ABSENT, BUT IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN OPERA:

A STUDY OF THE ROLES OF DECEASED MOTHERS IN VERDI'S *IL TROVATORE*,

WAGNER'S *PARSIFAL*, AND MASSENET'S *WERTHER*

by

ROBERT S. HARRELSON

(Under the Direction of Frederick P. Burchinal)

ABSTRACT

Plot development in operas may take many forms. As the great opera composer Giuseppe Verdi noted, the best practice is to show an audience rather than to tell them. However, certain plots are so convoluted that external conventions are often employed to guarantee clear delivery and maximize dramatic impact in a limited amount of time. Characters which are specifically mentioned during an opera may help drive story lines even if those characters do not ever actually appear on stage. This development is especially notable when an archetype, such as a deceased mother, is utilized. This dissertation discusses three operas in which deceased mothers play important roles, despite never appearing onstage. This study should be of use in analyzing how other "absent" characters have been treated in existing works, and how they might be presented in performances or in future compositions. The analysis is a starting guide for approaching new depths of characterizations using a previously little-studied dramaturgical device and will be of use to vocalists, voice coaches, voice instructors, directors, and composers.

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B.S., Gardner-Webb College, 1991

M.M., Appalachian State University, 2022

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2024

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DEDICATION

For my wife, Amy Cox Harrelson, and for my parents, Michael A. Harrelson (Ph. D., University of Georgia, 1969) and Judith P. Harrelson.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my past and present committee members, Professors Frederick P. Burchinal, Elizabeth Johnson Knight, Rebecca L. Atkins, and Gregory S. Broughton for their unwavering support of my efforts while at the University of Georgia, and for their work as members of my committee. Special thanks to my mentor and voice teacher, Professor Burchinal for his invaluable insights and encouragement. My sincere thanks as well to my wonderful wife, Amy, for lovingly participating in some significant career adjustments at this point in my life. I have never had to say, “I wish I had tried,” because she made possible the pursuit of my goals every step along the way.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As British psychiatrist Mark Jones pointed out in his series of articles "The Psychiatry of Opera:"

> *Opera, together with the other performing arts, literature, and painting, cannot simply be seen as entertainment. It is also a reflection of the society in which the composer and librettist lived and the issues and values contemporary to those people. Opera with its fusion of words, music, and theater is able to delineate those issues involved and present them with an emotional intensity possibly unequalled elsewhere in art.*[1]

The purpose of this analysis is to explore an area of opera history which has been somewhat ignored, that of "missing" characters. Specifically, these are characters which never appear during the performance of an opera, but their mention by on-stage characters motivates the actions of the opera and affects the audience's experience during the performance. An examination of the librettos of 140 operas which are either canonic (i.e. consecrated as outstanding examples in the idiom without further questioning by following generations, and therefore still considered to be the core of repertoire regularly performed by numerous opera companies) or that were influential revealed that there are numerous examples of opera characters which are never seen or heard during a staged performance, yet their mere existence creates an aspect which develops other characters and/or propels the plot. (See Appendix D – List of Operas Studied for the Dissertation for the works considered along with any "missing" characters from each. Significant missing characters are indicated by bold type. Peripheral characters who had little story impact are shown in parentheses). An early example is found in George Frideric Handel's 1724 opera *Giulio Cesare*,

[1] Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and Times* (Portland, Ore.: Amadeus Press, 1994), 5.

where an entire plot is driven by revenge for Pompeo, who is talked about but never seen or heard outside of a box said to contain his head in some productions. Among numerous other examples are: Lostados in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, the Queen of Castile in Gaetano Donizetti's *La Favorita*, Elena's brother in Giuseppe Verdi's *I Vespri Siciliani*, Ivan the Terrible and the real Dmitriy in Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, Robespierre, Dumoriez, and Louis XVI in Umberto Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, the Marchessa Attavanti in Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*, and Marie in Erich Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*. Sometimes such characters are barely mentioned, but often they are an important part of the tapestry of the story and further clarify the motivations of the characters on stage. One of the most common usages, and a powerful one, is of mothers who have already died prior to the start of the opera. Examples of this type are: Robert's mother in Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, the Romani mother in Verdi's *Il trovatore*, Maria (daughter/mother) in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, Margherita's mother in Arrigo Boito's *Mefistofele*, Herzeleide in Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, and Charlotte's mother in Jules Massenet's *Werther*.

In opera, when there is a mother and child relationship, the mother rarely has control over events. Motherhood and maternal love seem to have been overlooked in opera storylines, despite the regular appearance of marriages.[2] In fact, when a mother and child appear in an opera, almost always one or both dies. Infanticide appears in every opera based on the Faust legend. Medée (Luigi Cherubini) also kills her children. Soon after giving birth, Mélisande (Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*) passes away. In Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, Marie is murdered. And, Maria is never seen in *Simon Boccanegra* though she plays a pivotal role in the opera's plot by dying during childbirth.[3]

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[2] Caroline Hilda Harder, *The Roles of "Mothers" in Opera as Exemplified by Fidès* (*Meyerbeer's* Le Prophète); *Kostelnička* (*Janáček's* Jenůfa); *Mrs. Patrick de Rocher* (*Heggie's* Dead Man Walking), [Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2009], 2.
[3] Jennifer Barnes, "Where are the Mothers in Opera?" *Opera Quarterly* 79 (1995), 420.

The role of absent but important characters has taken many forms in many of the works in the standard opera canon, but one of the most poignant usages has been that of deceased mothers.

In almost every society, the role of the mother (beyond being a biological necessity) is universally understood to be an integral part. Having a loving mother is a trope virtually everyone, even those who have never known their mothers or were raised in a non-traditional (by most cultures) setting, will understand. The lingering allegiance to any maternal archetype, even just a reference to one, is enough to inform an audience of the import of a mother's death – seen onstage or not. With such a reference, an audience might immediately understand why someone who has lost a mother might seek vengeance, or change a life path, or why someone would feel compelled to marry a person when she is in love with someone else.

This analysis discusses three example operas in detail: *Il trovatore*, *Parsifal*, and *Werther*. Each opera is examined for the historical and social context in which the work was set and for which the opera was written. The genesis of the opera and specifically the development of these "missing but present" mother figures by the composers and librettists yields fascinating insights into why each was created and how each impacted the other characters as well as the plot development and dramatic intensity. In the case of these three operas, the mother never appears because she was already dead when the actions in the operas begin. Nevertheless, their shadows reach far into the actions of the characters on stage. The operas included were deliberately selected in different languages, from different countries, but all are from the latter half of the Romantic period when the opera form was at its greatest height in popularity. The result is a clearer understanding of how missing characters, and deceased mothers in particular, adds to the dramatic/emotional impact and the immediate and enduring appeal of these canonic operas.

This analysis and resulting conclusions are important for addressing an important psychological component of many operas. A thorough preparation of a character and how that character influences and is affected by the action in an opera is necessary to achieve the most meaningful audience impact possible. Preparation consists of background research of the opera and a framework that performers and directors create from what is clearly indicated by the composer/librettist and what is assumed or invented given the context of the opera. To clarify a character's motivations and intentions, that character should become as "real" as possible to the performer. This process usually begins with a list of attributes such as: age, history, flaws, assets, complexes, occupation, social standing, views, hopes, secrets, movement style/rhythm, gestures, and how the character is thought of by others. Once the information which may be directly gleaned from the work itself has been filled-in, a performer or director must then make "educated" assumptions to complete a full, complex, and dynamic character. These assumptions might be based on research of other actual people and events during the time period in which the opera is set, or they might even be based on fictitious works. The idea is to make a complete character with a unique personality, and therefore a unique and interesting set of motivations, hopes, fears, etc. Only then can the character begin to be placed in the various scenes in an opera and offer a heightened sense of realism. The performer now enters the mindset of the character, turning "What would he/she think," to, "What would I think?" This is a subtle but important distinction and makes the difference between an audience being entertained and an audience enjoying a truly meaningful experience. Questions such as, "What are the stakes?," "What am I willing to risk?," "How do I feel about the people around me?," and even, "Who am I?," become not only easier to answer but more poignant when looking through the clearest possible lens of the composer's intent. The information gleaned through this research should be of much use to opera directors and

vocalists/instructors who are preparing informed character studies. The analysis will also aid future composers and librettists with tools which inform useful approaches to problematic or lengthy plots that need to be condensed. The more tools a composer has in his/her toolbox, the greater the chance for achieving dramatic impact through heightened emotional sensitivity.

CHAPTER 2

AZUCENA'S MOTHER IN *IL TROVATORE* (1853)

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Upon *Il trovatore's* première in 1853, the opera was immediately recognized as the masterpiece we still know the opera to be today. (See Appendix A – *Il trovatore* Synopsis for plot and character clarification). One of the most notable attributes of the earliest stagings is the enormous number of individual performances that took place in a single season. No other opera, by him or any other composer, was performed more often in Verdi's lifetime.[4] In France, England, Germany, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, historians and critics generally date the beginning of Verdi's pre-eminent position as *the* composer of Italian opera in the later part of the nineteenth century from the success of *Il trovatore*.[5] For the three years following the première, *Il trovatore* was the most popular opera in numerous countries, heard in Italian, French, and German versions.[6] During those three years, there were more than 230 individual productions, and total performances reached into the thousands. The opera's effects are wide-ranging. There are numerous melodies, a magnificent use of dark orchestra coloring, and the opera runs at a break-neck speed. Such a powerful combination has ensured continuing popularity since the première of the work.[7]

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) was one of the most celebrated composers in the history of opera. He was born in a small village near Busseto, Italy, and displayed sufficient talent while

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[4] Martin Chusid and Thomas G. Kaufman, "The First Three Years of *Trovatore*." *Verdi Forum*: No. 15, Article 3, 1987, 30.
[5] Ibid., 32.
[6] Martin Chusid, *Verdi's* Il trovatore*: The Quintessential Italian Melodrama* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 98-99.
[7] Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Verdi* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 255.

taking organ lessons that he was sent to study formal music theory and composition at a young age. By the time Verdi was 20, both of his parents had died, leaving Verdi to fend for himself. His second opera, *Nabucco*, catapulted him to fame. *Nabucco* contained "Va, pensiero" (the "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves"), which became an Italian call for unification during the height of the *Risorgimento* (a nationalist movement driving toward Italian independence as a country which took place from roughly 1815 until 1870).

Italy during the *Risorgimento* was rife with revolution. All of Giuseppe Verdi's early life and the composition of many of his operas took place during this time period. He was very involved with this renewal process, particularly during the dramatic decade of the 1840s which were driven by a growing sense of cultural and political identity for much of Europe. Although most of his early operas had no obvious contemporary political messages, most of them were filled with "conspiracies, assassinations, appeals to liberty, and exhortations against tyranny."[8] Of his first 14 operas (1839-1849), only one (*Macbeth*) is considered part of the modern canon. During his middle period (1849-1859) Verdi wrote eight operas, of which seven stayed in the standard repertoire through the twentieth century.[9] For the most part, the plots of Verdi's middle period focus on individuals with stories of love, jealousy, greed, and revenge. In general, social agendas became less important than personal problems.[10]

Following the failures of the revolutions of 1848-1849, police, church, and other censors required examination of libretti before operas could be staged in Italy. This practice had been the case for some time, but after 1849 there were even more controlling restrictions. Authors of libretti

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[8] Donald J. Grout and Hermine Weigel Williams, *A Short History of Opera, 4th ed.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 402.
[9] Martin Chusid, ed., *Verdi's Middle Period (1849-1959): Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1.
[10] Ibid., 6.

were required to obtain approval of subject matter before they could even begin writing, and frequently permission was denied on moral grounds. Even if an opera had been approved and performed in one location, that opera often had to be modified to be deemed appropriate at another venue. As a result of these restrictions, Verdi abandoned his previous "grandiose *Risorgimento*" style of composition.[11] His representation of (thinly-veiled) oppressed people in large choruses such as "Va, pensiero" was no longer acceptable. Verdi's new dramatic method during his middle period was to avoid politics and religious subject matter, and instead focus on the individual, conflicting personalities of his characters.[12]

In 1856, Verdi created the French translation of *Il trovatore* (*Le trouvère*) and bought the French performance rights from Ricordi. He then proceeded to publish, sell, and rent the opera to as many theaters as possible. He was paid ten thousand francs to adapt the opera for the Paris Opéra, most notably creating ballets, but modifying other small details as well.[13] The Opéra was Paris's premiere opera house during the 18th and 19th centuries. The venue was founded in 1669, during the reign of Louis XIV. The house specialized in grand opéra, a genre defined by extreme length (usually five acts), ballets between individual acts, extraordinary scenic effects, and plots drawn from ancient mythology and history. Throughout the history of the house, the Opéra was supported and run by the French government. As such, the house often produced works with a clear propagandistic bent. For instance, during the 17th and 18th centuries, operas about ancient Greek and Roman emperors and heroes represented the grandeur of the monarchy, while after the French Revolution, stories about senatorial Rome represented the new French Republic. Verdi integrated ballets for French performances by using themes found in the opera. Instead of adding

