nonbinary refers to a gender outside of the binary of male and female, although it is important to note that 'nonbinary' should not be seen as a third item in a binary. While some nonbinary people describe their gender as being like or including aspects of a binary gender, others describe their gender as something completely separate from either 'male' or 'female'.⁵³ Other useful terms for discussing nonbinary people include transmasculine and transfeminine, which may be used by somebody assigned female at birth who has transitioned to a more masculine but not entirely male gender, or somebody assigned male at birth whose gender is more feminine but not entirely female respectively.⁵⁴

Trans/transgender and nonbinary are both umbrella terms, referring to a broad set of similar experiences. When discussing gender assigned at birth many trans and nonbinary

⁵¹ Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English "Uranian" Poets from 1889 to 1930* (Ashford-on-Thames: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 7

⁵² Sefton Sexual Health Service, "What does LGBTQ+ stand for?" *Sefton Sexual Health Service*, July 18 2019, <https://www.seftonsexualhealth.nhs.uk/lgbtqi/what-does-lgbtq-stand-for/>

⁵³ Helena Darwin, "Doing Gender Beyond the Binary: A Virtual Ethnography," in *Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 40, no.3 (2017): 317

⁵⁴ Claire Gillespie, "What Does it Mean to Identify as Transmasculine?" *health.com*, August 20 2022, <https://www.health.com/mind-body/transmasculine>

people will use the terms AFAB and AMAB – assigned female at birth and assigned male at birth respectively.

Finally, it is worth noting that pronouns are not always an indicator of gender: for example, a nonbinary person may use he/him or she/her pronouns. Additionally, some nonbinary people may combine multiple sets of pronouns such as she/they or they/he, while others may use all pronouns, or neopronouns. Neopronouns are any sets of pronouns outside of he, she, and they, with some common examples including xe, hir, or em.⁵⁵

4 EXISTING QUEER READINGS OF OPERA

Alban Berg's opera *Lulu*, first performed in June of 1937 and based on two plays concerning the title character from 1895 and 1904, by playwright Frank Wedekind, contains what is generally viewed to be opera's first depiction of a lesbian character.⁵⁶ Countess Martha Geschwitz, Lulu's friend, was depicted both in Wedekind's plays as a lesbian but this characterisation was carried over into Berg's opera. Right before her death, Geschwitz exclaims that she means to remain with Lulu throughout all of eternity.⁵⁷ And while Countess Geschwitz is canonically a lesbian, there are other characters in whom many lesbians, as well as gay men, have seen something of themselves reflected over the centuries. An example of this is Cherubino, Almaviva's page in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, a young boy who is played by a woman.⁵⁸ Cherubino may well be textually a male character but undeniably there are many lesbians and bisexual women who have found a lot of themselves to be reflected back, especially in his two most notable arias, *Non so piu cosa son, cosa faccio* (*I no longer know who I am or what I want*) and *Voi che sapete che cosa e amor* (*You you know what love is*), in which Cherubino describes his sudden intense attraction to women.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ K.R. Blevins, "Defining: Neopronouns," *My Kid is Gay*, May 2018, <http://mykidisgay.com/defining-neopronouns>

⁵⁶ Silvio José Dos Santos, "Ascription of Identity: The *Bild* Motif and the Character of Lulu," *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2004): 269

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 288

⁵⁸ Daniel Hertz, "Constructing 'Le Nozze di Figaro,'" *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, vol. 112, no. 1 (1986): 90

⁵⁹ Lydia Hamessley, "Review: En Travesti: Women, Gender, Subversion, Opera," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 52, no. 1 (1999): 164-165

It might be expected, since the first lesbian character in opera appeared in the 20th century, that a gay male character followed later, but this is not the case. Arguably the first, or one of the first, examples of not just a gay male character but a gay male love triangle in opera was written in 1767, with the first version of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Apollo et Hyacinthus*.⁶⁰ Mozart wrote the score for the opera, with Father Rufinus Widl contributing the libretto, during the late eighteenth century for performance by students at the Benedictine University in Salzburg. Mozart's original sketch for the story included a love triangle between Apollo, Hyacinthus, and Zephyr. However, the libretto was changed by Widl, who instead interpolated a heterosexual love story by adding Hyacinthus' sister to act as a new love interest for Apollo, instead of Zephyr.⁶¹ This first depiction of a gay male character in opera is not just remarkable because of its portrayal of same-gender love in opera a good few centuries before many modern audiences might expect this to appear. It also suggests that even before homosexuality was widely accepted, there was at least some slight undercurrent of acceptance in the arts.

Orlando: A Biography not only has themes of homosexuality but depicts its title character almost as a nonbinary woman.⁶² Woolf describes Orlando's inability to reproduce the colour green that they see outside their window in their poem – 'in order to match the shade of green precisely he looked [...] at [...] a laurel bush growing beneath the window. After that, of course, he could write no more. Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another' – in a way that rings true not only as a depiction of artistic or creative frustration but as a potent depiction of gender dysphoria.⁶³⁶⁴ *Maurice* was partly written about E.M. Forster's experiences as a gay man before this was legal, while *Orlando* was an extended love letter to Woolf's partner, Vita Sackville-West, and these are only two examples of queer literature written by queer authors before the legalisation of gay male relationships in the United Kingdom. In its own way this exemplifies that the arts are and historically have been an excellent way for marginalised people – in this case LGBT people – to discuss their

⁶⁰ Thomas Lederer, "The Clemency of Rufus Widl: Text and Context of W.A. Mozart's First Opera," *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, vol. 58 (2009): 230-231

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Karen Kaviola, "Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nation," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1999): 235-236

⁶³ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 15

⁶⁴ Morgan Danielle Beers, "'Orlando had become a woman': Trans Embodiment and Temporality in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*" (Master's Thesis), *University of Alabama*, 2020

experiences, either directly or in more metaphorical ways.⁶⁵ And, while most operas are not produced by one single person, historically, opera has at times been a safe space both for audiences and composers to explore and discuss their sexuality and genders.

An obvious example, as mentioned before, from the perspective of a performer is Cherubino. As discussed previously, Cherubino's existence as a male character played by a woman whose most important arias both concern his attraction to women is something which is far from uncommon in opera – *travesti* roles were an easy solution to a character being a boy whose voice had not yet broken but a composer wanting to cast an adult performer.⁶⁶ No less, the fact that Cherubino is clearly a female performer playing a young man may well have resonance which Mozart and Da Ponte did not intend for a lesbian either watching or even performing as Cherubino. From the perspective of a composer, on the other hand, two examples immediately jump out. The first, obviously, is Benjamin Britten – specifically his opera *Billy Budd* (with libretto by E.M. Forster). *Billy Budd* was described by Philip Brett as '[Britten giving Forster] the opportunity to write about profound relationships between men; symbolically to evoke the power of homosexual love without being in any way sexually explicit'.⁶⁷ Another example comes from Polish composer Karol Szymanowski, whose most well-known opera, *Król Roger (King Roger)* bears similarities in its treatment of homosexuality – specifically male homosexuality – to Britten's *Billy Budd*, albeit with a far less bleak and far more hopeful finale than that of *Billy Budd*.⁶⁸

In the case of *Król Roger*, I point to one specific production, by the Royal Opera House in London with Polish baritone Mariusz Kwiecien in the title role, as being particularly worth discussing. While *Król Roger* is set some time in the 12th century this production instead updates the action to the early 20th century and in doing so, rather than having its characters wear robes and togas, instead uses costumes and general design where the people on the stage are concerned that is distinctly reminiscent of American artist J.C.

⁶⁵ Milan Ney, "Metaphors and Hermeneutical Resistance," *European Journal of Philosophy* (2022), 8

⁶⁶ D.S. Neff, "Bitches, Mollies, and Tommies: Byron, Masculinity, and the History of Sexualities," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2002): 397-398

⁶⁷ Philip Brett, "Salvation at Sea: Britten's *Billy Budd*," in *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays*, ed. George Haggerty (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006), 72

⁶⁸ Tadeusz Kobierzycki, "The Dionysian Motifs of Karol Szymanowski's Opera "King Roger"," *Heksis*, February 2010, <https://heksis.dezintegracja.pl/en/the-dionysian-motifs-of-karol-szymanowskis-opera-king-roger/>

Leyendecker.⁶⁹⁷⁰ Leyendecker's illustrations were primarily for advertisements but, as Leyendecker himself was most likely a gay man, which he expressed noticeably through his art, many of his drawings clearly accentuate the attractiveness of the male subjects of his illustrations and themselves depict men in situations which, even if not sexually charged, still clearly appear to be flirtatious.⁷¹ Both the costume design and the set and staging of the Royal Opera House's production of *Król Roger* seems calculated in its resemblance to art by Leyendecker – for example, the giant model of a head in which Roger lives is designed in a way that clearly mimics Leyendecker's angular way of painting people. This, I argue, is not just an homage to a well-known artist but a way of stressing the homoerotic tension that can be clearly seen on stage between Roger and the Shepherd throughout the opera.

To a modern audience, certain operas of the nineteenth century also have what I argue to be homoerotic themes. The most notable of all of these, of course, would be Verdi's *Don Carlo*, itself based on a play by Friedrich Schiller, which includes an important relationship between two men, the titular Carlo and baritone Rodrigo di Posa. The duet between Carlo and Rodrigo, *Dio, che nell'alma infondere amor*, includes the two men making what can easily be interpreted as wedding vows. Whether or not this was Verdi and his librettists' intention, the fact that the two characters, in a church (or rather a chapel), make vows to live and die together is something which may well lead a modern audience to the conclusion that the relationship between Carlo and Rodrigo is not entirely platonic.⁷² Indeed, the San Francisco Opera's production, with Michael Fabiano in the title role of Carlo and Mariusz Kwiecien as Rodrigo, included, during the prison scene in which Rodrigo dies, Carlo kissing Rodrigo.⁷³

⁶⁹ Clements, Andrew, "Król Roger review – Szymanowski's melting-pot opera is a musical treat," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/may/03/krol-roger-review-royal-opera-house-king-king-roger>

⁷⁰ Illustration History, "J.C. Leyendecker," *Norman Rockwell Museum*, August 22 2015, <https://www.illustrationhistory.org/artists/jc-leyendecker>

⁷¹ Richard Martin, "J. C. Leyendecker and the Homoerotic Invention of Men's Fashion Icons, 1910–1930," *Prospects*, 21 (1996): 455-456

⁷² The Kennedy Center, "Don Carlo," *The Kennedy Center*, n.d., <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/opera/don-carlo/>

⁷³ San Francisco Opera, "Mariusz Kwiecien – Rodrigo's death scene," *YouTube*, May 28 2021, <https://youtu.be/VQR-PUYnt3g?t=753>

5 *D'UN ODIO MORTALE, D'UN CIECO FUROR*: DONIZETTI AND CAMMARANO'S *LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR*

Lucia di Lammermoor was first performed on the 26th of September 1835, at the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples. In the intervening years it has become one of the most popular operas in the common repertoire, and the most frequently performed of Donizetti's operas. A French version of *Lucia*, titled *Lucie de Lammermoor*, exists with a revised score. *Lucie de Lammermoor* premiered a few years after *Lucia di Lammermoor*, on the 6th of August 1839 in the Parisian Théâtre de la Renaissance. The source material for the opera was Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, one of his 'Tales of my Landlord' series, which was first published in 1819.

Both the novel and both versions of the opera are set in the Lammermuir hills in Scotland, shortly after or shortly before the Act of Union in 1707. We can assume from a reference in Enrico and Lucia's duet to the death of King William who died in 1702 and putative accession to the throne of Queen Mary that Donizetti sets the opera in 1707.⁷⁴ Both the novel and the two versions of the opera, having been written in the 19th century, are very deeply wound up in not only 19th century political affiliation, but with 19th-century gender roles. These portrayals of gender and gender roles also often intersect with portrayals of social class. Because of certain shifts in the characters (including rewriting all the Ashton family apart from Lucy as they appear in the novel into one single character, Enrico), another important theme of the opera is male-male relationships. All these themes are overarched by the theme of honour. This is a theme which is also clearly visible in *La Forza del Destino*, being something which multiple of the male characters talk frequently about in many operas of the period of many genres.

In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that, especially in the nineteenth century although by no means exclusively at this point, male-male relationships and the homoeroticism that often came from these relationships was tangled with patriarchal systems.⁷⁵ Sedgwick also argues that this is the case although homophobia is and was a major issue for men who are and were attracted to

⁷⁴ While the libretto suggests that Mary would succeed to the throne after the death of her husband, Mary in fact predeceased William.

⁷⁵ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 5

men.⁷⁶ She describes this, especially in relation to similar relationships between female characters and historical figures as a 'continuum between "men-loving-men" and "men-promoting-the-interests-of-men"'.⁷⁷ Cammarano rewrote all of the members of the Ashton family in the book except for Lucia herself into Enrico, allowing the libretto to show both sides of the spectrum of male-male relationships described by Sedgwick. In Enrico's relationship with Edgardo, Donizetti and Cammarano give an example of what Sedgwick referred to as the 'erotic triangle': even for an acrimonious relationship between two male characters, a woman is required to be the conduit.⁷⁸ On the other hand, Enrico's relationship with Arturo Bucklaw, the man who he forces Lucia to marry, the opera demonstrates the "'men-loving-men" and "men-promoting-the-interests-of-men"' continuum in full.

The other side of this coin of male-male relationships can be seen with the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo. This is a relationship which Cammarano and Donizetti portray as being just as intense as the canonical relationship, that between Lucia and Edgardo. It is also a relationship which, in keeping with Sedgwick's writing about the relationships between male characters, a relationship which requires the presence of a female character to exist. The female character here is Lucia in the two male-male relationships I will be discussing. I argue that the implications behind the relationship between these two male characters essentially being brought into existence thanks to the presence of a character who is the sister of one and the lover of the other are not just interesting but telling of how Donizetti and Cammarano use and subvert gender roles and expectations of sexual orientation in their score and libretto.

5.1 SYNOPSIS

The broad strokes of the story of *Lucia di Lammermoor* are a common bel canto opera plot. Lucia Ashton wishes to marry Edgardo Ravenswood but is prevented from doing so by her overbearing brother Enrico, and is instead forced to marry Arturo Bucklaw, a man of Enrico's choosing. Enrico is informed of Lucia's relationship with Edgardo, who is Enrico's sworn

⁷⁶ Ibid., 177

⁷⁷ Ibid., 3-4

⁷⁸ Ibid., 21

enemy, by one of his employees, and upon learning of their relationship, he swears to destroy them both.

Edgardo and Lucia meet in the woods, and privately make vows to marry and exchange rings before Edgardo goes to France on business. During this separation, Enrico intercepts letters between the two lovers. Enrico forges a letter from Edgardo, claiming that he has found a different woman in France and will not be coming back and, with the help of Raimondo Bidebent, the family's priest and Lucia's tutor, convinces Lucia to give up on her hopes of marrying Edgardo and instead to marry Arturo.

The wedding between Arturo and Lucia begins with a chorus, and Arturo swearing a vow of protection and care not to Lucia but to Enrico, after which Lucia arrives. She and Arturo sign the wedding contract, although Lucia is clearly under duress from her brother in doing so, at which point Edgardo arrives, uninvited, to the wedding. Despite Raimondo's attempts to maintain the peace between Edgardo and everybody else (with Enrico and Arturo being particularly aggressive towards him), Edgardo first aggressively jilts Lucia after discovering that she assented to the marriage and then swears revenge against everybody involved.

The first scene of the next act takes place at Edgardo's castle. Edgardo briefly bemoans the weather before hearing hoofbeats, heralding Enrico's arrival. Enrico first goads Edgardo with a description of Lucia and Arturo's wedding night, before the two men mutually challenge each-other to a duel, which will take place in the graveyard of Edgardo's castle.

After a brief chorus celebrating the wedding which opens the next scene of the opera, Raimondo arrives, reporting that Lucia has killed her new husband in a fit of delirium on the wedding night. She then enters, still wearing her now-bloodstained wedding dress and hallucinating that Edgardo has come to marry her, which is followed by Enrico reappearing after staying the night at Ravenswood. He expresses guilt at having driven his sister to this, and, when Lucia collapses, has her taken back home. The final scene at the opera begins with Edgardo planning to kill himself via Enrico in their duel. When he learns that Lucia, who died following her madness, is dead he instead stabs himself.

5.2 *EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD IS ABOUT SEX, EXCEPT SEX. SEX IS ABOUT POWER: EDGARDO RAVENSWOOD AND ENRICO ASHTON*

In *Understanding Gender and Character Agency in the 19th Century Novel*, Matthew Jockers and Gabi Kirilloff suggest that character action can act as a proxy for character agency.⁷⁹ I will use this framework to establish a possible queer reading of the relationship between Edgardo and Enrico and to explain how Lucia is narratively positioned to facilitate her brother's relationships with other men. As a female character the expectation for Lucia would have been to be submissive to the men in her life, who do more to move the story of the opera on: Barbara Welter described this as female characters being 'passive, submissive responders'.⁸⁰ This is something which we see in many operas, especially those of this period, which includes not just *Lucia di Lammermoor* but *La Forza del Destino*. A woman's 'sphere of action' was 'limited' in real life, and this carries over into the stories of operas.⁸¹ Throughout *Lucia di Lammermoor*, decisions are made for Lucia by male characters (Edgardo, Enrico, and Raimondo primarily), without her being consulted to the extent that the only 'action' that she is allowed to take is to kill her husband.

We also have the expectations of men and male characters, and how, even though these were not so severely wound, and men were not so severely constrained as women found themselves, many aspects of nineteenth century society at the least pointed men towards rigid structures of gender.⁸² While the story of *Lucia di Lammermoor* is not real it is still one that was written by real people, who were subject to the gender roles of the time and who existed within society. It therefore follows that Donizetti and Cammarano's writing of the characters in their opera would be imbued with the conventions of the time, and it also follows that this would naturally include gender roles. Amongst many others, there is one example which I will particularly point to of not just a gender role that was placed onto men in the nineteenth century but one which I will argue leads me to a reading of the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo (as well as that of Enrico and Arturo) as distinctly homoerotic. This is the idea that, while the 'role' of a man (and by extension a male

⁷⁹ Gabi Kirilloff and Matthew Jockers, "Understanding Gender and Character Agency in the 19th Century Novel," *Journal of Cultural Analytics* 2 (2016), <https://culturalanalytics.org/article/11066-understanding-gender-and-character-agency-in-the-19th-century-novel>: 3

⁸⁰ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1996): 159

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 159

⁸² Anthea Callen, "Doubles and Desire: Anatomies of masculinity in the later nineteenth century," *Art History*, 26 (2003): 669

character) was that he was expected to be the one 'doing' things rather than the person to whom things (in this case the plot) happen as a result of somebody else's actions, there were still delineations of what it was appropriate for a man (and therefore a male character) to 'do'.

A man was not just allowed but expected, in the nineteenth century, to be the person in a relationship by whom important decisions were made – this applied both to familial relationships (such as that between Lucia and Enrico) and romantic or marital relationships.⁸³ Opera is not by any means an accurate representation of real life, but it is no less a lens through which one might see certain real aspects of life in the period when the opera was composed, and *Lucia di Lammermoor* is no exception to this rule. In the case of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, we see a great exaggeration of the idea of a man having control over the actions of the women in his life. This is also the case in *La Forza del Destino*, wherein Carlo decides that the span of his control over what his sister does includes deciding whether she is allowed to be alive.

Discussing *Lucia*, and the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo, we see in the character of Enrico a depiction of somebody who would in a real-world setting be bound by conventions of masculinity. Because of this, Enrico is a character who I argue has a relationship with masculinity, and therefore with other men, which is at the same time extremely repressed and extremely intense. Nowhere do we see this better than in Enrico and Edgardo's duet *Qui del Padre ancor respira*, which opens the third act of the opera. This duet is the longest and most important interaction between the two men (and one of only two occasions where Enrico and Edgardo are seen on stage together. The two characters are both present at Lucia and Arturo's wedding but aside from that and this duet they do not appear on stage together). It is also a potent example of the sort of triangulation that Sedgwick describes in *Between Men* and shows the audience how Donizetti characterises Enrico's feelings about Edgardo (and Edgardo's feelings about Enrico). In the way that the duet does this, *Qui del Padre ancor respira* also gives the audience more of a look into the relationship that Enrico and Arturo have.

⁸³ Emilie Taylor-Brown, "Structures of Confinement: Power and Problems of Male Identity," *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2019), 140

When describing male-male relationships in *Between Men*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick uses the term homosocial rather than homosexual or homoerotic. She also explains in her writing that this is not something that she necessarily does despite the homoeroticism of the relationships but because of the perceived homoeroticism of these relationships. Early in *Between Men* Sedgwick explains that the term 'homosexual' is 'applied to such activities as "male bonding", which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality'.⁸⁴ Her use of 'homosocial' rather than 'homosexual' to describe these intense relationships between male characters '[draws] the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire", of the potentially erotic'.⁸⁵ In this way, Sedgwick makes the same link in *Between Men* between male literary characters as I make between male characters in operas here. Sedgwick's use of the term 'homosocial desire' is also useful for my argument in that the relationships which I am describing are often characterised in some way by animosity.⁸⁶ This is especially true of Enrico and Edgardo's relationship, but the fact that the two characters have a relationship which is dominated by their dislike of each other does not detract from the 'social' aspect.