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[11] Chusid, *Verdi's Middle Period*, 4-5.
[12] Ibid., 9.
[13] Chusid, *Verdi's* Il trovatore, 93-94.

random music to fulfill the traditional requirements, he used the ballet music to enrich the opera by adding to the music's dramatic value. In order to assure the success of the French version, Verdi agreed to direct the rehearsals. While the French version was having a very successful run at the Opéra, the Italian version was having a successful revival at the Théâtre Italien in the same city. Most of the opera houses in Paris produced French-language opera, either original works by French composers or operas from other countries translated into French. The Théâtre Italien, by contrast, presented Italian operas in their original language. Both venues featured some of the greatest singers of the day. This competition between two versions of the same opera was unprecedented, and marked a major turning point for Verdi in Paris.[14] Audiences there appreciated novelty, and Verdi gained a great deal of insight by seeing operas of his contemporaries. Since the orchestras were of a higher caliber in Paris, he learned to compose demanding parts. When he returned to Italy to write for theaters there, he demanded more of their orchestras.[15]

Verdi's compositions exploited greater extremes of volume, pace, and color than had been heard in previous Italian music. In *Il trovatore*, there is an association between keys and groups of characters: the flat keys are associated with Count di Luna and Leonora, and sharp keys are linked with the world of the Romanis. Verdi reached past the formal structure of previous opera composers. He eschewed the performer-driven formula of previous Italian opera, where singers demanded long introductory arias, at least two duets, and often additional pieces. The music was, and still is, a powerful, integral component in delivering the most emotional impact possible. Verdi used the term *tinta* (related to color) to refer to recurring melodic shapes. These shapes were more of a general feeling of ambiance rather than a specific reference which might be found in a motif, and gave scenes in each his operas unique atmospheres. There was a sense among Verdi's audience

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[14] Ibid., 97.

[15] Victor Lederer, *Verdi: The Operas and Choral Works* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Amadeus Press, 2014), 9.

that the characters were real people, and as a result what they were going through mattered. This search for musical honesty was one of his most enduring qualities.[16] Critic and composer Filippo Fillipi (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies) wrote in 1862, "Verdi [was] the only Italian composer who, at the height of the unrest, had known how to imprint in his music a vigorous echo of strong agitation, constituting a brilliant reflection of the present civilization, an eloquent commentary completely ideal for our history."[17]

CHARACTER ORIGIN AND ANALYSIS

In an 1853 letter to Cesare De Sanctis, a businessman who was a close friend (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies), Verdi discusses the difficulties in finding appropriate libretti. While working on *Il trovatore*, he stated that no one besides himself knew what would work best for his operas. "I want subjects that are new, great, beautiful, varied, and daring … with novel forms … and at the same time capable of being set to music."[18] He wanted the most extreme stories and characters possible, and he was at that point not one to concern himself with avoiding subject matter due to what he called "silly scruples."[19] To Verdi, the goal of emotional impact necessitated the employment of many of humankind's baser tendencies. However, some parts of Italian society were disturbed by Verdi's choices. He was the most popular artist in Italy, and he seemed to condone adultery in *Stiffelio*, rape and suicide in *Rigoletto*, and in *La traviata* he portrayed the death of a "kept woman" as a tragedy. Conservative political and religious parties wondered if he was using his immense talents for good purposes.[20] In 19th Century opera, aesthetic and

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[16] Ibid., 6.
[17] Chusid, *Verdi's Il trovatore*, 111-112.
[18] Giuseppe Verdi, "Letter to Cesare De Sanctis" in *The Essence of Opera*, ed. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1969), 239.
[19] Ibid.
[20] George Martin, *Verdi: His Music, Life and Times* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1963), 280.

sociopolitical aspects were "intertwined and mutually reinforcing."[21] Opera was associated with wealth and privilege, largely based on the cultural prestige and aristocratic support the art form had received since the beginning. The focus was on large, stylized productions which reflected opera's "aristocratic lineage." As the century progressed, however, there was an ongoing progression of European opera. The move was from a view of opera as a high-art old-world entertainment into a way for the working-class to see themselves in a new light – and establishing for themselves a new identity.[22]

Verdi did not commit to a premiere of *Il trovatore* in Rome until he was assured that the essential dramatic elements would be included. One of the most striking required changes was removing all mention of witchcraft and instead substituting Romanis (the Romani people are an ethnic group of Indo-Aryan origin who traditionally lived a nomadic, itinerant lifestyle) and poison.[23] Also of note, Leonora's death was rendered somewhat ambiguous. Suicide was considered a mortal sin by the Catholic church, which was ruling Rome and surrounding areas at the time. The papal censors in Rome also would not allow the use of an actual liturgical chant in an opera. The "Miserere" section of *Il trovatore* is written in Italian instead of Latin although the text suggests an ecclesiastical chant.[24] However, such control over subject matter may have been less detrimental than one would have at first thought. Noted Verdi scholar Martin Chusid (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies) suggested that the restrictions of writing caused by political and social problems of mid-19th Century Italy led Verdi to create more accessible characters and stories

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[21] James Hepokoski, "*Ottocento* Opera as Cultural Drama: Generic Mixtures in *Il trovatore*" in *Verdi's Middle Period (1849-1959): Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 148.
[22] Ibid., 149.
[23] David R. B. Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 28-29.
[24] Chusid, *Verdi's* Il trovatore, 79.

that transcend time and location. One does not need to be aware of a political climate or current trends to understand the power of a story of love or revenge or jealousy, or a combination thereof.[25]

Financial security from new royalty agreements with his publisher allowed Verdi the flexibility to write works in a style all his own and spend more time selecting subject matter. *Il trovatore* was the first opera he composed without a commission. As a result, he was free to choose where and when the work would be premiered. For the first time, he could create his own timeline, and he was not required to write for specific singers, a particular venue, or even for a particular audience. He enjoyed this compositional freedom only four times while writing 26 operas.[26]

While Verdi was composing *Il trovatore* at his home in Busseto, Italy, the area was under Austrian rule as the area had been ruled more or less since the Congress of Vienna in 1815 (following Napoleonic rule). Many of the locals were resentful of the presence of these outsiders and plotted against the Austrians. There had been numerous uprisings since Napoleon's empire had been re-distributed, most notably the revolutions of 1848-1849. The Austrian leaders responded with tighter controls and public floggings.[27] Verdi was dealing with personal and professional problems. His operas prior to *Il trovatore* had been only moderately successful, if not outright failures. He blamed this largely on the performances of his works rather than his music.[28] Verdi became more and more personally involved in managing his own contracts, including stipulations about the cast which would be used for the premiere and utilizing plots which fit them. His outlook, which informed the plots and music of most of his operas, was dark. His mother fled a Russian regiment when he was an infant, and he saw his children and their young mother die within a few months of each other. His mother died the year before he wrote *Il trovatore*, and his

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[25] Chusid, *Verdi's Middle Period*, 15.
[26] Chusid, *Verdi's* Il trovatore, ix.
[27] Martin, 294-295.
[28] Ibid., 92.

librettist died while writing the opera. Writing to the Countess Maffei (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies) while discussing the gloomy plot of *Il trovatore* Verdi said, "But after all, in life isn't everything death? What else exists?"[29]

He was openly living with a woman to whom he was not married – Giuseppina Strepponi (later his second wife, see Appendix E – Brief Biographies) – much to the displeasure of the town. Strepponi did not get along well with his parents, so Verdi bought a small property outside of the town and sent them there. His mother died not long afterwards.

During the years he was writing *Il trovatore*, he was contending with a dying librettist (Salvadore Cammarano, see Appendix E – Brief Biographies), an ill father, and ongoing concern about whether censors would allow the opera to go on as he had envisioned. Verdi wrote to Cammarano, "As a gifted and most exceptional man, you will not be offended if I humbly take the liberty of saying it would be better to give up this subject if we cannot manage to retain all the boldness and novelty of the Spanish play."[30] Cammarano was a seasoned veteran of crafting libretti for numerous successful Donizetti operas, and he played a significant role in outlining the form *Il trovatore* would take. Although Verdi very much liked the way *Il trovatore* was coming together, he was left with the problem of an incomplete libretto upon Cammarano's death in 1852, just six months before the planned premiere. Upon conferring with De Sanctis, Verdi chose Leone Emanuele Bardare to complete the parts left incomplete (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies). Bardare's responsibilities amounted to little more than adding some new rhyming lines for additional verses specified by Verdi. Bardare was not well known at the time, and his modest contributions to *Il trovatore* are still the only work for which he is known today.[31]

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[29] Lederer, 14.
[30] Osborne, 247-248.
[31] Ibid., 248.

In an early correspondence with Cammarano, Verdi emphasized the importance of agreement between composer and librettist, going on to say:

> *When I'm presented with some poetry that can be set to music, any form, any distribution is good, the more they are new and bizarre the happier I'll be with them. If in operas there were neither cavatinas, nor duets, nor terzets, nor choruses, nor finales, etc., etc., and the whole opera were one single piece, I should find this more reasonable and proper…. Do not make Azucena mad. Overcome by fatigue, by suffering, by fear, by lack of sleep she cannot manage a logical discourse. Her senses are overwhelmed, but she is not mad. It is necessary to preserve to the end the two great passions of the woman: the love for Manrique and the ferocious thirst to avenge her mother. Manrique dead, her feelings for vengeance become gigantic and she says with exaltation! Lights, lights ... he is your brother ... Fool! ... You are avenged, O mother!!*[32]

And, to De Sanctis (largely intended for Bardare) he wrote, "… The greatest part of the drama (as you say) is incorporated … in one word "vengeance." To say "You are avenged O mother!" and to say "late vengeance! … but how proud you would be O mother" is the same as regards the drama. Except that the former is shorter and better suited."[33]

There are two main plot threads in the *Il trovatore*. The one which Verdi found the most compelling is that of the Troubadour's relationship with the Romanis and the story of Azucena and her mother. The focal point of that story line is Azucena's unwillingness to let go of her mother's terrible death, resulting in the repeated phrase "Avenge me!" The other plot involves the Troubadour's reciprocated love for Leonora and his quest for glory. Although the love story became increasingly important as the opera was being composed, Verdi knew that the real draw for the opera was the impact the death of a mother would have on her children.[34] Given the recent death of his own mother, Verdi possibly also felt a large amount of sensitivity toward the subject

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[32] Lederer, 17.
[33] Ibid., 32.
[34] Ibid., 67.

matter. To Verdi, Azucena was the main character in the opera, and he channeled his feelings and compassion through her.[35]

In the original Spanish play *El trovador*, upon which Verdi's opera was based, positive public sentiment about liberal ideas was displayed largely by the sympathy shown by the author toward Romani ideals. There was a prevailing empathy toward Azucena and her mother; they were victims of superstitious beliefs and prejudice, and they were treated in a brutal manner by the powerful di Luna family. Verdi, also, was almost always deferential to the downtrodden masses and religious outsiders. He felt strongly that society should help build them up rather than try to keep them in their places.[36] The same sensibilities Verdi used to help indirectly lead Italy to its own national identity likely helped convince him that this story of righteous ire of a repressed group against a wealthy noble family would strike a chord in his audiences across Europe. The triggering point for this draw was Azucena's quest for vengeance, and the entire plot was predicated on the death of her mother.

The immense popularity of *Il trovatore*, ironically, made the opera a favorite target of critics of the day. They did not appreciate Verdi's honesty and directness, hearing only in his score the end of the *bel canto* era. The story is extremely melodramatic, complicated, and very difficult to believe (and follow) by today's standards. For modern, more informed listeners, however, the opera is the purest embodiment of the highest level of *bel canto*, with enormous requirements of vocal beauty, range, and agility. Verdi's amazing achievement was that he single-handedly led Italian music from the innocence of Rossini and Donizetti to a wisdom akin to Wagner. According to music historian Donald J. Grout (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies), "The essence of Verdi's

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[35] Osborne, 251.
[36] Chusid, *Verdi's* Il trovatore, 2.

early style is a certain primitive directness, an uninhibited vigor, and naturalness of utterance."[37] He created a style of opera in which the drama is carried by melody, but the melody is informed by the drama. And, he did this with a very un-Wagner-like sympathy for both his characters and his audiences.[38] Verdi revitalized a 200-year-old Italian tradition and was idolized by his nation.[39] The basis of the drama in *Il trovatore* is that the main characters, although full of passion and inner will, are ultimately fated to lose. The four main characters represent cruel ironies: Manrico's inability to know who he really is, the count's destructive passions, Leonora's futile self-sacrifice, and Azucena's role as both loving mother and vengeful daughter. Perhaps that is what drew people to love the opera – the humanity, although the story was set in a world of extremes. The heroines of Verdi's middle period reached audiences on a personal level with their fragility, while his earlier strong-willed heroines espouse strength and power, but arouse no tender love feelings.[40] These female characters were merely frameworks by which the influence of *Il trovatore* was felt both in the society who first heard the work and in compositions which followed. That humanity, along with Verdi's musical genius, has maintained *Il trovatore* as one of the core pieces of opera repertoire for over 150 years.

THEORETICAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT FOR AZUCENA'S MOTHER

As is the case with each theoretical character development in this dissertation, the vast majority of this section was created using general knowledge of the time frame and the location involved in conjunction with the opera's libretto. When creating a theoretical character development, some choices are not necessarily wrong provided they are plausible, but some make a better fit than others and some may be more compelling. For example, the name given to

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[37] Grout & Williams, 406.
[38] Osborne, 12.
[39] Alfred Einstein, *Music in the Romantic Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1947), 5.
[40] Ibid., 7.

Azucena's mother is one that research indicates would have been a typical female name in a European Romani community in the fifteenth century. None of the source material indicates her actual name, but the more specific the details, the more realistic the character becomes. A character without a name loses some relevancy.

"Elvaira" was born a poor Romani, and died by immolation (burning at the stake) after being accused of witchcraft at age 46. Her own daughter had recently given birth to her first child – a beautiful, healthy baby boy. Family was everything to Elvaira, and she knew that the joy of a new baby also meant seeing to the child's needs. To that end, she accompanied an acquaintance of hers to help clean and take care of a newborn child whose parents were high ranking in the offices of the powerful Count di Luna. Elvaira was hoping to earn a little money, and perhaps find a way to bring back some food items as well when she found herself in the nursery with the baby. She was struck by the disparity between the worlds of her grandson who was born into poverty and this baby which had been born into wealth and comfort. The unfairness of everything about the situation upset her, and she sat by the child's bed while she collected herself. Unfortunately, another nurse happened to see her sitting by the bed, seeming to stare intently at her baby, and demanded for her to leave immediately and not ever come back. Although Elvaira apologized and tried to explain that she meant no harm, the damage had already been done. Through a terrible misfortune, the baby developed a fever within the next week and died. The incident of the "staring Romani" quickly became the talk of the area, eventually reaching the ears of Count di Luna. As with any ruler, he needed his people to remain calm and maintain order. Anger was running high, and the superstitious people of his area were demanding that he do something lest other babies suffer similar fates. Not helping matters was the fact that his own household employed several Romanis, including a nanny for his newborn son. An example had to be made, and a spectacular

one would be the most emphatic statement against people who would use evil powers to curse others. Even though di Luna did not really believe in witchcraft, he chose the most expedient path forward and acquiesced to the mob demanding Elvaira's death. As she was dragged to the pyre where she was to be burned, she turned and screamed to her daughter Azucena, "Avenge me!" Azucena watched every moment of her mother's death, inextricably linking her murder with the life path she would choose for herself, her biological son, and the son she had stolen from the man who had taken her mother from her.

Elvaira had been intelligent and willful since she learned how to speak – traits which were valued amongst her community but frowned upon for women in "cultured" European society in the fifteenth century. Her determination helped her overcome numerous hardships throughout her life, including surviving two famines and ongoing systematic oppression. Elvaira's trust was difficult to gain, but once won her loyalty was undying. Her love of her family, especially her oldest daughter Azucena, was always at the center of her life and the motivation for most of her actions. She saw the best of herself in Azucena, without her own pridefulness and quick ire which had occasionally caused Elvaira and her community no small trouble with outsiders. She did what was necessary to ensure her family was taken care of and fed, even if helping her family meant occasionally tricking people or even stealing from them.

Elvaira had no formal education, yet she was extremely worldly-wise, having learned through a difficult life full of painful lessons. Although she did not really practice witchcraft, she was very superstitious. She was known to carry several lucky charms with her and share them with her family and loved ones. Elvaira was also known to create bad-luck totems and hide them around her enemies and rivals. Politically, she thought there should be no nations, only people who should be allowed to live as they please wherever they please. She wanted a sort of "promised land" for

the Romani, but was disappointed to realize that there was no way to achieve such a goal with the class system in place at the time in Europe. Her general philosophy was “live and let live,” with a healthy dose of *carpe diem* as well. A person should be with those she loves and able to avoid those she does not care for. She believed in love, but not so much in marriage. Generally, Elvaira was wary and slightly sad. She very rarely smiled, and then only around her very closest friends and family.

Physically, Elvaira was average height, wiry, and grey-haired; she was aged before her time. Her dark skin was very wrinkled. A hard life of poor nutrition and lack of protection from the elements hobbled her with aching joints and a stooped back. One could easily see why someone from a different class in Europe at that time would see her as an “old woman,” although she was only 46. She walked with a cane and moved slowly when the situation allowed her to do so. Her movement was akin to a snake – smooth and deliberate. The angrier she became, the more controlled her movements. Then, she would strike rapidly and without warning, belying her age. She stared at people constantly, a trait shared by many Romani, but she took the art of staring to a different level. Those who did not know her, particularly those outside of her community, thought of her staring as creepy at best and menacing at worst. Her reputation as someone who always read situations and people correctly and knew the trigger points and motivations in others was uncanny, bordering on magical. Unfortunately, this meant that some people in – and especially outside – her Romani community suspected her of witchcraft. Among non-Romani, there was much prejudice toward Elvaira and her people. Romani were, at best, thought of as untrustworthy nomads who wandered from town to town. At worst, they were thought of as thieves, cheaters, and practitioners of dark magic. Elvaira, in particular, was eyed with suspicion; anything she did could be (and often was) mis-interpreted. Amongst Romanis, she was thought of as a respected, if daunting, matron.

Women would seek her wisdom for all domestic matters, particularly in the art of gaining and keeping a suitable romantic partner.

The character in *Il trovatore* that is most influenced by the life and terrible death of Elvaira is her daughter, Azucena. The person playing that character, and certainly the director, have the most to gain by crafting the most detailed character study possible. Obviously, Azucena has a profound sense of duty, and like her mother she has a strong vindictive streak contrasting a deep love and loyalty to those closest to her. Did Azucena love or fear her mother? Is her quest for vengeance out of a sense of loyalty and duty or out of a need for emotional catharsis (or another cause, or a combination of causes)? Azucena was so profoundly disturbed by her mother's terrible death that her thirst for vengeance resulted in the death of her own son. The result of this catastrophe of her own making was her adoption of the son of her mother's killer. Was she prescient, knowing that this child would eventually be killed by his brother, the new count? Or, rather, was this an homage to her dead mother or her own son who she had inadvertently slain?

The opening scene of *Il trovatore* features Ferrando telling the story of the Romani woman's death and her daughter's quest for vengeance. He and the chorus of soldiers are convinced of the mother's guilt and certain that her punishment was just. They wish the same fate for Azucena, and Verdi's martial setting emphasizes their mood. However, when Azucena finally appears in Act II, she sings her famous aria "Stride la vampa" (the fire roars), which is entirely dedicated to the story of her mother's fiery execution. The fact that Verdi introduces Azucena in this manner immediately indicates the primacy of her mother's death as a major driving force in the opera's plot. A vocalist in this role should strive to indicate the depth of emotions ranging from love to hate to despair – all amplified by the audience's knowledge that this is now how Azucena will forever remember her mother. The audience is never told clearly what kind of mother she was,

but Azucena knows. The vocalist portraying her may take this time to develop both her own character as well as that of her mother. By the time Azucena turns to Manrico and says, "Avenge me! Avenge me!," the audience should have an understanding of the great significance of the phrase and why Azucena is exhorting her adopted son to aid her in this quest. Then, in her duet with Manrico which immediately follows the aria, Azucena tells a different version of the story with which Ferrando opened the opera. Instead a tale of an evil enchantress, Azucena tells the story of a loving mother who even blessed her daughter as she was dragged to her funeral pyre. The amount of desire for vengeance perceived by the audience is proportional to the amount of affection and reverence Azucena displays regarding her mother. The life that Elvaira led and who she was are of paramount importance in legitimizing the actions taken by Azucena; they should be taken into account in order for a more realistic and meaningful performance of *Il trovatore* to take place. Verdi went to great lengths to help the audience understand the plight of Azucena and the other Romanis so that they would feel more emotionally connected and sympathize with them. By choosing a story with a vengeance theme, he was subtly playing on a theme of unfair treatment of an oppressed people to which his audiences were immediately drawn. One might argue that the missing mother in the opera was the focal point upon which almost all later action was predicated.

CHAPTER 3

PARSIFAL'S MOTHER IN *PARSIFAL* (1882)

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

According to opera historians Donald Grout and Hermine Weigel Williams (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies), "Wagner affected the course of lyric drama like a new planet hurled into a solar system. The center of the operatic universe shifted; all the old balances were disturbed; regroupings took place, accompanied by erratic movements."[41]

No matter what language they were written in, operas prior to Richard Wagner (1813-1883) used similar musical forms and shared an understanding of how the singer should interact with the orchestra. There was an understanding which had grown out of *opera seria* and the Italian *bel canto* tradition that singers were the driving force of opera creation, and composers largely focused on accommodating them. Story lines were interrupted by long, repetitive arias often for the sole purpose of vocalists' egos. Wagner, however, wanted to transcend such boundaries and create a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a synthesis of every possible form of art. He envisioned operas without conventional numbers such as extractable arias or duets, thereby removing his operas from the entanglements and limitations of well-practiced forms. Moving forward, those forms and relationships were forever changed. Additionally, Wagner's new ideas in musical texture, opera form, production values, and even architecture influenced much in and outside the world of opera.[42]

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[41] Grout & Williams, 496.
[42] Carolyn Abbate And Roger Parker, *A History of Opera* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 291.

Wagner's early years were rather unremarkable, considering the impact he was to have on the world later in his life. Born to a policeman who died when Wagner was only six months old and his wife, he was the youngest of nine children and received no formal compositional training. Nevertheless, he still showed a remarkable talent for music and parleyed instrumental lessons into teaching himself the composition of derivative instrumental works while in his teens. He began compositional studies at the University of Leipzig, where he was primarily focused on the works of Beethoven and sought to emulate them. Wagner later styled himself as a conductor, thereby gaining a pathway into the world of opera. He had dreams of becoming an opera composer, but his early compositions in that genre were received lukewarmly at best. An early idol of his (later a victim of his calumny), Giacomo Meyerbeer, wrote a letter of reference for Wagner which opened the door to a position as a court conductor in Dresden.[43] During his time in Dresden, Wagner composed some of his most famous works, including *Rienzi* and *Der fliegende Holländer*. These operas, with their bold themes and innovative musical techniques, brought him widespread acclaim and established Wagner as a rising star in the opera world.

Richard Wagner's connection to Bayreuth was deeply intertwined with his quest for artistic freedom and the realization of his visionary concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "total artwork." Frustrated by the constraints of traditional opera houses and inspired by the ancient Greek theater of Epidaurus, he envisioned a purpose-built festival theater which would serve the unique needs of his vision. *Parsifal*, Wagner's last opera, was the *Bühnenweihfestspiel* (a play for the consecration of the stage) for the performance venue which he considered the culmination of his life's work. *Parsifal* an extreme example of an "autonomous work concept," because Wagner designed the opera specifically to inaugurate the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, and took measures to

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[43] Ibid., 292-294.

ensure that the Festspielhaus would be the only possible location for future performances.[44] The Festspielhaus, still in use today, is an opera house built and opened by Richard Wagner in 1876 dedicated solely to the performance of his stage works. The house offered numerous innovations, including a large orchestra pit under the stage, horseshoe seating to improve view and acoustics, concealed lighting, and an acoustic design. *Parsifal* explores themes of redemption, spirituality, and the healing power of compassion. (See Appendix B – *Parsifal* Synopsis for plot and character clarification).