I argue that in the relationships in *Lucia di Lammermoor* there are two of these 'love triangles' as described by Sedgwick. The first far simpler triangle is that which exists between Enrico and Edgardo and Lucia, which can be summed up quickly: Lucia is in love with Edgardo, who Enrico views as an enemy (and who hates Enrico in return). The presence of Lucia in the lives of both men allows for their relationship to take place – if Lucia was not in love with Edgardo, then Enrico would have no reason to pursue him, albeit differently to how Lucia is pursuing Edgardo. In the duet which I am discussing here, this triangle reaches its highest – and its most dramatically intense – point. The duet takes place shortly after Lucia and Arturo's wedding in the previous act. On the surface, the duet is also simple: Enrico, having pursued Edgardo back to his home, challenges Edgardo to a duel, and Edgardo accepts the challenge. The two men swear to fight to the death (which Edgardo seeming to imply that he will use the duel as an excuse to kill himself) the next morning in

⁸⁴ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 21-22

the graveyard at Ravenswood (Edgardo's castle). But the duet is more complicated than just this surface-level interpretation.

During *Qui del Padre ancor respira*, the animosity in the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo reaches its most dramatically intense point. I also argue that the duet is a point at which the exact emotions that the two characters feel for each other, and the duet shows an intensity of feeling of some sort that also appears in romantic duets. I also argue that, from a sufficient 'distance', there is not a huge amount of difference between the two sorts of passionate feeling on a dramatic level. This distance could be physical or more emotional. The physical distance between the performers on stage and the audience necessitates a more exaggerated kind of acting than screen acting requires – and I argue that this can produce a clearly very intense relationship. Even if that intense emotion is meant to be negative, the audience's interpretation could be different, for reasons which lead me to the second sort of 'distance' which I mentioned above.

The physical distance between the stage and the audience, as I mentioned, necessitates exaggerated action, but there also exists an emotional distance between the audience and the performers. This is not to say that a production of an opera is not emotionally believable by default. My argument is instead that, in part because of the style of acting required because of the physical distance between audience and stage and in part because very often the stories of operas are not realistic, an emotional distance is created between the audience and the characters. I argue that opera characters rarely behave in a logical way or in a way that 'real' people would, but this clearly is not the point. If the characters in opera behaved like 'real' people would in the situations that they found themselves in, then there would be very few opportunities for genuinely interesting storytelling, which is the point of opera. This produces two effects. First, because the characters do not behave realistically, it is easier for the audience to detach themselves from the real emotion consequences that would result from the behaviour of the characters in the 'real' world. Secondly, because the characters still behave in an interesting and intense way, even if this is not always a believable way, the fact that they behave unrealistically does not lead to them becoming less compelling.

This emotional distance which I mentioned above is heightened by the fact that many the most popular operas were composed in a time with values different to values in the

present: all the operas that Operabase's statistics show as being the 20 most popular were composed before 1930. Only two of these operas, *Tosca* and *Turandot*, had their premier in the 20th century, and over half of the 20 most popular premiered in the 19th century.⁸⁷ Even the nineteenth century, when both *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *La Forza del Destino* were composed, while comparatively recent, not only had wildly different levels of technology to the modern day, but social and moral mores were almost completely different. Coupled with the exaggerated personalities of opera characters, I argue, as Wayne Kostenbaum does in *The Queen's Throat*, that opera essentially provides a space where exploring one's thoughts and identity can be very easy.⁸⁸ I explored this in the introduction of this thesis when discussing Russell Thomas' interview with *Advocate* magazine, but I also argue here that this can be extended further even than Thomas suggests.⁸⁹

There are two points of *Qui del padre ancor respira* which I want to look at in detail in my interpretation of the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo. The first of these is Enrico's first verse of the duet, which begins with '*Di letizia il mio soggiorno*, and the very end of the duet where the two men are singing together, from '*O sole più rapido a sorgere t'appresta*'. These parts of the libretto of the opera are an excellent example of Sedgwick's idea of triangulation, as well as an example of her interpretation of the concept of 'desire' as something separate from attraction. The dynamic that Donizetti and Cammarano present between Edgardo and Enrico is a power dynamic which I argue to be extremely homoerotic. Starting with the second section of the duet which I identified and working backwards, the lyrics of the part of the duet where the two men are singing together are one of the most interesting parts of the duet. There is, I argue, a clear homoerotic undertone which may be especially clear to a modern audience to the idea of the two men essentially taking off together to prepare for their duel the next day. This is something which Sedgwick refers to in her theory about the concept of desire. Sedgwick separates the ideas of 'attraction' and 'desire' in a way that makes the two not mutually exclusive and allowing for a far wider definition of the concept of 'desire'.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Arts Consolidated Inc., "Statistics," *Operabase*, 2023, <https://www.operabase.com/statistics/en>

⁸⁸ Wayne Kostenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (Boston: Hachette Books, 2001), 9

⁸⁹ Egbuniwe, "Superstar Tenor Russell Thomas on Being a Black Queer Man in Opera," 2022

⁹⁰ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 21-27

In some cases, the sort of desire which Sedgwick refers to may well refer to a desire to destroy one another as it manifests in Enrico and Edgardo. It could, however, also be a romantic or a sexual desire, or even the blend of the two which I argue is displayed in Enrico and Edgardo. This is also what I argue makes the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo as interesting and as compelling as it is in the opera. This is something which I also mentioned previously: while the relationships between characters in opera may not necessarily be healthy ones this does not mean that they are not interesting. In fact, the fact that the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo is as fraught and dramatic as Donizetti and Cammarano write it as heightens the dramatic tension in a similar way to how the foreknowledge on the part of the audience that the relationship between Carlo and Alvaro in *La Forza del Destino* will end in disaster heightens the tension of that relationship. The fact that the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo is as dramatic as it is, almost to the point of exaggeration, also means that it 'fits in', as it were, with the rest of the opera.

I argue that the generally unrealistic but still compelling relationships which Donizetti and Cammarano portray also create what I would identify as a kind of relation of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (*V-Effekt*), translated as the Distancing Effect.⁹¹ The *V-Effekt* is typically used to refer to far more dramatic examples of dramatic distancing – such as visible stage fixtures and lights, or what amount to 'spoilers' on the set for the end of the piece.⁹² I argue, however, that in stories which portray such exaggerated character interactions and events – Lucia's being driven mad and murdering Arturo is an example of this – the effect as described by Brecht can take place. Brecht's idea that acting and directing choices such as deliberate breaking of the 'fourth wall' was intended to '[hinder the audience] from simply identifying with the characters in the play'.⁹³ Instead, Brecht intended to produce an intellectual understanding of the characters and events that were being depicted on stage. In the case of *Lucia di Lammermoor* I also argue that this could be used to particularly great effect by a director: even though Lucia herself is the main character of the opera, and her 'mad' scene is the most famous in the opera, at every step her actions are controlled by the men around her.

⁹¹ Berthold Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 4

⁹² *Ibid.*, 212

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 91

A production of *Lucia* that does not question this, I argue, is also missing something significant about the work: the story 'is' Lucia's, and so the fact that she is pushed out of the frame at every point is something which should receive more attention. Part of my argument in this chapter centres around the idea that Enrico and Edgardo's relationship and Enrico and Arturo's relationship is one which is distinctly homoerotic but in order for this to be the case the title character of the work has to be essentially pushed out of the frame. This could be exaggerated to the furthest possible point by showing that not only is Lucia not the main character in her own story but that she is in fact not the main character in her own relationships. Additionally, if this was played particularly obviously by a director, the audience's experience of and reaction to seeing the relationship between Edgardo and Lucia reflected in the relationship between Edgardo and Enrico could be used by a director to criticise the relationship between Edgardo and Lucia. Donizetti and Cammarano create in Edgardo a character who is patently unpleasant, but in a way that is often ignored by directors. This is in spite of the fact that the wedding scene includes Edgardo, in response to learning that Lucia has been forced into a marriage that she does not want, describing her as '*abominata, maledetta*' ('*abomination, accursed*').⁹⁴

5.3 *AMICO, FRATELLO, E DIFENSOR: ARTURO BUCKLAW AND ENRICO ASHTON*

The relationship that exists between Enrico and Edgardo is one that is characterised primarily by animosity between the two men. The opposite is the case of the relationship between Enrico and Arturo: even though his role in the story is to marry Lucia and then be killed, Arturo's part in *Lucia di Lammermoor* focuses far less on his wife, and far more on her brother. This is evident from before the point at which Arturo first appears on the stage, starting from the duet between Lucia and Enrico, which is the first time Arturo is mentioned on the stage. During Lucia and Enrico's duet and during the only interaction that Arturo and Enrico have on the stage, which occurs during the wedding ceremony during the finale of the second act of the opera, the narrative framing of Piave's libretto positions Arturo less as somebody who will be marrying Lucia and more as somebody who will be protecting and taking care of Enrico. It seems that Lucia's part in the equation is mostly an incidental one, as she only really 'needs' to marry Arturo, if she does indeed 'need' to marry him, to give an

⁹⁴ Murashev, "'Lucia di Lammermoor' by Gaetano Donizetti libretto (English and Italian)," *Murashev*, 2012, http://www.murashev.com/opera/Lucia_di_Lammermoor_libretto_English_Italian101

excuse for Enrico and Arturo to carry on their relationship. This is almost a mirror image of the animosity between Enrico and Edgardo, whose mutual hatred extends back further than Edgardo and Lucia's relationship – even without Lucia falling in love with Edgardo exacerbating the situation it seems that the relationship between the two characters would be poor.

In the first section of this chapter, where I discussed the relationship between Edgardo and Enrico, I discussed the ideas that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick presented for her interpretations of male-male relationships in English literature. Specifically, I discussed the idea that these relationships, even if they require a woman as a 'conduit' of sort, tend to take precedence over the romantic relationships between male and female characters.⁹⁵ My discussion of Sedgwick's ideas as they relate to Enrico and Edgardo focused primarily on animosity and hatred, but clearly the relationship between Enrico and Arturo, as characterised on the stage, is quite the opposite of that. However, the idea which I introduced earlier in this section – Lucia's role in her marriage being essentially to provide an excuse for Enrico and Arturo to carry on a relationship of some sort – is one which I argue is also important. While in her theory, Sedgwick was primarily writing about relationships between male characters which were mostly characterised by the characters hating each other, her ideas can no less be applied to relationships between characters who like each other. Enrico and Edgardo hate each other and are thrown into a situation where they are forced by the narrative to be in each other's vicinity not because of their own choice but because of Lucia and her desire to marry Edgardo.

The first aspect of the relationship between Enrico and Arturo as it appears in the opera which I will discuss is also Arturo's first on-stage appearance, which takes place during the wedding scene that ends Act II of the opera. By the time of the wedding scene Lucia has consented to marry her brother's choice of man instead of Edgardo, a choice of partner which Cammarano's libretto has shown to be partly a practical one. The death of William III, which is referred to in Enrico's duet with Lucia, puts Enrico in an unstable political position and requires him to seek the support, both political and military, of somebody in a position of more power. In the case of *Lucia*, this person is Arturo. In the wedding scene, Enrico is

⁹⁵ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 21

not presented as an equal to Arturo with whom he is essentially making a business deal. Rather, Donizetti's music portrays him as wheedling in a way that David Rosen identified both Wagner and Verdi using to show a character being insincere in *Meter and Testosterone: Preliminary Observations about Meter and Gender in Verdi's Operas*. The technique that Rosen identifies to show a character being insincere is the use of trills – for Iago this takes place during the brindisi '*Inaffia l'ugola*' and his aria '*Credo in un Dio crudele*'.⁹⁶ This is musical language that, by the wedding scene, Donizetti has already used to show Enrico being insincere: his duet with Lucia earlier in Act II included similar ornamentation when Enrico is trying to convince Lucia that Edgardo has forgotten her.

Referring to masculinity rather than sexuality, Donizetti's use of trills here resembles a scene from another opera of the bel canto period. This is the duet between Riccardo and Arturo in Bellini's *I Puritani*, which received its premiere the same year as *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and which has a similar plot to *Lucia*. Arturo and Riccardo (tenor and baritone respectively) are both in love with the soprano Elvira, and their duet involves them fighting over Elvira and nearly coming to blows. But while both characters declare their intentions to fight each other the conflict fizzles out almost immediately.⁹⁷ Riccardo allows Arturo to leave, and rather than fighting, Arturo does so. This duet is dissimilar from the tenor-baritone duet from *Lucia di Lammermoor* and from most 'heroic' tenor-baritone duets from other operas. Examples of such duets from the period include '*Si, pel ciel*' (*Otello*), '*Dio, che nell'alma infondere amor*' (*Don Carlo*), and '*Amici in vita, in morte*' (*La Forza del Destino*).⁹⁸ These duets are characterised by driving rhythms, often dotted rhythms which evoke military brasses, and unison singing.

The heroic duet in *Puritani* is instead between the baritone and the bass (Giorgio): *Il rival salvar tu dei...suoni la tromba e intrepido*. This duet, again, paints a picture of masculinity which I intend to refer to for comparison to *Lucia*, because while *Suoni la tromba* is heroic and shares traits with the tenor-baritone duets mentioned above its subject matter is

⁹⁶ David Rosen, "'Meter and Testosterone': Preliminary Observations about Meter and Gender in Verdi's Operas," in *Una piacente estate di San Martino: Studi e ricerche per Marcello Conati*, ed. Marco Capra (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2000), 193

⁹⁷ Vlado Kotnik, "The Idea of Prima Donna: The History of a Very Special Opera's Institution," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2016): 245

⁹⁸ Scott L. Balthazar, "The Primo Ottocento Duet and the Transformation of the Rossinian Code," *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1989): 488

comparable more to the tenderness that Verdi uses in *Dio, che nell'alma infondere amor*, or that Donizetti uses in Edgardo and Lucia's love duet in the first act of *Lucia*. During the duet, Giorgio essentially negotiates Riccardo's plans down from seeking out and killing Arturo to only killing Arturo if he comes to them. This is a departure from the sort of escalation that we see in, for example, *Qui del padre ancor respira*, where the tension escalates until Enrico and Edgardo are declaring their intentions to fight a duel the next morning. The less heroic of *Puritani*'s duets, that between Arturo and Riccardo, is instead musically characterised by solo singing of the two characters essentially at each other. The musical lines followed by both characters, rather than the bombastic and aggressive dotted rhythms of either *Suoni la tromba* or *Qui del padre ancor respira*, are also filled with ornamentation.

The characterisation that this creates is much like the characterisation Donizetti creates for Enrico using ornamentation in the score of *Lucia*. What the characters are saying is aggressive (in the case of *Puritani*) or confident (in the case of *Lucia*), but the ornamentation produces a subtext which opposes this. The 'fighting music' that Donizetti uses in *Lucia*, especially the wedding scene, is simpler rhythmically and harmonically and sounds martial. Likewise, when Donizetti shows Enrico truly being aggressive and angry during his aria in the first act his musical language is quite different. *Cruda, funesta smania*, Enrico's aria, is tightly wound and controlled with an underlying feeling of barely restrained anger.⁹⁹ This is created in two ways, with the accompaniment and the vocal line. For the orchestral accompaniment Donizetti uses triplets in the accompaniment which are syncopated with Enrico's vocal line. The vocal mostly places Enrico in the middle of his vocal range, and he mostly sings in a controlled legato, which creates the appearance of restraint. When this restraint breaks, however, many baritones will interpolate a high G flat – for example, on the final syllable of '*pria che d'amor, si perfido*'.¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹ This gives the impression of Enrico suddenly losing his grip on his emotions and shouting.

During the wedding scene, Donizetti uses this same musical device to show insincerity from Enrico, but the way in which Donizetti uses it in conjunction with Cammarano's libretto

⁹⁹ The Metropolitan Opera, "Ludovic Tezier - Cruda, funesta smania & Cabaletta - Lucia di Lammermoor - Act I," *YouTube*, May 23 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQw-s4NGbKg>

¹⁰⁰ Dmitri Hvorostovsky, "Donizetti: Lucia di Lammermoor / Act I - Cruda, funesta smania," *YouTube*, December 15 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZK7vCZjH9UI> – this example is here to demonstrate the interpolated Gb.

¹⁰¹ The Gb which I mentioned is not in the score but is commonly added by performers.

gives it a different connotation. The points where Donizetti makes heavy use of trills take place only during Enrico and Arturo's conversation before Lucia arrives on stage. While Enrico is certainly being insincere at this point – he is telling Arturo that Edgardo, to whom Lucia is still attracted, is no longer a problem – Cammarano's libretto creates a different implication. Enrico is certainly portrayed as trying to manipulate Arturo in this way, but he is portrayed as deferential and almost submissive to Arturo throughout the wedding scene. This is an aspect of Enrico's character which we only see at this point in the opera – during his duet with Edgardo Cammarano writes Enrico consistently trying to have the upper hand. The dynamic which Cammarano presents between Enrico and Arturo during the wedding scene is one of Enrico being obsequious and I would argue submissive to Arturo, and this is not one of which Arturo is unaware. Nor is it something which he shies away from: instead, Arturo's libretto has him describing himself as Enrico's 'friend, brother, and protector'.¹⁰² This dynamic was one which was common in same-sex romantic and sexual relationships in historical settings, especially male-male relationships.

An uneven power dynamic in a relationship between two characters is a common dramatic device in opera: an example is the relationship between Filippo and Rodrigo in *Don Carlo*. Filippo being King of Spain puts him clearly far above Rodrigo in the social order, as Rodrigo is a grandee and initially a Marquis. Another example can be found in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in the relationship between Don Giovanni and Leporello. While objectively the relationship between Don Giovanni and Leporello is a toxic one this has not prevented directors from suggesting or outright depicting a romantic or sexual relationship between the two characters. A blatant example of this, both the uneven power dynamic between master and servant and an objectively sexual relationship between the two men, comes from a 2009 production presented at the Macerata Opera Festival, which stars Ildebrando d'Arcangelo as Don Giovanni and Andrea Concetti as Leporello.¹⁰³ In reference to *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Cammarano's writing of Arturo in how he speaks to and about Enrico during the wedding and the way that he speaks to Lucia are both lyrically and musically similar. The language that Arturo uses during his first interaction with Enrico – statements such as '*La*

¹⁰² Murashev, "'Lucia di Lammermoor' by Gaetano Donizetti libretto (English and Italian)," *Murashev*, 2012, http://www.murashev.com/opera/Lucia_di_Lammermoor_libretto_English_Italian101

¹⁰³ Macerata Opera Festival, "Ildebrando d'Arcangelo - Don Giovanni," *YouTube*, August 2 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vf2kR4G0Cuk>

man mi porgi, Enrico: ti stringo a questo cor. A te ne vengo amico, fratello e difensor ('Give me your hand, Enrico: I hold you to my heart. I come to you as a friend, brother, and protector').¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵

Cammarano's libretto is joined by Donizetti's score for this scene in giving the impression that even during the wedding, Arturo is not so much thinking about marrying Lucia but about flirting with her brother. Donizetti uses similar long legato passages for Arturo in his declaration of his friendship for Enrico as he uses in the duet between Edgardo and Lucia in the first act of the opera. In addition to this, Arturo is scored similarly in his conversation with Enrico as he is during his 'proposal' to Lucia, and, more than this, Enrico and Arturo's interaction during the wedding is scored in a noticeably similar way to Edgardo's proposal to Lucia before he leaves for France. Both of these factors, I argue, lend credence to the idea that Arturo and Enrico may have a romantic relationship. A man marrying his lover's sister could have been a way for a male-male couple to make an excuse for their relationship.¹⁰⁶ This is another possible interpretation of the reason behind Arturo being the man who Enrico insists that Lucia marry.

In my discussion of the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo I mentioned my argument that there are two 'triangles' as described by Sedgwick in the story of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. The second of these 'triangles', which incorporates aspects of the previously mentioned Enrico-Lucia-Edgardo relationship as well as introducing aspects of masculinity and masculine identity that the previously mentioned 'triangle' could not, is between Enrico, Edgardo, and Arturo. A significant portion of the Enrico-Edgardo duet is Enrico telling Edgardo that the wedding between Arturo and Lucia took place despite Edgardo's objections to the wedding. A major part of this conversation between the two characters concerns Enrico describing to Edgardo that the wedding night took place and in the text it is clear that this is intended to make Edgardo jealous. I argue, however, that between Enrico and Arturo's other interaction and the connotations that I have identified of the Enrico-Edgardo duet, there is another sort of jealousy to be seen here.

¹⁰⁴ Murashev, "'Lucia di Lammermoor' by Gaetano Donizetti libretto (English and Italian)," *Murashev*, 2012, http://www.murashev.com/opera/Lucia_di_Lammermoor_libretto_English_Italian101

¹⁰⁵ Translation mine

¹⁰⁶ Ari Adut, "A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 111, no. 1 (2005): 215-216

In his *History of Sexuality*, French philosopher and Historian Michel Foucault argued that a relationship between two individuals with a sexuality born of repression occurred in and prior to the eighteenth century, which led to sex only being discussed in the context of a married heterosexual couple.¹⁰⁷ In Cammarano's decision to frame Enrico and Edgardo's interaction and to refer to Enrico and Arturo's relationship like this, *Lucia di Lammermoor* implies that Enrico is not only jealous of his sister but that he in some sense wants Edgardo to share this jealousy. Considering the way that Enrico and Arturo's relationship is referred to by Arturo himself during the wedding scene that ends Act II, I interpret this in two ways. Enrico desires not just for Edgardo to feel jealous that the woman he is attracted to has married another person but for Edgardo to feel jealous of the relationship that he and Arturo have.