CHARACTER ORIGIN AND ANALYSIS

Of all of Wagner's works, *Parsifal* enjoyed the longest genesis. By the time the work was premiered, the chivalric tale had taken more than forty years to come to fruition.[45] Wagner enjoyed old books and spent a lot of time reading them. Wagner first saw King Arthur's wandering knight Percival in the 13th-Century epic poem "Parzival" by the Minnesinger, Wolfram von Eschenbach (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies). The poetry, which shows significant piety but offers little actual formal religion, left Wagner unimpressed, but Condrie's wild appearance captured his attention. Years later, in a 7-volume compilation, he was able to read all of the significant Grail Romances. Only the Welsh/Breton *Peredur* and the allegorical *Perlesvaus* contain a feature that appears to have been particularly significant to Wagner: the disgusting, filthy Loathly Damsel is also the lovely Grail bearer who is seen at the Grail Castle. Although Klingsor controls her stunning change in his rendition, Wagner preserved this aspect of dualism.[46] He had to significantly reduce the material from the medieval epics that served as his inspiration, including combining several characters into one to create the character Kundry. Wagner was captivated by the abstract idea of

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[44] William Kinderman, *Wagner's Parsifal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8.
[45] Ibid., 47.
[46] Derrick Everett, "An Introduction to Richard Wagner's *Kundry*" www.monsalvat.no/kundry.htm.

the feminine, and shared his opinion often. A favorite concept was that "feminine" music should bow to the rules of "masculine" poetry. In his last prose essay, he argued for "reconciliation of masculine and feminine," suggesting that the removal of such labels via this unification would lead to a universal state of happiness.[47] Perhaps this combination of opposites helped craft the character of Kundry in *Parsifal*.

In his diary, in his first prose sketch of *Parsifal* (1865), Wagner says of the multi-faceted Kundry:

> *Who this woman is and where she comes from, no one knows. ... She has a complexion which is pale one moment, sun-burnt the next ... often her black eyes shoot from their sockets like burning coals; one moment her gaze is unsteady and wandering, the next – staring again and fixed. The brotherhood of knights treats her more as a strange, magical animal than a human being. Also she always lives apart, how she keeps herself is not known, nor where she seeks shelter. ... If there is something difficult to be accomplished, something to be done far, far away, a message or order from the Grail for a Knight of the Grail contending in foreign zones, then suddenly one is aware of Kundry eagerly seizing the task which none can perform so speedily or reliably as she. ... Thus she is a true, indispensable servant to the company of knights: all her missions turn out well. ... She shows great indifference, indeed scorn towards the knights, never accepting their thanks. ... She never gives advice or opinion: but simply shows the swiftest zeal in at once carrying out what is commanded or desired. She is therefore considered completely stupid and senseless, as well as animal. ... Kundry is living a never-ending life of constantly alternating re-births as the result of an ancient curse which ... condemns her, in new shapes, to bring to men the suffering of seduction; redemption, death, complete extinction is vouchsafed only if her most powerful blandishments are withstood by the most chaste and virile of men. So far, they have not been. ... Within her again and again unconsciously arises the desire to be delivered by a man, this being the sole manner of deliverance indicated to her by the curse: thus does innermost necessity cause her constantly to fall victim anew to the power which drives her to be reborn as a seductive woman. ... [When Parsifal enters Klingsor's magic garden,] he hears the loud, loving sound of a woman's voice calling him by name. He stops, shaken, believing it to be his mother, and stands, greatly affected, rooted to the spot. ... Then, in a grotto, under a couch of flowers, he sees a young woman of the greatest beauty, Kundry, in new, wholly unrecognizable guise. ... This wonderful woman knows how to stir the tenderest chords of his emotion by touching intimately and solemnly on his memories of his mother; the longing of that distant, forsaken woman for her son, her languishing, despair and death. ... Not all that could make him*

[47] Abate & Parker, 344.

> *happy was contained in his mother's love: the last breath of motherly longing is the benediction of the first kiss of love.*[48]

The key tool Kundry uses in her effort at seduction is a story from Parsifal's own background; he was given his name by his dying father before he was born. Her strategy is to sing a lullaby, reminding him of his childhood, in an attempt to hypnotize him into a dreamlike contentment. Additionally, Wagner carefully references Parsifal's grieving mother, Herzeleide (Heart's Sorrow). During Kundry's account of Parsifal's early years, Herzeleide is the main character. She is overly attached to her son, worries about keeping him ignorant of the outside world, and is extremely dependent on him. After Parsifal abandoned his mother, all of these factors culminate in a gloomy conclusion: Herzeleide's despair ultimately results in her demise. His involvement in his mother's demise is a terrible reality that strikes close to the bone, given his unique ability for compassion. When Parsifal acknowledges his mother's passing, her presence is erased, which gives the omniscient Kundry the opportunity to assume Herzeleide's place and strengthen her psychological grip on the bereaved youth.[49]

The portrayal of the ideas of compassion in *Parsifal* is not expressly religious; rather, the story references Christianity subtly but extensively.[50] Wagner himself thought of Kundry as the serpent in the Garden of Eden, whose kiss would finally make the innocent Parsifal aware of the concept of sin.[51] Parsifal is another example of a typical hero. He is a protagonist who has only a shaky grasp of who he really is, and his revelation of his identity and what his fate will lead him to is one of the main themes of the opera. But, Parsifal does remember his mother, and that he left her to search for adventure. He even remembers her name, Herzeleide (heart's sorrow), which he

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[48] Richard Wagner, *The Diary of Richard Wagner 1865-1882*: The Brown Book, trans. George Bird (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980). 50-57.
[49] Kinderman, 237-238.
[50] Ibid., 41.
[51] Ibid., 49.

recalls to a melancholy and yearning musical phrase. And this mother, who never appears, is one of the most decisive characters in the opera. The reason we never meet Herzeleide is that she is already dead, a fact of which Parsifal is as yet unaware. Kundry, however, does know her fate and tells him in a brutally direct manner. Parsifal is so taken aback by this news that he literally grabs Kundry by the throat and has to be stopped by Gurnemanz. Gurnemanz informs Parsifal that Kundry cannot lie, so his mother must truly be dead. Wagner makes the fact imminently clear that, in this implied oedipal relationship, Herzeleide is unquestionably dead. Wagner appears to have placed her beyond the possibility of entering into the storyline for the primary purpose of being able to bring her back later in a different form to compel the drama.[52] One should note that, in Wolfram's version of this story, Amfortas is the person who tells Parsifal that his mother is dead.[53] In the second act, Parsifal's exploits invariably lead him to the Magic Garden, Klingsor, and the ultimate seductress. Regardless of whether the drama's structure, storyline, or all of the work's deeper meaning are the focus of discussion, what happens there is the fulcrum event of the story.

The first thing Kundry does in her role as "mother messenger" is tell the spellbound Parsifal that she has only stayed in the magical garden to tell him what she witnessed of his time with Herzeleide. She observed the routine of his upbringing up until the moment when Herzeleide died after Parsifal abandoned her, forcing him to shoulder the responsibility of being the cause of his mother's death. He calls out in his agony to the woman who is not there, at least in name. Kundry is now able to further pursue her seduction until the scene reaches a point where telling the difference between which woman is present and which is not becomes impossible. The kiss, the drama's pivotal point in so many ways, follows. And this kiss is unambiguously his mother's kiss.

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[52] Barry Emslie, *Richard Wagner and the Centrality of Love* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, U. K.: The Boydell Press, 2010), 232.
[53] Kinderman, 57.

The critical moment is "a last token of a mother's blessing, the first kiss of love," according to Kundry, who delivers both message and kiss softly and seductively.[54] Now, one might believe, Parsifal understands redemption, because this mother figure has physically aroused him with a kiss. Wagner's complex creation brings together the spiritual and sensual, all via the composite Kundry character and her kiss. There is clearly an oedipal intention here, as Kundry's role as substitute mother and sexually desirable woman is emphasized by Wagner.[55]

Wagner's ability to choose from sources and create new relationships between their aspects demonstrated his theatrical genius. Using a variety of sources, Wagner drastically altered the original tale of courtly chivalry, condensing the story and eliminating a large number of simple characters in favor of a small number of complicated ones. When Wagner was writing *Parsifal*, a critical missing component was a character that would connect Amfortas and Parsifal, who might, later in the opera, be the catalyst for the downfall of the former and the triumph of the latter.[56] Parsifal has a mother fixation, and therefore Kundry's efforts at his seduction mostly depend on her playing the part of mother. Her kiss is both "a last mother's greeting" and "a first kiss of love."[57] Kundry's kiss is a pivotal dramatic moment in the development of Parsifal's character, marking a significant turning point. The greatest psychological obstacle Parsifal must overcome on his heroic journey is her seduction; if the effort is successful, that seduction would ultimately lead to his downfall. An ordinary person would be powerless against her, unable to look past the sensual temptations of Klingsor's magical garden. Parsifal uses his sympathy and compassion as a form of resistance.[58]

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[54] Emslie, 237-238.
[55] Ibid., 239-240.
[56] Kinderman, 63.
[57] Ibid., 66.
[58] Ibid., 67.

THEORETICAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT FOR PARSIFAL'S MOTHER

This character development is largely interpolated from situations in Wolfram von Eschenbach's 13th-Century epic poem "Parzival," from Wagner's treatment of Kundry in *Parsifal*, and from general history of the eighth century, in which the story is set. Of the three operas discussed in this dissertation, Herzeleide is the only mother who is actually given a name by the composer. She is also the only character who is present and has actual actions attributed to her in the original source material. Herzeleide is particularly complicated by the fact she is represented by Kundry so well that even her own son, Parsifal, believes them to be one and the same. Of course, the transformation that takes place during their interaction in which he changes from the naiveite of youth to the understanding of adulthood is the central aspect of the opera. Nevertheless, a clear differentiation of who Herzeleide is, including her background and specific character traits is important to a more fulfilling representation in the opera, especially during scenes where Parsifal must deal with the loss of his mother.

Herzeleide was born into the highest level of nobility in Wales, a group of several independent kingdoms since the Romans departed early in the fifth century. At the age of 23, she became queen of her kingdom when her brother died in battle without yet marrying. For a female monarch to be able to take and maintain power was very rare at that time, since so much of leadership was based on a person's battle prowess. The kingdoms of Wales were more established and stable than the rest of what would become Great Britain, but they were still constantly fighting off threats from the Saxons from the east and other invaders from the south and west coasts. Knowing she needed to marry a warrior herself to lead her country's troops, she hosted a great tournament for knights from across the known world. The winner would become her betrothed. Although the winner, a great warrior named Gamuret, was already married to another woman, an

African queen, Herzeleide ensured that their union was nullified. She saw in him the future strength and good fortune for her country and her people. Although Herzeleide knew Gamuret had abandoned his previous wife while pregnant to pursue combat adventures (including Herzeleide's tournament), Herzeleide was still devastated to be abandoned in exactly the same way. Blinded by her love and dwelling on her plans, she never saw Gamuret for who he was – a knight whose only goal in life was the sheer joy of conquest. Once the conquest was completed, he grew restless for another source of adventure. Swearing that her son would never follow in his father's footsteps, Herzeleide abdicated her throne and moved with him to a small cabin deep in a forest. Her world collapsed in size. No longer did she care about what was good for all of her people; she only cared now what happened to her only child. Her goal was to keep Parsifal ignorant of the world of knights and great battles. Unfortunately for her, a pair of knights happened to pass by and speak with Parsifal when he was twelve years old. Parsifal was immediately drawn to this new, exciting life path and left Herzeleide to seek adventures of his own. Shortly after his departure, Herzeleide died of a broken heart at age 35.

Herzeleide's assets were her will and determination; she was a person who knew how to lead people and always got what she wanted. She clung steadfastly to her belief that right would always win out in the end. She loved deeply and completely; an asset at first, but later she was unequipped to deal with the loss of first her husband and then her son. Her flaws revolved largely around her belief that people could really change and that people could avoid their destinies. Her need to try to control those most important to her ultimately led to them leaving her and eventually caused her death. Too late did she realize that just because a person wants something to be a certain way does not mean that things would actually turn out that way. She was average in appearance in every way, certainly not remarkable for Wales during the time in which she lived. Her hair was

mousy brown, her face not ugly but not terribly attractive, either. People noticed her bearing and strength of character people first rather than her outward appearance. She applied a tremendous amount of discipline to almost every aspect of her daily life. Because of her station in life, there were certain things she did not have to do yet learned about regardless. The fact that she took an active interest in all aspects of life in and around the castle spoke greatly of her humanity and humility, and helped keep her and her son alive and safe after she abandoned her noble life altogether.