6 *THESE VIOLENT DELIGHTS HAVE VIOLENT ENDS: VERDI AND PIAVE'S LA FORZA DEL DESTINO*

While when looking at *Lucia di Lammermoor*, my focus was primarily on male/male relationships without much focus on gender as a separate subject, gender and gender identity will be a major part of my interpretation of *La Forza del Destino*. I specifically intend to look at three themes that I have identified, all of which individually have significance to many queer people. The first of these themes is, quite simply, male/male relationships, as was the case for my interpretation of *Lucia*. I will also be looking at gender identity in far more detail when discussing *La Forza del Destino* than I did when discussing *Lucia*. I will further divide this into names and identity more broadly, as characters using pseudonyms is often an important part of the plot of the opera, and gender and the ways in which the opera plays with conceptions of gender.

One of the most noticeable themes and narrative through-lines of Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* is names and how they relate to identity – and as such this is one of the ways in which I will look at the opera and its story and characters with a mind to discussing trans interpretation. Also important to the opera, however, is gender and gender roles, and, at times, breaking with such gender roles. I argue that, especially with a director with a good

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 37

understanding of trans and nonbinary people, *La Forza del Destino* could very well be interpreted as a narrative which is in part about gender variance. This is one of the two arguments which I mean to make in this chapter, along with an analysis of the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro. While Leonora is one example of a character whose relationship with gender is one which I argue falls outside of the gender binary, partly in that her role in the opera has Carlo unable to identify her gender and Alvaro later assuming that she is a man, she is not the only such character in the opera. I also point to Carlo himself as an example of a character who I would interpret as a transgender man.

Most of my discussion of gender in the section of this thesis looking at *Lucia di Lammermoor* occurred in relation to my discussion of male-male relationships, and how the way that gender was constructed and upheld for both men and women in the 19th century informs the male-male relationships in the opera. I will also be discussing this aspect of gender in *La Forza del Destino* as it relates to the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro. When discussing *Lucia di Lammermoor*, I also used Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theories about male-male relationships in fiction of the 19th century as a particularly important secondary source, and when discussing similar themes to this in *La Forza del Destino* I will be using Sedgwick's theories again. However, as I will be discussing gender not just as something which informs the relationships between characters but looking at gender identity as its own distinct topic this is not the only source I will be using. In this section I will also be discussing topic theory, especially in the ways in which Verdi uses his music in conjunction with Piave's libretto both to develop the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro and to explore gender identity and gender roles on their own.

6.1 SYNOPSIS

Many of the scenes in *La Forza del Destino* focus on characters who are either tangentially related to the arguments in this section of this dissertation or on characters who have no relation at all to it. There are eleven principal characters named in the score of the opera and the chorus is split into six separate 'groups' (peasants, servants, pilgrims, soldiers, vivandieres, and friars) and mentioning every event in the plot is not necessary to understand the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro, nor is it necessary to understand the ways the opera can be seen as a metaphor for a queer experience. However, it is necessary to provide a description of the broad contours of the plot of the

opera and to explain in more detail what happens during scenes which will be central to arguments that I plan to make in this chapter.

In the first act of the opera, Alvaro and Leonora fail to elope together, resulting in the death of Leonora's father the Marquis of Calatrava when Alvaro accidentally shoots him. In the first half of the second act, we are introduced to Leonora's brother Carlo as well as the fortune-teller Preziosilla. At the end of the scene, Carlo and most of the other men agree to go off to war. The second half of the act concerns Leonora becoming a hermit in a cave near to a monastery. In Act Three, both Carlo and Alvaro have conscripted to fight in the Austrian War of Succession. The two men meet, become extremely close friends and then, when Carlo discovers who Alvaro is after Alvaro is wounded in battle, fall out dramatically. They fight and Alvaro swears to become a monk. The next scene is based on Schiller's *Wallensteins Lager* and is sometimes staged as all the characters left behind in the army dying. Act Four, the final act, begins with a group of people being given alms by a monk and asking for Padre Rafaele. Carlo then arrives, intent on fighting Alvaro to the death of one of them, revealing that 'Rafaele' is in fact Alvaro. The two men argue again before Carlo slap Alvaro, successfully goading him into a fight. In the duel that ensues, Alvaro mortally wounds Carlo and happens upon Leonora's hermitage trying to find somebody who can hear Carlo's final confession. After Leonora and Alvaro's reunion she is stabbed to death by Carlo. In the original St. Petersburg version of the opera Alvaro then kills himself despite the guardian of the monastery's protestations that he does not do so, but in the more commonly performed revised versions he does not do this.

6.2 'CHI GLI ANNUNCIO?' 'UN CAVALIER': GENDER AND GENDER IDENTITY IN LA FORZA DEL DESTINO

As discussed in the introductory section to this chapter, one of my arguments when talking especially about *La Forza del Destino* is that gender and gender roles, and the interplay between characters in heavily gendered environments is one of the aspects of the opera which provides some of Verdi and Piave's most interesting commentary. One noticeable gap in academic writing about opera generally but especially in writing about *La Forza del Destino* itself is discussion not just of gendered environments but of gender identity and of possible interpretations of the gender identities of the characters themselves.

Much of the time discussion of transgender identity when applied to the characters in opera is applied to trouser roles. Characters such as Cherubino are in a modern setting often the subject of discussion about gender identity, with them occasionally being interpreted as a transgender man, and even being played by transmasculine performers.¹⁰⁸ One example is Holden Madagame, a transmasculine tenor who described Cherubino's aria *Voi che sapete* as the aria that made him realise what he wanted to do with his life.¹⁰⁹ To give another example, the transmasculine soprano Adrian Angelico has repeatedly played Oktavian, the trouser role in Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*, in professional settings. Angelico is a transmasculine individual who does not take testosterone and therefore has retained a high voice after transitioning.¹¹⁰ Cherubino's character in part revolves not only around his attraction to women but his identity as male. Figaro's aria *Non piu andrai*, while portrayed generally as the title character teasing Cherubino, is no less one which is a discussion of masculinity: *Non piu andrai* contrasts Cherubino's current presentation against a hypermasculine parody of maleness.¹¹¹

The fact that most discussion of transmasculinity and transmasculine identity in opera that hinges on its characters tends to revolve around trouser roles is not necessarily surprising, then, not least because roles such as Cherubino are often played by young people. In some cases, the experience of playing a male character and being able to 'play with' gender on the stage could be the catalyst for such an awakening. Additionally, there are very few openly transgender and nonbinary people performing in or writing about opera, and very few of them will be transmasculine.¹¹² This is no less an avenue which I argue needs more exploration, in no small part because, in order to encourage more transgender and nonbinary people to develop an interest in opera, this demographic needs to see itself on the stage. Additionally, if opera wishes to try to represent as many demographics as

¹⁰⁸ Sophie Gertrude Strohmeier, "Pants Roles: Gender Fluidity and Queer Undertones in Opera," *WQXR*, June 1 2022, <https://www.wqxr.org/story/pants-roles-gender-fluidity-queer-undertones-opera/>

¹⁰⁹ Madagame, Holden, "Holden Madagame: The trans opera singer who went from mezzo soprano to tenor," *The Independent*, December 4, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/holden-madagame-glyndebourne-academy-transgender-opera-a8090386.html>

¹¹⁰ BBC World Service, "Adrian Angelico is one of the few trans male opera singers in the world - BBC World Service," YouTube, June 24 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hjtcBCFANU>

¹¹¹ Richard Andrews, "From Beaumarchais to Da Ponte: A New View of the Sexual Politics of 'Figaro,'" *Music & Letters*, vol. 82, no. 2 (2001): 214-233

¹¹² BBC World Service, "Adrian Angelico is one of the few trans male opera singers in the world - BBC World Service," YouTube, June 24 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hjtcBCFANU>

possible, then taking the opportunity to represent a demographic which often finds itself ignored is one which should not be passed up.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section on *La Forza del Destino*, while an interpretation of Don Carlo di Vargas as a transgender man will be the focus of my exploration of gender and transgender identity in this opera, I will also be discussing Leonora di Vargas. Leonora, the soprano of the opera, follows a similar path to the character of Leonore in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, albeit for a different reason to Leonore: while Leonore disguises herself as a man in order to reunite with her lover Florestan, Leonora disguises herself as a man in order to escape her brother.¹¹³ While Leonore is to a lesser or greater extent successful in her attempts to disguise herself as a man, to the extent that a female character falls in love with her; Leonora's attempt to disguise herself as a man attracts discussion and questions. Leonora is less a character who I feel a director might choose to interpret as nonbinary in herself, although this is still an interpretation of the character which could carry water, however, and is instead a character with a story which I argue could be symbolic of nonbinary identity. I also argue that this could apply regardless of whether the character of Leonora herself were interpreted to be nonbinary.

As the focus of my research and arguments here focuses on Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro, with most of my coverage of gender focusing on Carlo himself and not Alvaro or their relationship, I will not dedicate a lot of time to discussing Leonora and my interpretation of her relationship with gender. In the case of Leonora, her place in the narrative means that most of my interpretation of her character must by necessity take place without looking at her in relation to the other characters. Looking at Carlo, one of the first things that the audience sees Carlo do is to join the army, an action of which there are two possible interpretations. The first is that Carlo is aware of the military being a place where men are in essentially a male-only society with very few women around. Women would attach themselves to military companies – this is the subject of the opera *La fille du regiment*, in fact – and this is shown a little later in the opera.¹¹⁴ No less there are reports of

¹¹³ Vlado Kotnik, "The Adaptability of Opera: When Different Social Agents Come to Common Ground," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2013): 318

¹¹⁴ M. de Thémis and Margaret Cecilia Cleveland, "Donizetti: His Life and Works," *Watson's Art Journal*, vol. 7, no. 16 (1867): 81-82

men from the early modern period having homosexual relationships in all branches of military service.¹¹⁵

The service most noted for this is the Navy, but there is also evidence of men in the army having homosexual relationships.¹¹⁶ In some cases, this was a sort of situational sexuality, where men who were ordinarily attracted to women found themselves in an all-male society and adapted in order to fulfil the desire for companionship. In others, though, it seems as though the men involved joined the army at least in part with the intention of being able to have homosexual relationships. In addition to this, Carlo and Alvaro are both officers in Act III of the opera: Carlo is an Adjutant (a commissioned rank given to an officer who assists a commanding officer with administration), while Alvaro is the Captain of the Grenadiers. In the setting of the opera this would mean that Alvaro was in command of a battalion, which we see referred to briefly during Act III. The fact that both Carlo and Alvaro are officers would mean that they would have, in a 'real world' setting, very little opportunity to fraternise outside of the other officers.¹¹⁷ We also see this in how Piave characterises both: while well-liked Alvaro seems to have few friends in the army. Carlo, meanwhile, appears to have maintained his characterisation as somebody who is generally unpopular and annoying from the second act into the third act.¹¹⁸

The second interpretation which I argue of Carlo is that he is a transgender man. While people who might now consider themselves to be transgender existed in the past, it is difficult to classify them as such in the modern day because of the difference in language. This being said, while the word 'transgender' was not first used until 1965, this does not mean that historical figures who died before the word was first used could not have been transgender. One such example of somebody who was born before the coining of the word 'transgender', but who would still likely have identified himself as such, was Amelio Robles Ávila. Ávila, although he was assigned female at birth, lived as a man for almost 75 years,

¹¹⁵ Gert Hekma, "Homosexual Behavior in the Nineteenth-Century Dutch Army," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1991): 267

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ A.D. Harvey, "Homosexuality and the British Army During the First World War," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 79, no. 320 (2001): 313-314

¹¹⁸ Murashev, "'La forza del destino' by Giuseppe Verdi libretto (English and Italian)," *Murashev*, 2012, http://www.murashev.com/opera/La_forza_del_destino_libretto_English_Italian

and would threaten people who referred to him with female honorifics with a pistol.¹¹⁹ Since this interpretation of Don Carlo di Vargas does not apply exclusively to productions of *La Forza del Destino* set in the 18th century and to streamline the terminology, I will be describing my interpretation of the character as transgender or transmasculine.

An interpretation of the relationship between Carlo and Alvaro as a gay one has been suggested repeatedly, such as by Sam Abel in *Opera in the Flesh*.¹²⁰ Additionally, William Berger's *Verdi With a Vengeance*, while not an academic text, makes a similar suggestion about the relationship between Carlo and Alvaro. On the other hand, my research presented no academic readings of Carlo as a transgender man, and no interpretations other than my own from fans. The military has historically attracted individuals such as the previously mentioned Amelio Robles Ávila who were assigned female at birth and who may have transitioned before such terminology existed in order to serve in the military. Women dressing as men and serving in the military without identifying their gender as anything other than female is also not unknown – but in the case of Robles I feel comfortable in my suggestion that he would have considered himself a trans person.¹²¹ This also provides historical precedent to the idea of transgender men or people who may have considered themselves transgender had the language been available to them joining the military. This is also an aspect of my interpretation of Carlo as transgender.

There is no definitive data for the number of transgender people (either transmasculine or transfeminine, or nonbinary people), and therefore no definitive answer to the question of how many trans people are attracted to the same gender. However, the majority of roughly 2000 trans men surveyed in the USA in 2015 (65%) identified their sexuality as 'queer'. The National Center for Transgender Equality, who commissioned the research, describe this as encompassing bisexual, pansexual, gay, or asexual.¹²² Keeping this in mind, we can interpret Carlo's decision to join the army not just as an expression of queer identity but interpret this

¹¹⁹ Gabriela Cano and Carlos Monsiváis, *Unconcealable Realities of Desire: Amelio Robles's (Transgender) Masculinity in the Mexican Revolution*, in "Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico" (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 35-36

¹²⁰ Sam Abel, *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance* (New York: Avalon Publishing, 1996), 70-71

¹²¹ Ellen Creathorne Clayton, *Female Warriors: Memorials of Female Valour and Heroism*, from the *Mythological Ages to the Present Era* (Tinsley Brothers, 1879)

¹²² S.E. James et al., *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, National Center for Transgender Equality, Washington, D.C. (2015), 59

as more impetus to portray the character as a trans man. Not all historical figures who might now be considered transmasculine went into extremely male-dominated fields of employment but especially in the early modern period we see a good amount of evidence for this being the case. As well as Amelio Robles Ávila we see Charley Parkhurst (a stagecoach driver). Parkhurst is also the main character of the first opera written specifically for a transmasculine performer.¹²³ An example of an historical nonbinary person was the Public Universal Friend, a Quaker preacher who shunned their name and all gendered pronouns, who wore gender-neutral clothes and asked to be referred to with no gendered pronouns.¹²⁴

Since the army was male dominated, were the character of Carlo to be played as transmasculine, he could have joined the army either to 'prove' his masculinity to himself or society. Equally, while the idea seems contradictory on first glance, it isn't impossible that the military could, in a 'real world' setting, be seen as a location where somebody in this position would not have their gender questioned. In the military somebody in the position that I suggest Carlo is in might well think it unlikely that anybody would even get the idea to misgender them. The idea of somebody designated female at birth getting into the army in this way would not be unknown, of course, but it would still have been seen as unlikely.

Masculinity is one of the most important themes of *La Forza del Destino*, and this refers to a whole spectrum of masculine identities and expressions of gender. In order to demonstrate my point, I will briefly touch on the role of Padre Guardiano in the opera and the different ways that Piave and Verdi write masculinity. Padre Guardiano's main role in the opera is to be a fatherly figure to both Leonora and Alvaro, if not actively a father figure for Leonora. In *La Forza del Destino*, the world of the military that Carlo and Alvaro exist in is a hypermasculine one, partly by design. However, the world of the monastery that Guardiano is the guardian of is equally a masculine one, albeit without the expectation of violence. Carlo and Alvaro both join the military with the expectations of death and/or glory, while Guardiano is the guardian of a monastery which is open only to male monks. In the 18th century, when the opera is set, only men could join the army, and even in a modern setting,

¹²³ Proud Viks, "Wild West PSU Opera features lead role for trans singer," *Inside Portland State*, December 1 2022, <https://insideportlandstate.pdx.edu/2022/12/01/wild-west-psu-opera-features-lead-role-for-trans-singer/>

¹²⁴ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 35

Verdi's writing of the military act means that there is no room for women outside of the *Wallenstein's Lager* scene.¹²⁵

While both the army and the monastery are male dominated by design, the expectations of masculinity and the way that masculinity is to be performed are completely different. Both the army and the monastery expect discipline of their members, but while the third act acknowledges Alvaro as an excellent officer and able to deal with the discipline of the military, Act IV suggests that he is ill-suited for the sort of discipline expected of him in the monastery.¹²⁶ Carlo is also unable to reconcile the need for discipline that he finds in the military with his own character. He is unable to reconcile his affection for Alvaro and the fact that Alvaro is the person who killed his father, and therefore that Alvaro is the person that he hates. Carlo fits excellently in this way into the military's particular combination of fraternity and violence towards the 'other'. Piave demonstrates this with the chorus, upon hearing of the war (including Carlo), immediately declaring '*Morte ai Tedeschi!*' ('*Death to the Germans!*') while also having Carlo and Alvaro's first interaction be them swearing eternal friendship.¹²⁷ Carlo's relationship as a character with the idea of the 'other' could be reframed as an exploration of internalised homophobia in the hands of the right director and performer. Carlo's initial camaraderie with Alvaro and him realising that his feelings are not platonic could be directed as causing him to turn his discomfort outwards and Alvaro being the man who killed his father could just seem to Carlo to be a justification for his own internalised issues.

When discussing the organic discipline of the body, Foucault referred to a sort of argument to nature which posited that bodies must do that which is 'natural' of them.¹²⁸ The positioning of certain actions a person can take as 'natural' and others as 'unnatural' is particularly relevant to LGBTQIA+ people, whose identities are often decried as unnatural. A gay couple where neither party is transgender, for example, may be told that their attraction is 'unnatural' because they would not be able to produce a child and a transgender person may be told that their body is 'unnatural' because they have taken sex

¹²⁵ Matthew McCormack and Kevin Linch, "Defining Soldiers: Britain's Military, c. 1740-1815," *War in History*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2013): 145

¹²⁶ Murashev, "'La forza del destino' by Giuseppe Verdi libretto (English and Italian)," *Murashev*, 2012, http://www.murashev.com/opera/La_forza_del_destino_libretto_English_Italian

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 167-168

hormones not usually produced by their body in a sufficient quantity to produce traits associated with a particular sex, or because they have undergone gender confirmation surgery. However in an interpretation of *La Forza del Destino* focusing on homoerotic subtext, a director could take the discipline required by the army and the monastery, and especially of the monastery, and reframe it in this manner.

6.3 *IO L'AMISTÀ NE AMBÌA*: DON CARLO DI VARGAS, DON ALVARO, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP

The use of gender and gender roles not only by Piave in his libretto but by Verdi in his score itself in *La Forza del Destino* is a subject which is rife for interpretation regardless of whether this examination is attempting to read queer themes into the opera or not. While I clearly subscribe to the argument that *La Forza del Destino* has queer themes outside just of the subtext between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Carlo which this section will expound upon, exemplified not only by the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro but by the character of Leonora and her character arc, Piave's libretto and Verdi's score provide a fascinating look at standards of masculinity and femininity in 19th century Italy. As such, when discussing male-male relations, in *La Forza del Destino*, I will be drawing heavily on the way in which Verdi uses and subverts musical conventions of the time.

After the first act of the opera, the focus of *La Forza del Destino* shifts from the relationship between Alvaro and Leonora to the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Alvaro, with their initially one-sided relationship even managing to dominate the narrative before the two characters first appear on stage together. Carlo's first line in the opera, during the first scene of Act II, '*Ricerco invan la suola e il seduttore! Perfidi!*' not only immediately makes it clear to the audience who Carlo is in relation to Alvaro and especially to Leonora, it makes his pre-ordained role in *La Forza del Destino*'s plot abundantly clear to at least a well-informed audience.¹²⁹ The fact that Carlo will spend the next couple of on-stage hours hounding both Leonora and Alvaro would especially have been obvious to audiences when the opera first premiered as *La Forza del Destino* had its premier after but still within easy memory of the bel canto period. The 'standard' bel canto plot, as seen in, for example, *Il Trovatore*, or indeed in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, could be boiled down to a baritone (often either a relation of the soprano, if he was not in love with her) doing all he could to prevent

¹²⁹ Murashev, "'La forza del destino" by Giuseppe Verdi libretto (English and Italian)," *Murashev*, 2012, http://www.murashev.com/opera/La_forza_del_destino_libretto_English_Italian

a soprano and a tenor from marrying. Don Carlo di Vargas is not only clearly a baritone but clearly one who, if not in a standard bel canto opera, often seems to refer in his music and his characterisation to this period.