Herzeleide was as virtuous a woman as she knew how to be. She was a Christian (a legacy left courtesy the departing Romans), and attended church regularly. She was honest and fair when possible and received her subjects appropriately and graciously. Herzeleide had numerous suiters beginning when she was only 13, but she maintained her chastity until her marriage to Gamuret. She saw her purity as a civic duty to her kingdom; by maintaining her virginity she was able to offer a very valuable commodity at that time. She knew from a very early age that she would likely be marrying someone to increase her brother's power and influence. When her brother died, she then knew she would be trading her independence for a more direct cause – a king who truly deserved the throne of her country and would spend the rest of his life devoted to its stability and growth. Herzeleide was hopeful and idealistic, always seeing the good in people and looking for the silver lining in every grey cloud. When Gamuret abandoned her and her kingdom soon after getting her with child, she was absolutely crushed. She questioned everything from her ability to rule to her religion. Realizing she had been naïve, she decided that her kingdom would be better off with anyone leading other than herself. Herzeleide gathered her trusted lords, assigned one of them a temporary protector, and left the same day without fanfare. She moved into a hunting

cottage built some time ago by a member of her family for their gamekeeper to use. Many people knew where she was, but out of respect for her they kept their distance.

The characters most affected by Herzeleide's death are Parsifal and Kundry, both in very different ways and for very different reasons. Parsifal goes from being a capricious youth who seems ignorant of the consequences of his actions (and life in general) in the first act of *Parsifal* to a well-traveled and worldly-wise knight by his appearance in the second act. What truly drives him to start thinking about more than himself and the adventure he sought? Largely the driving force is Kundry informing him that his mother is dead, and furthermore Parsifal's abandonment of her was an important contributing factor in her death. Parsifal lashes out like a petulant child and physically attacks Kundry, saying that she is wrong and that his mother is still alive. Only when he accepts that she is truly dead and that he played a part in her death does he start to really understand that actions have consequences, and not all consequences can be undone. Who his mother was and the archetype she represented that gives his reaction more of a truly visceral quality. Later, when he encounters Kundry again in Klingsor's magical garden, that same love of his mother starts to draw him in to what could have been his downfall. Parsifal does not even recall his own name until Kundry-as-Herzeleide says, "Parsifal! Tarry!" As he is drawn into her embrace, the memories of his childhood with his mother all come flooding back and he has an epiphany. With newly found strength of constitution he is able to resist the temptation and proves himself to be a hero worthy of guarding the Grail. The impact is greater because of the person his mother was, even though she was never really encountered in the opera.

For Kundry's character, the impact of Herzeleide is equally important. Kundry is, as Wagner points out in his sketches, not just complicated but a collection of antithetical attributes. Ugly one moment and beautiful the next, she is also the loving mother and tempting seductress.

Whether Wagner created her this way out of pure expediency, a deeply ingrained psychological belief, something completely different, or a combination of many factors, there is still a need to justify why Kundry is acting a particular way at a specific point in *Parsifal*. In particular, when the subject of Parsifal's mother first comes up, Kundry rather callously states that she is already dead and that Parsifal contributed to her demise. Why would Kundry take such an approach? Jealousy of Herzeleide and/or the loving relationship she had with her son? Anger at Herzeleide's willingness to so quickly give up when she had so much at her disposal? Curiosity at what Parsifal really knows and a desire to test his character? Answers to these questions drive much different approaches to the scene for both Kundry and Parsifal. Later, in the scene in Klingsor's magical garden, there are new factors in play. Kundry has been compelled by Klingsor against her will to attempt the seduction of Parsifal, but the approach she will take is greatly informed by the treatment of Herzeleide. Even if the motivation for Kundry is duplicitous, her approach must be so realistic that even Parsifal is convinced. Kundry is described both in the opera and by Wagner as all-knowing; she would certainly have a very clear understanding of Herzeleide's background and the type of relationship she had with her son.

Near the end of Act I, Scene 1, Parsifal recalls little about his life prior to that moment – only that he had a mother, Herzeleide, and that he had left her in search of adventure. Gurnemanz chastens him for having deserted his mother, leaving her worried about him, and almost immediately Kundry announces that Herzeleide is not worried because she is dead. Wagner has composed a full measure of build-up music prior to Kundry's revelation; this is an excellent opportunity for the vocalist portraying her to build to the epiphany. Parsifal initially shows child-like anger upon learning his mother's fate, but during Gurnemanz's fatherly upbraiding Parsifal now has the opportunity to reflect on a mother who loved him and died, heartbroken, after his

departure. How Parsifal felt about his mother should be evident to the other characters and to the audience. The fact that his mother has died is a terrible blow, made even worse because Parsifal contributed to her death. The vocalist portraying Parsifal should know who Herzeleide was, what she was like, and her core beliefs so the revelation of her death has more relevance and therefore more impact. This is especially true since Parsifal's love for his mother creates a weak point which Kundry later exploits during her attempted seduction.

There is no doubt that Wagner tried to pack as much as he possibly could into *Parsifal*. He took an epic poem which had been expounded upon by numerous story-tellers for hundreds of years, full of a large number of complicated, interesting characters, and distilled the resulting *Gesamtkunstwerk* down to a "mere" four-and-a-half-hour (closer to five-and-a-half-hour including intermissions) run time. Not only did he compress the timeline, he greatly compressed the main singing roles as well, limiting the number of main female roles down to exactly one: Kundry. The result of this concentration of information was the deep complexity of many of the characters, especially Kundry. Spectators at Bayreuth and elsewhere may not have known the Arthurian legends in general, or the tale of Herzeleide in particular, yet they needed to be made aware of both the framework of the world and Parsifal's place within that world. What better way to bring an audience into the world being created for them than to prepare a thorough character study of an important missing character such as Herzeleide and thereby make the characters associated with her more depth and meaning?

CHAPTER 4

CHARLOTTE'S MOTHER IN *WERTHER* (1892)

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Wagner's *Parsifal* made a stage debut at Bayreuth on July 26, 1882. The piano-vocal score had been released, and the devoted Wagnerians in Paris wasted no time in turning their attention to the work. Vincent d'Indy, Emmanuel Chabrier, Henri Duparc, Gabriel Fauré, and André Messager formed a small, close-knit group, but when they got together to read the new work, they were critical of what they perceived as the opera's decadence, if not senility. Their hero, the composer which they held in their highest esteem, had greatly disappointed them. One member of the group said, describing the prelude, "Why, it's just bad Massenet!" One could, in hindsight, interpret this as a left-handed praise.[59]

Jules Massenet (1842-1912) was born a child of means. Although his social background was not frequently discussed, that aspect did neatly fit into a larger image painted by Wagnerian critics of a voracious composer who created "cultural commodities for a rapaciously materialistic society."[60] In his later career, Massenet was frequently stereotyped as a "bourgeois capitalist."[61] A critic for one of his operas referred to Massenet as a "spoilt child of fortune," which was a familiar criticism from his adversarial peers.[62] One would be hard-pressed to deny that he was lucky, but given the lukewarm reception of his early operas and his persistence, luck and a wealthy

[59] Irvine, 133.
[60] Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siecle*. Oxford Academic: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195189544.003.0002, 2005. Accessed Aug. 19, 2023.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

background were not the main factors in his success. A more likely contributing factor that led to Massenet's great success, other than talent, was constant effort. He espoused that one must not wait for inspiration, composing for five or six hours starting early most mornings. Massenet did not even let the fact that he was a regular traveler impede this routine, taking work along with him to occupy his time while in hotels.[63]

Jules Massenet was, by 1890, an extremely popular composer. In fact, the popularity of his operas in France created difficulty for other composers who hoped to compete with him. Massenet's style became the norm, and other French operas were compared to his. Audiences were enthralled with his tonal lyricism, and many of his contemporaries (including Claude Debussy) duplicated his melodic style.[64] A common belief was that there was a secret Massenet inside of every French composer. However, his contemporaries also denounced his popularity and resulting arrogance, scornfully calling him an "opportunist who pandered to public taste."[65] A typical Massenet opera is rife with personally flawed, extreme characters. This reflects the psychologically unsettled turn of the century in Europe, when people became more aware of society's degradation. The majority of Massenet's operas are a mirror of the worries that plagued his bourgeois audiences at the end of the Nineteenth-Century, and his subjects often hint at and call to attention to the contradictory moral ideals of the day.[66] When his opera *Werther* opened in Paris in 1893, Massenet seemed to have reached the apex of his career, yet afterward he would write another 16 operas which would find their way to the stage. (See Appendix C – *Werther* Synopsis for plot and character clarification).

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[63] Irvine, xiii.
[64] Fisher, 15-16.
[65] Ibid., 16.
[66] Ibid., 17-18.

Massenet's career was significantly influenced by Parisian businessman and music publisher Georges Hartmann (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies). Although Hartmann occasionally encouraged other up-and-coming French composers like George Bizet, Édouard Lalo, and Debussy, Massenet became the main focus of his professional attention. As Hartmann became intrigued by the structure of several of Massenet's works, he combined his business and creative interests and even provided scenarios for *Werther*.[67] The story resonated with Massenet's modern audience, even though the work's fundamental origins are in the German Romanticism of the previous century. In other words, the audience understood the anguish that Werther and Charlotte were going through because they were unable to question bourgeois norms and constraints. Typical of Massenet, the themes served as a reflection for his audience, following his goal of encouraging people to examine their own morals and their own psyches.[68]

The success of *Manon* had opened the doors for the world première of *Werther* in Vienna.[69] However, the Opéra-Comique declined to produce *Werther*, because they wanted instead another *Manon*. As the name suggests, the Opéra Comique specialized in the genre of lighter opera. In contrast to grand opéra, "comic opera" stories focus on lower-class characters and often use the interaction between nobility and peasants as fodder for comic situations. The genre of opéra comique also includes portions of spoken dialogue, whereas grand opéra is entirely sung. Contrary to the name of the opera house, however, not all operas premiered or performed there were of a humorous nature (e.g. Carmen, Lakmé, Pelléas et Mélisande). As a result, *Werther* was warmly received when the opera was premiered in Vienna in 1892. The fact that Massenet's work was well received in Vienna is greatly to his credit.[70] Massenet had successfully applied a clarity of style

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[67] Huebner.
[68] Fisher, 18.
[69] Irvine, 169.
[70] Ibid., 182-183.

that was distinctly French to one of the greatest works of foreign literature. Almost no German composer of the time would have ventured to set *Werther*. Over seven years had passed since Massenet first began to consider *Werther*, and only the success in an Austrian opera house allowed him to convince his fellow Frenchmen that they were incorrect in deriding the work as too gloomy.[71] The opera finally showed up at the Opéra-Comique a year later, where audiences lavished the work with adoration.

CHARACTER ORIGIN AND ANALYSIS

A cutting-edge component of Eighteenth-Century classicism known as *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) was marked by a pronounced theatrical tendency in the arts and an emotional sensitivity (*Empfindsamkeit*) presaging the Romanic period. The most important literary work of the movement was Goethe's (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies) first great novel, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers (The Sorrows of Young Werther)*, first published in 1774.[72] The book, written in the form of letters, is full of themes which eventually became the basis of Nineteenth-Century German Romanticism: the juxtaposition of love and death, the preference for a simple country life, and the praise of nature. Goethe had fashioned the archetypal Romantic hero: a young man with such elevated sensitivity that he decides to kill himself, a victim of unattainable passion. In German Romanticism, subjectivism countered the rational. As a result, Romanticism championed greater freedom in expression, disregarded authority, attacked tradition, and celebrated the illogical aspects of humanity. Many artistic works represented themes which were transcendental or melancholy.[73] Longing evolved as the shared foundation for both spiritual ascent and love.

[71] James Harding, *Massenet* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1970), 94-95

[72] Gabriel Alfieri, "Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: A Primer for Singers" *Journal of Singing* 63 (2006), 151-152.

[73] Burton D. Fisher, *Massenet's Werther (Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series)* (Las Vegas: Opera Journeys Publishing, 2000). Accessed September 4, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central. Created from ugalib on 2023-09-04 01:59:38, 20.

Goethe's *Sorrows* is primarily about the need and desire for love. The novel was immensely popular for the next century, so much so that people adopted more colorful clothing, and there was a marked rise in suicide by young men in the years immediately following the book's publication.[74] And yet, the French composer who finally brought Goethe's *Sorrows* to the stage in a successful opera (premiered in Vienna) felt there was at least one significant ingredient missing.