As stated above, bel canto traditions appear to lay out a clearly marked path for the characters, but this is especially the case for Don Carlo di Vargas. Carlo exemplifies this in more ways than one: in addition to being a baritone cast in a similar role by the narrative to Enrico Ashton, the baritone in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Carlo bears several similarities to a character archetype in a considerably older style of genre than the bel canto period. This is the revenge tragedy or the revenge play, a genre which hinges far less on romance than bel canto opera tends to: Carlo is cast as the avenger similarly to avenger characters in renaissance Revenge Plays. Rather than a genre, revenge plays are plays which are joined together by a distinct set of themes. A character wants revenge for a tragic murder, often with the ghost of the murdered party, or other omens, spurring the avenger on to their actions. The villains of such plays, typically, are thoroughly evil and often men, while the person attempting to exact revenge may often be as unpleasant a person as the object of their obsession.¹³⁰

La Forza del Destino does not adhere entirely to the formula which I mentioned above. Even so, certain of the places where it diverges from the general formula of a revenge play are a way that *La Forza del Destino's* homoerotic themes are further exemplified. In not separating the avenger and the villain and casting Carlo in both roles, Verdi and Piave combine two distinct character archetypes who of themselves have been argued in scholarship to frequently have powerfully homoerotic relationships in a way that accentuates these themes.¹³¹ This comes from a change from the original play, wherein Alvaro befriended first Don Carlo di Vargas while in the army. In the play, Alvaro then kills Carlo and incurs the ire of a second brother, Don Alfonso. Don Alfonso was written out in the transition between the original play and the opera, and instead of having two separate

¹³⁰ Ronald Broude, "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (1975): 38-40

¹³¹ Nicholas Radel, "Fletcherian Tragicomedy, Cross-Dressing, and the Constriction of Homoerotic Desire in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Drama*, Vol. 26 (1995): 53-55

characters to fulfil all of Don Carlo's role as it appears in the opera the two characters are boiled down to one.¹³²

Maintaining only one enemy who pursues Alvaro through the opera is far more narratively compelling for the audience than having two characters to essentially fulfil the same role. By merit of Verdi and Piave's decision to condense Don Carlo and Don Alfonso down into one character streamlining the storytelling, a production is also given the ability to develop the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro far more than if Carlo were to have remained as two characters as in the original play. This also bears certain similarities beyond just the fact that one character in the opera is essentially a 'composite' character of multiple characters in the source material to how Cammarano and Donizetti treat the characters in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. I briefly mentioned in my discussion of *Lucia* that Enrico is in fact a composite of four characters in Scott's original novel. In the case of *Lucia*, the combination of characters who were condensed down into one character resulted in Enrico taking on a characterisation which bore marked similarities to certain tropes of gender common to Gothic literature.¹³³

In the case of *La Forza del Destino*, on the other hand, both Don Carlo and Don Alfonso are male characters who had much the same motivation in the original play. Because of this, the main change that comes of the combination of two characters into one is to the relationship between Don Carlo and Don Alvaro. While the original play upon which *La Forza del Destino* was based did give Don Carlo and Alvaro's relationship some development Alvaro and Alfonso had very little relationship. The relationship between Alvaro and Alfonso, which Piave and Verdi commuted into Act IV of the opera, is between two characters who have no positive interactions in their on-stage past. Carlo and Alvaro in the opera, on the other hand, have spent much of Act III as good friends before Carlo looks through Alvaro's letters to discover who he is.¹³⁴ As I mentioned this makes for far more of a compelling relationship between the two men of itself. As the audience watching, we know the whole time that the relationship between the two characters is unlikely to lead anywhere but to disaster.

¹³² Spain is Culture, "Don Álvaro, or the Force of Fate," *Spain is Culture*, November 8 2017, http://www.spainisculture.com/en/obras_culturales/don_alvaro_o_la_fuerza_del_sino.html

¹³³ Asmat Nabi, "Gender Represented in the Gothic Novel," *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (2017): 73

¹³⁴ Murashev, "'La forza del destino' by Giuseppe Verdi libretto (English and Italian)," *Murashev*, 2012, http://www.murashev.com/opera/La_forza_del_destino_libretto_English_Italian

For an audience, a relationship between two characters that is heading towards disaster without the knowledge of the characters is compelling. This kind of dramatic irony forms an important part of the stories of many operas from many genres, often relying on the audience's pre-existing knowledge of genre conventions or foreknowledge of stories.¹³⁵ We even see this in the first surviving opera, Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, wherein the audience would have been expected to know that Eurydice had died during Orfeo's celebrations of his upcoming wedding. It makes for a far more interesting story for the audience, and from the point of view of a director one obvious way to heighten the stakes of the fallout of a relationship between two characters is to heighten the stakes of the relationship itself. The idea of *La Forza del Destino* showing the dramatic fallout of a relationship between two friends ending extremely poorly is already interesting for an audience member.

When writing music for Don Carlo di Vargas, Verdi habitually and clearly deliberately uses musical language and scoring that serves deliberately to set the character apart from the other characters. This therefore has the effect that Carlo is set somewhat apart from the rest of the narrative. The most noticeable aspect of Carlo's music is exemplified in his major aria *Morir! Tremenda cosa!...Urna fatale*, which is a cavatina-cabaletta. This is a musical style which is characterised by recitative accompanied by the orchestra which is in a stricter time than secco recitative (*accompagnato*), an aria with a slower tempo which is followed by a faster, shorter aria of a simpler style with a repetitive rhythm.¹³⁶ While this was a form of aria that appeared several times in *Lucia di Lammermoor* (both Lucia and Enrico's main arias are in this form, in fact), and a form which Verdi himself also used (for example, Violetta's *Ah, fors'è lui?... Sempre libera!* in *La Traviata*), by the 1860s it was an outdated form which Verdi had for the most part stopped using. A contemporary review of *Masnadieri*, one of Verdi's operas which features several cavatina-cabalettas, described Francesco's aria where he reflects in horror upon having killed his father as 'a melody which would eminently suit the tenderest of loves', then going on to suggest that 'he would have done better not to set these unfortunate words [to music] at all'.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ R.M. Longyear, "Beethoven and Romantic Irony," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (1970): 647-649

¹³⁶ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Cabaletta," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, n.d., <https://www.britannica.com/art/cabaletta>

¹³⁷ G. Baldini, *The Story of Giuseppe Verdi: Oberto to Un Ballo in Maschera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 134

Verdi's use of this musical convention in an opera which is otherwise characterised musically by melodies and arias which are far more typical of the time, then, might well seem to be an odd one. This is doubly the case as it is not the only time in which Verdi uses an outdated musical style in *La Forza del Destino*. Not only do both of Carlo's arias have musical conventions common of operatic arias written at the latest two or so decades ago, but Carlo's musical language also seems to 'influence' that of the characters around him. While Carlo spends much of the opera either literally or figuratively alone, the fact that all four of his duets with Alvaro, the person with whom he sings the most, take on Carlo's musical conventions is notable – doubly so when Alvaro has his own musical 'language', and that musical language is quite the opposite of Carlo's. As previously mentioned, Carlo's music has a good amount in common with characters like, for example, Enrico (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Ezio (*Attila*), and Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*). His music is both distinctly martial in nature, with a good many dotted rhythms (especially in his and Alvaro's duets and *Son Pereda*) and liberal use of brass, high woodwinds, and strings. All of this combines to create an image not only of a character who is not only in some sense possessed by the past, but very clearly obsessed by masculinity and the standards of masculinity.

In his use of military motifs, Verdi also stresses themes of both masculinity and honour, giving further characterisation to Piave's libretto, which also has Carlo place a good amount of emphasis on these aspects of himself throughout the opera. Alvaro, on the other hand, is musically characterised far differently to Carlo throughout the opera, and this is best exemplified in his aria, *La vita e inferno all'infelice*, which is the first aria in Act III, as well as the only aria that Alvaro has (this is compared to the two arias that Carlo sings, and the three that Leonora has). This aria is, essentially, Alvaro telling the audience his life story, as well as revealing that he believes Leonora to be dead. Musically both of Carlo's arias, as well as being written in a style which seems calculated to harken back to older operatic traditions, are fast-moving even if they are not necessarily upbeat, although the long legato lines that characterise a lot of Verdi's arias for baritone are present especially in his second aria. Alvaro, on the other hand, is consistently less musically agitated, which can be seen in

his first aria. Alvaro immediately holds aloof and does not tell Carlo his name without prodding, telling Carlo that he owes his being saved to chance (*'al caso'*).¹³⁸

In its text, *Forza* presents us with a world full of people who are almost obsessed with honour and the defence of that honour, as well as their family honour more broadly. The first time the audience sees this comes in the first act, with Alvaro saying that he would kill himself in order to defend Leonora's honour from accusations of impropriety rather than attempt a duel with her father. Later still in the opera, Preziosilla lists amongst the reasons that the men who she is inducing to come to war along with her is only briefly focused on the actual 'issue' of the War of the Austrian Succession and more on the benefits that going to war will bestow on those who go. I would argue that, as well as the fixation on honour that we see in the story, in the narrative we see Piave and Verdi in some way mocking this glorification of war. This clearly fits with the subtext of the fixation on honour that we see throughout the opera, beginning, again, right in the opera's first act. Alvaro's bringing a gun when he and Leonora plan to elope with the intention of shooting himself if Leonora's honour were called into question almost literally backfires when his throwing the gun down to surrender results in the Marquis' death. In this way, a character's fixation on honour above all else and attempt to adhere rigidly to their own perceived moral code causes a completely unnecessary death.

This presentation extends into the theme of honour and the glory of war, beginning right from the point at which the idea of going to war is introduced by Preziosilla and she suggests personal glory being in the future of everybody who goes to fight. Even the circumstances of Carlo and Alvaro's first on-stage interaction seems in some way to parody the sorts of 'heroics' that one might expect in a depiction of war. While Alvaro's first on-stage action in relation to Carlo is to save him from being killed, not only are the people who are attacking Carlo fellow officers from their own side in the conflict, but the circumstances that lead Carlo to this point are clearly ridiculous. Act III of the opera begins with a brief chorus of some officers playing cards off-stage, before Alvaro's aria -- and directly after the aria, Alvaro saves Carlo from being killed because of this card game. Even Piave's libretto slightly pokes fun at this turn of the plot, with Alvaro commenting that Carlo seems too

¹³⁸ Murashev, "'La forza del destino' by Giuseppe Verdi libretto (English and Italian)," *Murashev*, 2012, http://www.murashev.com/opera/La_forza_del_destino_libretto_English_Italian

noble to be fleeing being killed by officers of their own 'side', and Carlo responding by explaining the circumstances. This is not only the point at which Carlo and Alvaro meet on-stage for the first time but the point at which this overarching theme of honour and masculinity first intersects with the theme of male-male relationships.

As I have already established, the first time Carlo and Alvaro meet occurs during the third act of the opera, where the two men are both serving in the army under pseudonyms. Immediately the relationship between the two characters calls to mind the sorts of relationships between two male characters that appear in other operas – especially the relationship between Carlo and Rodrigo in Verdi's *Don Carlo* and that between Nadir and Zurga in Bizet's *Les Pecheurs de Perles*.¹³⁹ In all three of these relationships, we see a level of closeness and genuine regard for each other which in some ways rivals or even overshadows that of the heterosexual relationship in their respective operas. Carlo and Rodrigo's duet in *Don Carlo*, for example, is distinctly reminiscent of wedding vows in its text, and of the ritual of a Christian wedding ceremony in its staging.¹⁴⁰ Bizet's duet is less thematically explicit in this way. No less, however, in the duet from *Les Pecheurs des Perles*, the attraction that both men feel for Leila falls away in comparison to the affection between the two male characters.

There are four particularly important parts of *La Forza del Destino* where the relationship between Carlo and Alvaro is concerned. These are, in order, *Amici in vita, in morte*, *Solenne in quest'ora*, *Né gustare m'è dato un'ora di quiete*, and *Invano, Alvaro*. These are all duets between the two characters – although the first two are often counted together as one almost segues into the next. Of these duets, however, I argue that the most important for an interpretation of the relationship between Carlo and Alvaro as a queer one is *Solenne in quest'ora*. As such, this is the duet which I will be looking at in the most detail for my interpretation of this relationship. After their first duet, *Amici in vita, in morte*, Carlo and Alvaro depart together for the battle of Velletri. This, and Alvaro being wounded and nearly killed in the battle, takes place offstage, and leads almost directly into Carlo and Alvaro's second duet, *Solenne in quest'ora*. In *Verdi With a Vengeance*, William Berger describes this

¹³⁹ Susan McClary, "Paradigm Dissonances: Music Theory, Cultural Studies, Feminist Criticism," *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1994): 76

¹⁴⁰ Hilda S. Rollman-Branch, "Psychoanalytic Reflections on Verdi's *Don Carlo*," *American Imago*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1963): 247

duet as '[the] love duet that Verdi never wrote for tenor and soprano', and this is an argument which I also make.¹⁴¹ Leonora is not present in the plot at this point and she is therefore physically absent from the opera's romantic subplot, but the implications of (nearly) dying in the arms of another person are undeniably intimate. Berger also describes this duet as having a 'sensual intimacy noticeably missing in his actual love duets'.¹⁴² I argue that, in *Solenne in quest'ora*, Carlo takes on the role of romantic lead opposite Alvaro, in the absence of his 'actual' love interest.

Solenne in quest'ora is more than just passingly similar to other of Verdi's heterosexual love duets – for example, the brief duet between Manrico and Leonora in *Il Trovatore* which takes place between Manrico's *Ah, si, ben mio* and *Di quella pira*. In Verdi's comparable tenor-baritone duets – Iago and Otello's *Si, pel ciel*, for example, or even Carlo and Alvaro's previous *Amici in vita, in morte* – the two men will tend to sing in thirds. In *Solenne in quest'ora*, however, as well as all of Carlo and Alvaro's remaining duets, this musical language is absent. Instead, Carlo and Alvaro are called upon to sing in a way that is reminiscent of the duets between the canonical lovers in other of Verdi's operas. This is similar even to the musical language of Alvaro and Leonora's duet in the first act of the opera, with one character singing the theme which is then echoed by the other, and the two singing in canon after this. This is undeniably like how Verdi scores his heterosexual love duets, and not just those in *La Forza del Destino*.¹⁴³ This musical subtext blends with the subtext which I argue is present in Verdi's libretto, and which demonstrates Verdi's understanding of, in Berger's words, 'the eroticism of male conflict and death'.¹⁴⁴ Writing about Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* and more broadly about war films and other cinema with a primarily male target audience, Kent Brintall makes the following suggestion. '[In] the war film, a soldier can hold his buddy – as long as his buddy is dying on the battlefield'. This is an argument that is shared between Brintall and Berger, with Brintall

¹⁴¹ William Berger, *Verdi with a Vengeance: An Energetic Guide to the Life and Complete Works of the King of Opera* (New York City: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2000) 326

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 326

¹⁴³ Emanuele Senici, "'Teco lo Sto': Strategies of Seduction in Act II of 'Un Ballo in Maschera,'" *Cambridge Opera Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1/2 (2002), 79-92

¹⁴⁴ Berger, *Verdi with a Vengeance*, 326

going on to argue that '[violence] makes the homoeroticism of many 'male' genres invisible; it is a structural mechanism of plausible deniability'.¹⁴⁵

Solenne in quest'ora is a moment of genuine intimacy for Carlo and Alvaro, and it is also one which Alvaro is never able to have with Leonora. Yet it is also a moment of intimacy that would not have been able to happen without a considerable amount of violence: Alvaro's decision to join the army seems to have come from his killing of the Marquis, and after this, Carlo's decision to join the army comes from a promise from Preziosilla of a particularly bloody sort of glory. Even had Alvaro not been mortally wounded there would have been no way for these characters to have had this moment of intimacy without a massive amount of violence. And, as I mentioned before, because Leonora is not present at this point, the person who is present when Alvaro nearly dies – and the person who comforts him here – is Carlo, and not Leonora, even though Leonora is canonically Alvaro's love interest. The resemblance that this gives the relationship between Carlo and Alvaro to canonical heterosexual relationships in other operas and other theatre is striking.

7 CONCLUSION

7.1 RESEARCH SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

The first aim of this research was to interpret the characters from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* in a way that was not necessarily present in the text. I did this in two ways: first, in the case of both *Forza* and *Lucia*, I interpreted the central male-male relationships in the opera as queer relationships. In the case of *Forza*, I extended my queer interpretation of the work into an interpretation of Don Carlo di Vargas, the piece's principal baritone, as a transgender man.

In the introduction of this research, I gave an overview of the plans for my work, including a brief overview of the pre-existing literature looking at queer subtext in opera. I also gave definitions of important terms which I would be using throughout my work, and explained what brought me to the research interest which I have. This was followed by a more

¹⁴⁵ Kent L. Brintnall, "Tarantino's Incarnational Theology: 'Reservoir Dogs', Crucifixions and Spectacular Violence," *CrossCurrents*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (2004), 72

thorough exploration of the queer heritage of opera and ways in which I saw that this could be continued past the present and into the future.

The first of the two operas which I looked at was Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, an analysis which I started with an introduction laying out my intentions and a brief synopsis. For my analysis of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, I opted to look at two relationships between male characters and the ways that Donizetti and Cammarano write and subvert traditional conceptions of masculinity. In my suggestions for ways that my ideas could be applied to productions I also brought up the ideas of Berthold Brecht and his distancing effect. In the first section of this chapter I looked at the relationship between Enrico and Edgardo, the opera's principal baritone and tenor, and in this section I also brought up the idea that Lucia is essentially pushed to the side in her own opera. I followed this section with an analysis of the relationship between Enrico and Arturo, and the ways that I viewed this relationship as subverting traditional heterosexual masculinity. Throughout this chapter I referred to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her ideas of the erotic triangle, and the difference between attraction and desire.

The second opera which I looked at for my research was *La Forza del Destino*, for which I did not opt to provide a full synopsis so as to avoid conjecture and excessive discussion of characters who are not important to my arguments. I instead summed up the most important parts of *La Forza del Destino* and gave a more detailed account of the scenes which I would later make more detailed reference to and analyse in more detail.

Throughout this chapter I again returned to the writing of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and I looked in a little detail at the Gothic and how masculinity was presented in 19th century Gothic literature. In addition to this, however, I looked at Michel Foucault's ideas of discipline and how this relates to the body, and how this can add to an interpretation of the characters as queer.

One of the main focuses of my analysis of the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro was masculinity, and in this I also examined the character of Don Carlo di Vargas in more detail. This involved an interpretation of the character as transmasculine, and an exploration of how explicitly playing a character as transmasculine could add to the themes of masculinity in the opera. This was followed by a reading of the relationship between Don Carlo di Vargas and Don Alvaro and how nineteenth-century Italian conceptions of

masculinity affected and drove this relationship. I also focused a good amount of my attention on topic theory throughout this chapter, both in my interpretation of the relationship between Carlo and Alvaro and in my interpretation of Carlo as a single character.

7.2 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER SUGGESTIONS

There are several limitations to this research, for a variety of reasons. For ease of comprehension, I have split them into limitations in a performance-based space and limitations in a more academically focused space. I will also interpolate suggestions for ways to rectify the issues which I have identified into the discussion of the issues.

Beginning with a limitation in a performance-focused space, this research comes with the obvious limitation of my having focused nearly exclusively on male-male relationships. As I previously explained, this was in part to allow for an in-depth coverage of a small amount of content rather than shallow coverage of a wide amount of subject matter. I no less recognise that only looking at male-male relationships and masculine gender identity (including transmasculine identity) means essentially 'ignoring' a good amount of scholarship on lesbian interpretations and feminine gender identity (including or perhaps especially transfeminine gender identity). I also recognise that there is generally a perceived lack of representation of women and female voices, especially those of trans women and transfeminine individuals when talking about opera, both literally and figuratively. While work is being done to rectify this – for example, the Royal Opera House's *Engender* initiative – increasing and improving the representation of women in opera clearly requires more work and focus. While looking at female-female relationships in opera would not be the be-all-end-all of critique of opera from a female starting point I no less feel that it would be important to look further into.

Another aspect of the limitation caused by my mostly discussing transmasculine identity where gender is concerned is that transmasculine and transfeminine vocal performers naturally have different needs. While the voice of a transmasculine performer who takes testosterone would naturally become lower thanks to the effects of hormones, some transmasculine performers may choose not to take testosterone or be otherwise unable to do so. This is in contrast with transfeminine performers, whose singing voices do not

become higher with oestrogen. Trans men and transmasculine individuals often report feeling erased in discussions about transgender issues, and so while the hypervisibility of transfeminine individuals is not a good thing, I thought it important to include a group which is often nearly invisible. No less there is plenty of space for further research on supporting transmasculine vocalists: the general effects of testosterone on transmasculine vocal production are well known, but this research is incomplete. Research into how taking testosterone after already having been through puberty once (which, in an oestrogen-based puberty, causes change in the vocal cords) affects the voice could lead to improvements in vocal health for transmasculine individuals.

In my discussion of *La Forza del Destino* (specifically my interpretation of Don Carlo di Vargas as a transmasculine individual) I mentioned that having characters who are being played as transgender or nonbinary should be played by trans or nonbinary performers. I firmly hold to this opinion, but I also suggest further here that this is not and should not be seen as the be-all-end-all of portraying characters as transgender, or any other marginalised identity. I would further suggest here that having characters played as transgender and those characters played by transgender performers is important but if the performer is the only transgender or nonbinary person who is involved in the production this could still produce problems. As I previously mentioned there is a considerable lack of research into how transitioning affects the voice of transmasculine individuals and this on its own could very easily present a vocal health problem for such performers. But in addition to this only having a transgender individual as a performer, while undeniably a major achievement for them and for visibility of transgender and/or nonbinary people, gives that individual limited say over how that character is portrayed. It would be preferable to have not only trans and nonbinary performers but directors, musical directors, dramaturgs, vocal coaches, and costume designers to name just a few less visible places.

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