Both French and Italian opera are frequently driven by intense feelings and passions, remarkable primordial struggles including love, avarice, betrayal, revenge, murder, and death. Both styles have similar Latin roots; the ways in which they are presented often vary, but they frequently showcase similar "underlying dramatic intensity."[75] Much like Verdi, Massenet frequently looked for librettos that offered something new and theatrical that could be performed in an opera, the sensualistic inside a traditional framework. Also like Verdi, purely political and historical topics didn't particularly interest him. Massenet's staging was dramatic; he concentrated on the deft control of acting forces on and off the stage with arresting entrances, interjections from a distance, and well-timed "scenic coups."[76] *Werther* provided a lovelorn lad, an empathetic heroine, and a bourgeois German backdrop that were very different from the intrigue-filled environments that Massenet had become so adept at creating.

A trip to Bayreuth to see *Parsifal* strengthened Massenet's regard for Wagner as a masterful composer worthy of emulation; Wagner casts a very long shadow in *Werther*. Compared to Massenet's earlier work, *Werther's* melodies have a looser form. The orchestral texture is rich in Wagnerian sonorities, and the acts are designed as wholes rather than as a collection of separate songs. Massenet had a talent for adapting whatever in the work of his contemporaries best suited

[74] Alfieri, 153.
[75] Fisher, 18.
[76] Huebner.

him and incorporating them into his own formulas, a talent he also shared with Puccini. One recurring style element is the way Massenet fragments and varies lines with displaced accents. His use of this style to convey Charlotte's mourning for her mother in "Si vous l'aviez connu," and in the dying Werther's "Là-bas, au fond du cimetière," where the rhythm gently hints at a funeral march, demonstrate its versatility throughout.[77]

The Sorrows of Young Werther is largely autobiographical, with certain historical events serving as inspiration. The magistrate of Wetzlar's daughter, Charlotte Buff, captured the heart of young Goethe. But, Charlotte was already committed, thus Goethe's romantic fantasy was doomed from the start. Concurrently, Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem, a friend of Goethe, shot himself out of desperation after being rejected by a married woman. The spurned Goethe found an alternative way to express his suffering and created his first book, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which merged his own pain with his friend's suicide. According to Massenet's personal writings, the origins of his operatic version of *Werther* began in 1866, when Massenet and Hartmann were returning from a performance of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth and stopped at Wetzlar. Hartmann provided Massenet a copy of the original Goethe novel, and the composer was taken by the romantic power of the story.[78]

The libretto is not a faithful adaptation of the novel. Instead of the existential crisis Goethe wrote, based on Werther's depressing, search for the meaning of life, Massenet's opera becomes a tale of passion driven by unrequited love leading to suicide. In the novel, Charlotte never returns the love professed by Werther, but in the opera she has her own dramatic climax when she realizes her love for him, only too late. The story now revolves almost entirely around their doomed relationship. The situation is clear: from their first meeting, Werther and Charlotte are attracted to

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[77] Harding, 95.
[78] Fisher, 21.

each other, but Charlotte will never be able to refuse marriage to Albert or leave him, and Werther will never accept these facts. Charlotte has been required to take over the responsibility of raising her siblings and tells Werther of the importance of fidelity to her mother. "How I love you, love you and adore you!" Werther avows. "We're both mad," Charlotte replies, realizing the true dilemma of the situation after telling him about her mother's death.[79] Werther grudgingly concedes that Charlotte must uphold her oath, but that he "shall die of it."[80] The promise she made at her mother's deathbed to marry Albert, a plot device completely missing from Goethe's novel, has become a pivotal point for the opera. Clearly, Charlotte has feelings for Werther. Perhaps her feelings are not as strong as his (she finally declares her love as he lies dying), but because he now knows that he otherwise would have had a chance to win her over, Werther is crushed between his overwhelming romantic attachment to Charlotte and the promise she made to her mother to marry another man. Massenet has effectively raised the stakes on what is generally considered the most important work in German Romantic literature by introducing an all-new character – one who never actually appears during the opera.

THEORETICAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT FOR CHARLOTTE'S MOTHER

The framework utilized to create this character development comes from the opera *Werther*, the book *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and a general eighteenth-century historical setting. The name given Charlotte's mother, "Gretchen," comes directly from one of Goethe's other master works, his play *Faust*. As with the theoretical character developments from the other two operas discussed in this paper, the goal is not to try to read Massenet's mind but rather to attempt to meet his intent. The most important part of the process is to create a fully-formed character with as much attention to detail as possible. The framework must be maintained for plausibility and

[79] John Cordingly, *Disordered Heroes in Opera* (London: Plumbago Books, 2015), 94-95.
[80] Irvine, 178.

therefore credibility. The opera *Werther* certainly does not adhere entirely faithfully to Goethe's original book. But, the important aspects of the world Goethe created are maintained, as is the young angst of the protagonist and the dedication and loyalty of the woman with whom he becomes enraptured. Gretchen becomes an integral part of the opera, and the promise Charlotte makes to her on her death bed becomes a powerful aspect of the story. The plot now no longer revolves around an unrequited love, but revolves around a mutual love that cannot be. Having a detailed development of Gretchen helps inform the way her daughter, Charlotte, in particular performs her part. And, such a character develoopment helps explain why her loyalty to her mother is a core part of her character and therefore a core part of the driving force of the plot.

Gretchen was born to two parents who loved each other immensely, but had very little wealth and no real prospects for increasing their socioeconomic status. Since she was the first born, she developed a strong sense of responsibility. She watched her parents struggle with their finances and learned to worry with them much as an adult. As her mother had more and more children (she eventually had ten, seven of which reached adulthood), she became more and more withdrawn. In the twenty-first century, such a withdrawal would be recognized as depression. All Gretchen knew was that her mother was becoming less and less able to cope with managing her daily responsibilities. Since no one else was going to do so, Gretchen decided she had better take over for her mother where able to do so. By age fourteen she was completely in charge of her younger siblings, and they deferred more to her than to their parents. Eventually, though, Gretchen grew resentful at this loss of her childhood. Every day, as she went through her relentless household chores, she promised herself that she would not be in a similar position after marriage. She had seen what marrying for love gained a person – poverty. Instead, she set her sights on an up-and-coming lawyer in the area, seeing him as her chance to move up the economic ladder. The lawyer

was nice enough and enjoyed Gretchen's company, so when he proposed she did not hesitate to accept the offer. With her "aggressive encouragement," the lawyer eventually became a district judge, and Gretchen believed she had finally succeeded in distancing herself from her humble upbringing. Gretchen was pregnant a great deal of the time after her wedding, and was glad she could afford to pay for assistance with tending to all of her children. Her eldest, Charlotte, was a devoted family member and always looked for ways to help as much as she could. Her kind, generous nature was combined with a beautiful face, and Gretchen knew she could know a life of comfort by using careful planning rather than relying on emotions to choose the best husband. Gretchen selected a quality husband for Charlotte, but kept that information secret until Gretchen became very ill and realized that she would not recover. "Promise me you will marry the man I have chosen for you. He is a good man who will provide well for you. Do not ever consider marrying for love alone; emotions come and go, but true security will last. You will learn to love Albert well enough." After receiving Charlotte's promise to comply, Gretchen soon died of cancer at age 43.

Gretchen possessed many strengths, among which were her strong constitution, a clearly defined idea of what is right and what is wrong, and a willingness to make difficult decisions that others fear. She was always the person who would tell people what they needed to hear rather than what they wanted to hear. Unfortunately, others saw her as unfeeling because she worked diligently to keep her emotions out of any decision making. Gretchen also categorized people. Once she mentally assigned them to their categories, they never moved from them. Often, she said exactly what was on her mind without always stopping to consider the circumstances. She was very much a closed book emotionally, even to her immediate family. Gretchen did feel emotions, but viewed

them as weakness. She had a fear of abandonment and a fear of not having enough money to provide a house and food, and she rued the loss of her childhood even as she laid dying.

Because of the relative poverty of her youth, Gretchen was largely self-taught. She knew that upper class women were often appreciated for their ability to sing and read, but given her station she had to focus on more practical social graces such as tending to her home and garden along with her siblings. She practiced social interactions so she would be able to be charming when necessary. After her marriage, she began to truly resent people who lived in poverty. After all, she figured out how to not be poor, and so could they if they chose to do so. She firmly believed in the class system. If a person did not like her current place in the world, she should find a way to change her fortune. She was very proud of herself, almost to the point of conceit, for improving her station, but her greatest disappointment in life was that she was never able to find a way to rise to the level of nobility.

Gretchen's public persona was that of a well-respected wife of a district judge. She was called upon by other ladies of the town for her wisdom and advice. Her input was always taken seriously, because she was viewed as a serious person with no time for silliness. Gretchen always thought of herself as correct in her thinking and in her actions, but in reality she was just very good at justification and rationalization. In private, she held one huge secret – she had once been in love. When she was a teenager, she had fallen madly in love with a handsome lad who lived in her same poor neighborhood. When she realized that he was never going to be able to elevate himself financially, she ended the relationship. Gretchen experienced more difficult than she would have thought trying to get over him, but breaking his (and, if she was honest with herself, her) heart was a necessary price to pay to ensure her later financial security. Gretchen thought of him wistfully from time to time, but never told anyone about him.

Gretchen remained thin with a beautiful face up until her death. Her blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin were striking. She knew that her appearance was her greatest asset next to her determination and did everything she could to maintain her looks. Her good looks had often turned heads, and though she never mentioned the fact to anyone, she greatly enjoyed the attention of men. In her youth she had relied on their attention to obtain her best possible prospect of a wealthy husband. As she aged, Gretchen still enjoyed flirting with gentlemen. She knew there were lines she would never cross, but there was certainly nothing wrong with the privileges her family gained as a result of her charismatic ways. When she was with people she deemed to be of a lower class than herself, she would radiate a lot of vibes which said, "I'm better than you because I chose to be." She was very graceful when she wanted to be, but generally brusque and efficient at all other times, even around her family.

Charlotte, in particular, has the most to gain by careful study of who her mother was and what circumstances had made her what she was. Why would she care who her daughter married? How did she hold such power over her daughter after her death? Is love more important than responsibility? Does love really conquer all, or is love a temporary fixation which bears only a distant relationship to the true happiness which only financial security brings? Once again, a new level of dramatic intensity may be created through a thorough study and preparation of a theoretical character development.

When Werther finally has a moment alone with Charlotte in Act I of *Werther*, he compliments her on how she treats her young siblings as if they were her own children. This comment opens the door to Charlotte's reflection of how present her mother still is in Charlotte's life. Charlotte says, "I believe I see her smiling face as I care for her children." During this section, how Charlotte portrays her mother is of utmost import to informing the manner in which Werther

and the audience regard her promise to marry Albert. If her mother were cruel, or even just very assertive, Charlotte might not feel the same compulsion to follow-through with her vow. But, if the vocalist portrays this moment sympathetically, Werther understands all too well the need to acquiesce and the audience feels the tension increase. Massenet knew the impact a deceased mother would have on the audience watching his version of Goethe's work. The promise Charlotte made to her mother becomes one of the most important aspects of creating the tension caused by a love that could never be. This requited but impossible love becomes the impetus for the eventual climax of the opera: Werther's suicide.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In 1839, Felice Romani, the finest Italian librettist of the early nineteenth century (see Appendix E – Brief Biographies), provided an apt description of the art of preparing a libretto:

> *Do you think it's so easy to reduce a French tragedy or comedy to an Italian melodrama? Render a whole volume in a few pages? Create miniatures of the characters and situations, take a composition made up entirely of dialogues and eliminate the dialogue, its primary element? And then do you think it is easy to satisfy all the musical requirements: to try to satisfy all the singers' demands, distribute the so-called pieces in such a manner that one party doesn't get angry at the other, arrange the scenes without letting them get monotonous, using sopranos here, basses there, combining poetic inspiration with practical necessity, widen a concept into a particular number of verses and meters, and narrow it down to so many verses of a particular measure? To say everything in a few words and be brief without being obscure?*[81]

If a modern-day movie/TV/video creator wants to tell a story about any particular character, any number of characters may easily be added for a short back-story scene. Frequently, directors rely on devices such as flash-backs or set-up scenes depicting events that clearly demonstrate the motivations of the characters and cause them to behave as they do. It's one thing for an audience to see Person A be angry at Person B and tell them that Person A wants to kill Person B. It's another thing altogether to see a complete scene in which Person B is responsible for the death of Person A's parents. If one has the ability to show events to an audience, it is almost always more compelling to do so than having a character describe those events. When a movie begins with a sequence in which a woman screams for her daughter (Person A) to avenge her before being unjustly burned at the stake by Person B, an audience now feels that Person A is fully vindicated in seeking vengeance. An audience may well even exult once that vengeance is attained. In a

[81] Chusid, *Verdi's* Il trovatore, 9.

similar way, Person A could say that he vaguely remembers Person B, and could say that Person C reminds him of Person B and is Person A is there tempted to trust Person C more fully. But, if an audience sees a movie in which Person A is a wayward son who unintentionally abandoned his loving mother (Person B) who had sacrificed everything in an effort to keep him safe, and later the audience sees and hears how similar Person C appears to Person B, the audience will readily understand how Person A could be duped by Person C and the implications which might arise as a result. Likewise, a scene in which a dying Mother A lovingly (or dictatorially) tells Daughter B who she must marry along with Daughter B giving her solemn word will more readily explain logically to an audience the barrier Daughter B has to another romantic relationship than simply Person B telling Person A that she cannot marry him. Even a stage play has more luxury of verbosity than opera. An opera librettist must economize as much as possible due to the numerous conventions of the format. Stories must therefore be compressed, and often characters are combined to create amalgams. Good actors may be difficult to find, but good opera vocalists are even more rare. To contract an excellent vocalist, then only utilize that vocalist in one brief explanatory scene makes little economic sense. And, music must move at its own pace (i.e. one cannot rush a slow aria just to throw in numerous lyrics). A composer must be selective about how much information to include, lest a book become a ten-hour opera.

The "missing but present" mother figures in these three operas are vital to the plots and the development of the characters in them. Each has a clear purpose for existence and inclusion in the storyline, even though none ever actually appear in the operas. Consider first the Romani mother in *Il trovatore*. If she is never mentioned, there is no back story to Azucena. She has no reason to have taken the child of a nobleman, much less raise him as her own. If that mother were added to the opera as a character, she would only be in an opening scene; there would be no sense for her

to come back later unless as a ghost. The entire shape of the opera would have to be re-thought, possibly even the number of acts. The conspicuous absence of Azucena's mother becomes more explicable when seen through the eyes of a timeline which covers twenty years or more. Verdi would have needed to extend the libretto greatly and compose sections to accommodate the changes; that is why Verdi settled on the existing version. In *Parsifal*, the titular character would have little or no motivation to change his errant behavior without his part in his mother's death being revealed. Furthermore, the impetus to be drawn to Kundry as his mother would have been much reduced – Wagner needed a driving force beyond mere physical temptation to explain Parsifal's near seduction. If Herzeleide were added as a character in the opera, an already lengthy, elaborately staged production would require another act, another set, and another vocalist. Wagner was very specific about the entertainment experience he was creating for his audiences, especially for the opera written for the dedication and continuing propagation of his own opera house. The choice to mention this character but not include her is a deliberate one, even though Herzeleide had an actual active part in the original source material Wagner was using as the basis for his libretto. Considering *Werther*, Massenet thought a deceased mother was significant enough that he altered an important aspect of the original Goethe plot to include her. Without her, Charlotte becomes free to marry whomever she chooses. If she is as smitten with Werther as he is with her from the start, she would call off her engagement and the opera would be a short and happy, if boring, one. Yet, again, if the mother were an on-stage character, an entire new scene prior to Werther's first arrival would be required. There would have to be a reason for this scene beyond simply establishing the fact that Charlotte feels an obligation to marry the person her mother has chosen.

This study has demonstrated that there are several reasons why mothers are absent in many operas, including dramatic tension, historical/social context, male-centered plots, and tragic themes. Opera thrives on conflict and drama, and an absent or distant mother can create emotional tension and drive the plot in a more compelling manner. Separation from a mother, whether due to death or other circumstances, can be a powerful dramatic device that propels the story forward and elicits sympathy from the audience. Many operas, especially those composed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were written at a time when societal norms limited women's roles and opportunities. Future research could explore development of similar missing but important characters in other performance formats, including staged plays/musicals, television, movies, and videos. Answers could be sought for such questions as: Are archetype characters more compelling due to familiarity, and, if so, which archetypes are the most relatable and therefore more powerful? Is there really a connection between a character just being mentioned and a general understanding that no one lives without affecting and being affected by others? Is there any kind of relationship between operas being canonic and the use of missing characters? In other words, does using missing characters add to the immediate and long-term popularity of an opera? Are missing characters more common when an opera is enitrely original or when an opera is derived from another work?

The creation of a theoretical character study for characters vital to the plot development of an opera is as important as the creation of a character study for those who are embodied by vocalists on stage. Characters appearing onstage which are directly affected by these "missing" characters have much to gain from carefully researched and crafted character studies, just as they have much to gain from character studies for those appearing on stage. The more commonality an audience feels to a performance, the more connected they are and they will enjoy a more meaningful

experience. The devil is in the details, and to perfunctorily gloss over these missing but important characters is a disservice to the audience and to the creators of the operas. By applying this process of character development for missing characters, future vocalists, directors, and those who work with them will be able to take the interpretation of an opera to a new, more fulfilling and compelling level for themselves and for their audiences. Additionally, the resulting character background stories could be included with the program notes so that audiences may become more acquainted with the intent of the composer. With this added knowledge, an audience would more fully understand the significance of a missing character and therefore the increased dramatic impetus of the character's absence. Composers could also use these ideas to increase their ability to deliver even more information in a more efficient manner.

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APPENDIX A

IL TROVATORE SYNOPSIS

Act I:

Scene 1: An antechamber in the palace of Aliaferia. While on night guard duty, Ferrando entertains his companions with a story from the count's family history: a Romani woman once bewitched one of the children of the old count, and was condemned to be burned at the stake. In a heated passion for vengeance, her daughter stole the child and threw him on the Romani's pyre.

Scene 2: Night in the palace gardens. Leonora has fallen in love with an unknown knight at a tournament. She recognizes him by his voice as the troubadour serenading her in the garden and rushes to meet him. Count di Luna, who also loves Leonora, enters and challenges the knight (Manrico) to a duel.

Act II:

Scene 1: A Romani camp in the mountains of Biscay. Manrico has defeated di Luna, but spared his life. However, they met again in battle where Manrico was overcome by superior forces. A Romani, Azucena, has nursed him while he recovers from his severe injuries and tells him her story. Her mother, though innocent, was burned at the stake by di Luna's father. She stole one of his children in revenge but mistakenly threw her own child into the fire; she has brought up the other baby as hers. Although Manrico has doubts, she assures him that she is that child and must avenge his grandmother's death. Prepared to do so, his revenge plans are postponed when he learns that Leonora is about to take vows to become a nun.

Scene 2: In a convent near Castellor. Di Luna has learned of Leonora's plans to take her vows and intends to abduct her; Manrico intervenes. The lovers flee to the fortress of Castellor.

Act III:

Scene 1: Di Luna's camp at Castellor. Luna is laying siege to the fortress, which is being commanded by Manrico. Azucena is discovered near the camp and is arrested for spying. She calls out in her fear for her son Manrico. When di Luna learns her identity, he orders her execution. Ferrando recognizes her as the woman for whom many have been seeking.

Scene 2: In the Castellor fortress. Leonora and Manrico are about to take their wedding vows. When he learns of his mother's capture, he prepares his troops to free her.

Act IV:

Scene 1: In the palace of Aliaferia. Di Luna has conquered and occupies the fortress of Castellor, taking Manrico prisoner. Lenora has fled. When she hears that Manrico and Azucena are to be executed, she offers herself to di Luna to save them. Di Luna agrees, but Leonora secretly takes poison so she will not have to follow-through.

Scene 2: A dungeon. Manrico and Azucena are in chains. Leonora urges Manrico to escape, but he believes she has betrayed him since she will not leave with him. They are reconciled when the poison takes effect and she dies in his arms. In his anger, he has Manrico executed while Azucena is forced to watch. After, she tells him that Manrico was his brother and announces her mother has finally been avenged.

APPENDIX B

PARSIFAL SYNOPSIS

Before the opera begins:

The Order of Grail only allows those who renounce physical/sensual love to partake in the Grail's miraculous powers. Klingsor, a knight who castrated himself to overcome his desires, has still been refused admittance to the Order. In revenge, he has built a magical castle near the castle of the Grail (Montsalvat) and an accompanying pleasure garden full of enchantingly beautiful maidens. Thus was he able to tempt many of the other knights to break their vows of celibacy. Even Amfortas, the ruler of the Grail kingdom, was seduced by Kundry. Amfortas was robbed of the sacred spear and was wounded by that same weapon – a wound that will not heal until a "pure fool made wise through compassion" returns the spear.

Act I

Scene 1: Near Montsalvat castle at daybreak. Kundry seeks redemption for her great sacrilege (she has been condemned to wander forever for mocking Christ on the cross) by serving the Grail knights with humility. As she has many times before, she returns from a long journey with an ointment for Amfortas' unhealing wound. Gurnemanz, a Grail knight, tells the squires the story of the wound and that only a "pure fool" can heal him. An unknown youth near the castle kills a swan with an arrow. Gurnemanz takes him to task for killing an innocent creature merely for pleasure. The boy is sorry for his actions and breaks his bow. Gurnemanz takes him into the castle.

Scene 2: Inside Montsalvat castle. Amfortas' pain is worsening every time the Grail is uncovered, but his station requires him to discharge his duty to provide the Grail knights their spiritual food. The boy watches the ceremony but misses the significance; Gurnemanz sends him away in disappointment.

Act II

Klingsor's magic castle and pleasure garden. Although Kundry is serving the Grail knights, she is also obedient to Klingsor. He commands her to seduce the fool approaching the castle. Kundry introduces the "fool" to love with a maternal kiss and calls him by his name: Parsifal. She thereby awakens in him memory of his origins and the grief and pain of separation from his mother. Now Parsifal cares for all living creatures, understands the origin of Amfortas' pain, and is able to resist Kundry's seduction attempt. Klingsor throws the sacred spear at Parsifal; the weapon stops over his head and is captured by Parsifal. Parsifal makes the sign of the cross with the spear and the magic kingdom disappears.

Act III

Scene 1: Near Montsalvat castle in spring, years later. Amfortas refuses to reveal the Grail. Deprived of their spiritual strength, the Grail knights no longer travel the world but instead dwell in the woods as hermthe s. During Parsifal's odyssey over the last several years, he has discovered himself and learned empathy for others. He returns in black armor to redeem Amfortas with the sacred spear. Gurnemanz leads Parsifal into the castle, but first anoints him as king of the Grail. Parsifal baptizes Kundry.

Scene 2: In Montsalvat castle. The assembled knights demand that Amfortas uncover the Grail as part of his father's funeral rites. Amfortas refuses, but Parsifal takes over the duty for him and heals him with the sacred spear. Kundry dies, redeemed from her sins.

APPENDIX C

WERTHER SYNOPSIS

Act I

The magistrate's house. Although the season is the middle of summer, the magistrate's children are practicing Christmas carols with their father. Two friends arrive to take the magistrate to a tavern. Werther, a lonely dreamer, invites the magistrate's daughter, Charlotte, to a dance.

After her mother's death, Charlotte has become responsible for the care of her siblings. Leaving her younger sister temporarily in charge, Charlotte joins Werther. Meanwhile, Charlotte's fiancé, Albert, returns from a long journey. Charlotte and Werther return at a late hour, and he confesses his love for her. Charlotte has similar feelings, but tells him she must refuse him – she has promised her mother on her deathbed that she would marry Albert.

Act II

A group of trees. The magistrate's friends are watching people entering a church, including Charlotte and Albert, who have been married three months. Werther, distraught, awaits her outside the church. Albert speaks to Werther, sympathizing with his situation. Werther is invited to a dance by Charlotte's sister. When he and Charlotte are alone, he again fervently declares his love. In exasperation, she sends him into "exile" until Christmas so they may both think about their difficult situations. Albert, witnessing Werther's behavior, becomes aware that Werther still loves Charlotte.

Act III

Charlotte is reading Werther's letters on Christmas Eve afternoon; she is deeply touched. Sophie attempts to cheer her up, but to no avail. Charlotte dreads Werther's return. When he arrives, they talk of the past, including a plan to translate romantic poems. Werther, seeing this as a sign of her love, allows his feelings free rein, and tries to convince her to let her true feelings show as well. Charlotte's sense of duty lead her to finally say goodbye forever to Werther. Upon her return home, Albert grows suspicious. Werther sends a message asking to borrow Albert's pistols for a long journey, and Albert vindictively sends the weapons to him.

Act IV

An orchestral interlude on Christmas Night accompanies Charlotte's travel to Werther's home. Bursting in, she sees blood on the floor and finds a gravely wounded Werther lying on his bed. Instead of having her fetch help, Werther wants to spend his last minutes alone with her. Finally, she confesses her love – and their first kiss becomes their last. The children sing the Christmas carol they had practiced in the summer, and Werther dies happily in Charlotte's arms.

APPENDIX D

LIST OF OPERAS STUDIED FOR THE DISSERTATION

YR.	TITLE OF OPERA	COMPOSER	MISSING CHARACTER
1606	*L'Orfeo*	Claudio Monteverdi	No
1640	*Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*	Claudio Monteverdi	No
1643	*L'incoronazione di Poppea*	Claudio Monteverdi	No
1674	*Alceste*	Jean-Baptiste Lully	No
1682	*Persée*	Jean-Baptiste Lully	No
1686	*Armide*	Jean-Baptiste Lully	No
1688	*Dido and Aeneas*	Henry Purcell	No
1709	*Agrippina*	G. F. Handel	No
1711	*Rinaldo*	G. F. Handel	No
1724	*Giulio Cesare*	G. F. Handel	**Pompey**
1733	*La Serva Padrona*	G. B. Pergolesi	No
1738	*Serse*	G. F. Handel	No
1762	*Orfeo ed Euridice*	C. W. Gluck	No
1782	*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*	W. A. Mozart	**Lostados**
1781	*Idomeneo, Re di Creta*	W. A. Mozart	**Helen of Troy**
1786	*Le Nozze di Figaro*	W. A. Mozart	No
1787	*Don Giovanni*	W. A. Mozart	No
1790	*Così fan tutte*	W. A. Mozart	No
1791	*La Clemenza di Tito*	W. A. Mozart	No
1791	*Die Zauberflöte*	W. A. Mozart	No
1797	*Medea*	Luigi Cherubini	No
1805	*Fidelio*	L. van Beethoven	No
1813	*L'Italiana in Algeri*	Gioachino Rossini	No
1816	*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*	Gioachino Rossini	No
1817	*La Cenerentola*	Gioachino Rossini	No
1821	*Der Freischütz*	C. Maria v. Weber	No
1823	*Semiramide*	Gioachino Rossini	No
1829	*Guillaume Tell*	Gioachino Rossini	No
1830	*Anna Bolena*	Gaetano Donizetti	No
1831	*La Sonnambula*	Vincenzo Bellini	No
1831	*Norma*	Vincenzo Bellini	No
1831	*Robert le diable*	Giacomo Meyerbeer	**Robert's Mother, Prince of Granada**
1832	*L'Elisir d'Amore*	Gaetano Donizetti	No

1833	*Lucrezia Borgia*	Gaetano Donizetti	No
1834	*Maria Stuarda*	Gaetano Donizetti	**Darnley, Ambassador, French Dauphin**
1835	*I Puritani*	Vincenzo Bellini	No
1835	*Lucia di Lammermoor*	Gaetano Donizetti	No
1836	*Les Huguenots*	Giacomo Meyerbeer	No
1837	*Roberto Devereux*	Gaetano Donizetti	(Rosamund)
1840	*La Fille du Régiment*	Gaetano Donizetti	No
1840	*La Favorita*	Gaetano Donizetti	**Queen of Castile**
1842	*Nabucco*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1843	*Don Pasquale*	Gaetano Donizetti	No
1843	*Der Fliegende Holländer*	Richard Wagner	(Satan)
1844	*Ernani*	Giuseppe Verdi	(Charlemagne)
1845	*Tannhäuser*	Richard Wagner	No
1847	*Macbeth*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1849	*Luisa Miller*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1850	*Lohengrin*	Richard Wagner	(Parsifal)
1851	*Rigoletto*	Giuseppe Verdi	(Duchess of Mantua)
1853	*Il Trovatore*	Giuseppe Verdi	**Romani Mother**
1853	*La Traviata*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1855	*I Vespri Siciliani*	Giuseppe Verdi	**Elena's Brother**
1857	*Simon Boccanegra*	Giuseppe Verdi	**Maria, Lorenzino**
1859	*Un Ballo in Maschera*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1859	*Faust*	Charles Gounod	No
1862	*La Forza del Destino*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1863	*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*	Georges Bizet	No
1863	*Les Troyens*	Hector Berlioz	**Hannibal, Lacoön, Iarbas, Sichée**
1865	*Tristan und Isolde*	Richard Wagner	No
1866	*Mignon*	Ambroise Thomas	No
1867	*Don Carlos*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1867	*Roméo et Juliette*	Charles Gounod	No
1868	*Hamlet*	Ambroise Thomas	No
1868	*Mefistofele*	Arrigo Boito	**Margherita's Mother**
1868	*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*	Richard Wagner	(King Marke)
1869	*Das Rheingold*	Richard Wagner	No
1870	*Die Walküre*	Richard Wagner	(Loge)
1871	*Aida*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1874	*Boris Godunov*	Modest Mussorgsky	**Ivan the Terrible, (True) Dmitriy**
1875	*Carmen*	Georges Bizet	No
1876	*La Gioconda*	Amilcare Ponchielli	No
1876	*Siegfried*	Richard Wagner	**Siegmund, Sieglende**
1876	*Götterdämmerung*	Richard Wagner	**Erde, Fafner, Wotan**
1881	*Eugene Onegin*	Piotr I. Tchaikovsky	(Onegin's Uncle)

1881	*Les Contes d'Hoffmann*	Jacques Offenbach	No
1882	*Parsifal*	Richard Wagner	**Gawain, Gamuret, Herzeleide**
1883	*Lakmé*	Léo Delibes	No
1884	*Manon*	Jules Massenet	No
1887	*Otello*	Giuseppe Verdi	**Doge**
1890	*Cavalleria Rusticana*	Pietro Mascagni	No
1890	*Pique Dame*	Piotr I. Tchaikovsky	No
1892	*Werther*	Jules Massenet	**Charlotte's Mother**
1892	*Pagliacci*	Ruggero Leoncavallo	No
1893	*Manon Lescaut*	Giacomo Puccini	No
1893	*Falstaff*	Giuseppe Verdi	No
1893	*Hänsel und Gretel*	E. Humperdinck	No
1894	*Thaïs*	Jules Massenet	No
1896	*La Bohème*	Giacomo Puccini	No
1896	*Andrea Chénier*	Umberto Giordano	**Louis XVI, Robespierre, Dumoriez**
1900	*Tosca*	Giacomo Puccini	**Marchesa Attavanti**
1900	*Louise*	Gustave Charpentier	No
1901	*Rusalka*	Antonín Dvořák	No
1902	*Adriana Lecouvreur*	Francesco Cilèa	**Duclos**
1902	*Pelléas et Mélisande*	Claude Debussy	No
1904	*Madama Butterfly*	Giacomo Puccini	(Butterfly's Father)
1905	*Salome*	Richard Strauss	No
1909	*Elektra*	Richard Strauss	**Agamemnon**
1910	*La Fanciulla del West*	Giacomo Puccini	No
1911	*Der Rosenkavalier*	Richard Strauss	No
1912	*Ariadne auf Naxos*	Richard Strauss	(Circe)
1917	*La Rondine*	Giacomo Puccini	**Ruggero's Mother & Father**
1918	*Il Trittico*	Giacomo Puccini	No (all 3)
1919	*Die Frau ohne Schatten*	Richard Strauss	No
1920	*Die Tote Stadt*	Erich W. Korngold	**Marie**
1921	*The Love for Three Oranges*	Sergei Prokofiev	No
1925	*Wozzeck*	Alban Berg	No
1926	*Turandot*	Giacomo Puccini	No
1928	*Die Dreigroschenoper*	Kurt Weill	**Queen Victoria**
1930	*Aufstieg & Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*	Kurt Weill	No
1933	*Arabella*	Richard Strauss	No
1935	*Porgy and Bess*	George Gershwin	No
1945	*Peter Grimes*	Benjamin Britten	**1st Apprentice**
1946	*The Medium*	Gian Carlo Menotti	No
1947	*The Telephone*	Gian Carlo Menotti	No
1949	*Regina*	Marc Blitzstein	No

1951	*The Rake's Progress*	Igor Stravinsky	No
1951	*Billy Budd*	Benjamin Britten	No
1951	*Amahl and the Night Visitors*	Gian Carlo Menotti	**Christ Child**
1955	*Susannah*	Carlisle Floyd	No
1955	*War and Peace*	Sergei Prokofiev	No
1956	*The Ballad of Baby Doe*	Douglas Moore	No
1957	*Dialogues des Carmélites*	Francis Poulenc	No
1958	*Vanessa*	Samuel Barber	**Anatol (The Elder)**
1976	*Einstein on the Beach*	Philip Glass	No
1979	*Lulu*	Alban Berg	No
1981	*Satyagraha*	Philip Glass	No
1981	*The Death of Klinghoffer*	John Adams	No
1987	*A Night at the Chinese Opera*	Judith Weir	**Both Sets of Parents**
1987	*Nixon in China*	John Adams	No
1991	*The Ghosts of Versailles*	John Corigliano	No
1996	*Emmeline*	Tobias Picker	**Buried Child**
2000	*Dead Man Walking*	Jake Heggie	No
2004	*The Tempest*	Thomas Adès	No
2005	*Doctor Atomic*	John Adams	No
2010	*Moby Dick*	Jake Heggie	No
2011	*Kommilitonen!*	P. Maxwell Davies	No
2012	*Written on Skin*	George Benjamin	(Townspeople)
2015	*Cold Mountain*	Jennifer Higdon	No
2016	*The Exterminating Angel*	Thomas Adès	No

APPENDIX E

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES

Bardare, Leone Emanuele (1820-1874) – Italian poet. Helped complete small parts of the libretto for *Il trovatore* after Salvadore Cammarano's death. His only other notable operatic achievement was creating a new libretto for Verdi's *Rigoletto* (called *Clara di Perth*) to placate censors at Naples.

Cammarano, Salvadore (1801-1852) – Italian poet, director, and librettist. Most famous for writing the libretto to Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, he wrote for all of the important (and many of the unimportant) composers of the period.

Chusid, Martin (1925-2013) – Professor Emeritus of Music at New York University and founding director of the American Institute for Verdi Studies. He received his Ph. D. from the University of California at Berkeley and contributed 50 years of studies on Verdi, including contributing to the new critical editions of the complete works of Verdi.

De Sanctis, Cesare (died 1881) – Italian businessman based in Naples and close friend of Verdi. Their correspondence of almost 250 letters has been published and sheds interesting light on the development of several of Verdi's operas. De Sanctis introduced Verdi to librettist Salvatore Cammarano and acted as an intermediary for Verdi at theaters and businesses in Naples.

Fillipi, Filippo (1830-1887) – Italian music critic who wrote for the Milanese magazine *La perserveranza*. He was a long-time proponent of Verdi's music and defended it against other critics who did not like the change from *Bel canto*.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1749-1832) – German polymath, generally regarded as the greatest and most influential writer in the German language. His work has had a profound and wide-ranging influence on Western literary, political, and philosophical thought from the late eighteenth century to the present day.

Grout, Donald J. (1902-1987) – American musicologist. Received his Ph. D. from Harvard and taught at Harvard, the University of Texas, and Cornell. Best known as the author of *A Short History of Opera* (1947) and *A History of Western Music* (1960), both of which are in publication in new editions at the time of this dissertation.

Hartmann, Georges (1843-1900) – French music publisher. He was a philanthropist of discernment and energy. Encouraged numerous young composers, including Massenet, Debussy, Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Franck, and Lalo. He also contributed to librettos for operas by Massenet, Charles Silver, André Messager, and Reynaldo Hahn.

Maffei, Countess Clara (1814-1886) – Italian woman of letters who supported the Risorgimento. She hosted regular salons in Milan where well-known writers, artists, scholars, and composers met to discuss art, literature, and politics. It is likely that Verdi met his second wife, Giuseppina Strepponi, at these salon meetings.

Romani, Felice (1788-1865) – Italian poet and scholar of literature and mythology who wrote many librettos for opera composers Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini. Romani was considered the finest Italian librettist between Pietro Metastasio and Arrigo Boito.

Strepponi, Giuseppina (1815-1897) – Italian soprano. Highly paid and sought after by opera houses and composers alike, her performance career ended when she was 31. She became Verdi's life companion by 1847, although they did not marry until 1859. Some musicologists suggest

that she was instrumental in helping guide Verdi's operas, especially during his "middle period," 1849-1859.

Williams, Hermine Weigel (1933-2018) – Received her Ph. D. from Columbia University and was Scholar-in Residence at Hamilton College. She published numerous books and contributed to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*.

Wolfram von Eschenbach (c. 1170-c. 1220) – a German knight, poet and composer, regarded as one of the greatest epic poets of medieval German literature. As a Minnesinger, he also wrote lyric poetry.