AMOR VINCIT OMNIA? PART I: THE DISCOURSE OF LOVE IN OPERA – A TENTATIVE TAXONOMY

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Abstract: *This article proposes a taxonomy of representations of love, itself framed by psychological approaches to love, mostly in nineteenth and twentieth-century operas. Between the zero degree of a lover dying from (*fatuous*)* love *in the absence of adversity (Jaufré in* L'Amour de Loin*) and the 'paroxysmal' degree of a lover dying naturally from grief at losing their beloved (Isolde in* Tristan und Isolde *and Elsa in* Lohengrin*) we can find* empty love *(Calaf in* Turandot*; Lohengrin at the beginning; Adina for Belcore, in* L'Elisir d'Amore*),* fatuous love *(Manrico and Leonora in* Il Trovatore*; newlywed Elsa and Lohengrin) and* passionate love *kindled at first sight (most star-crossed lovers, male and female). We witness suicide in response to love being either threatened (Leonora, in* Il Trovatore*) or seemingly annulled by death (Romeo and Juliet; Tosca); or jealousy-driven murder, as much for platonic love (Gustavo in* Un Ballo in Maschera*) as for love outside the wedlock (Nedda in* I Pagliacci*); some lovers defy death, but may 'change heart' and die for love (Pollione in* Norma*). Although the various faces of love (especially of romantic love) in opera do not necessarily demonstrate the truth of Virgil's claim* omnia vincit Amor*, there are a few cases which prove that neither social adversity, nor physical demise, can separate the lovers: Wagner's Tristan and Isolde, Gounod's Roméo and Juliette, and Bellini's Norma and Pollione envisage an afterlife of eternal reunion in love.*

Keywords: *love; opera; Shakespeare; Bellini; Berlioz; Donizetti; Gluck; Gounod; Leoncavallo; Offenbach; Puccini; Saariaho; Verdi; Wagner; Zandonai*.

Why, when they speak about love, many educated westerners regard it on the template of either *l'amour maudite* of the Romeo and Juliet type, whether in Shakespeare's tragedy or in Gounod's Shakespeare-inspired opera, or unreciprocated love of the Cio-cio-san type, in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*? This article proposes a taxonomy of the discursive representations of love in opera, framed by psychological theories of love. My non-musicological approach may broadly recall the topic of Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon – "the art of dying" as *contemplatio mortis* – when I study the intertwining of love and death (the famous Eros/Thanatos pairing). Like Catherine Clément's (12), my corpus includes (mostly nineteenth- and twentieth-century) libretti; however, I refer occasionally to Metropolitan Opera productions too.[1] Unlike Clément, I do not focus on "the undoing of women", even though I examine the type of love in its social circumstances,

[1] Much as I would like to delve in-depth into textual and staging aspects, for reasons of space or availability I will sometimes draw on, rather than quote, many of the libretti and especially opera productions.

which either support or suppress it. My working hypothesis is that artistic representations may be informed, to various degrees, by social 'reality', which, in turn, they may affect at least in the sense of challenging certain orthodoxies, whether moral, aesthetic or cognitive.

Theories of love

What is so amazing about love that it can drive so much art, if we were to think only of opera, alongside love poetry and drama? The American Psychological Association's *Dictionary of Psychology* (2015; first published in 2007) defines *romantic love* as

> a type of love in which intimacy and passion are prominent features. Although the loved party is often idealized, research indicates that the lover's sexual arousal is an especially important component of this type of love. (s.v. "romantic love", 925)

Psychological studies of love may look very different, though, particularly when devoted to the topic, as is the case of *The New Psychology of Love* (2006), co-edited by Robert J. Sternberg and Karin Weis. Notwithstanding, as late as the 1980s psychologists regarded 'love' as "a frivolous topic" unredeemable by "behavioral-scientific study", for, silently mindful of the cultural legacy of Europe, "psychologists had surrendered the study of love to poets, songwriters, philosophers, and the like" (Weis 3).

In the early twenty-first century, "many anthropological and psychological reports" have come to suggest, alongside "[w]orld poetry, myths and legends", that "romantic love is a human universal" (H. Fisher 89; see also Weis 4). For Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick, the "styles of romantic love" constitute "attitude/belief systems that include a variable emotional core, and possibly some linkage to personality traits" (150) and gender. Such love styles "moderate the experience of falling in love and loving" (Weis 7).

Biological theories of love, which study it in biological (including neural and evolutionary) terms (Weis 3-6), tend to regard romantic love as a complex psychological state which has evolved over time to serve genetic interests by promoting behaviours able to facilitate reproduction (Kenrick 15; Buss 66; Shaver, Mikulincer 37-48; Weis 5). Lovers may well "crave emotional union" with an intensity which "supersedes their longing for sexual contact" (H. Fisher 88). Nonetheless, the neural systems underlying romantic love, according to Helen Fisher (89), render it, in Weis's terms, "a mating drive similar to many other basic drives" (6).

Drawing on earlier psychological approaches, Robert J. Sternberg has proposed, in "A Duplex Theory of Love", a particularly useful theorisation – and taxonomising – of love. He examines the nature of love with respect to

both its structure (the triangular subtheory) and its development (the subtheory of love as a story) so as "to specify how various kinds (triangles) of love develop" (184). The triangular subtheory of love pictures a metaphorical triangle whose vertices are *intimacy*, *passion* and *decision*/*commitment* (184-186). Their specific combinations in relationships result in different types of love:

> Non-love refers to the absence of all three components of love. Liking results when one experiences only the intimacy component of love, in the absence of the passion and decision/commitment components. Infatuated love results from experiencing the passion component, in the absence of the other components of love. Empty love emanates from the decision that one loves another and is committed to that love, in the absence of both the intimacy and passion components of love. Romantic love derives from a combination of the intimacy and passion components. Companionate love derives from a combination of the intimacy and decision/commitment components of love. Fatuous love results from the combination of the passion and decision/commitment components, in the absence of the intimacy component. Consummate, or complete, love results from the full combination of all three components. (Sternberg 186)

Such psychological classification, I would argue, tacitly echoes bourgeois family morality, as I will demonstrate in Part II of this article. Nevertheless, the theory still has its explanatory force and can serve my own taxonomic purpose.

The subtheory of love as a story narrativises individual interaction experiences (Sternberg 190-194), for, indeed, all "[l]ove triangles emanate from stories" (190). People conceivably form over time their "own stories of what love is or should be" and "are more likely to succeed in close relationships with people whose stories more, rather than less, closely match" their own (190) – such is the explanatory and driving force of these stories. Riccardo Zandonai's opera *Francesca da Rimini* (1914) is living proof of how stories – here, Francesca's contemporary romances of courtly love – can shape both her imagination of, and conduct in relation to romantic love.

What follows examines operatic representations of romantic and not so romantic love, whilst excluding forms of love such as parental/filial or spiritual. For the present purposes, I take *romantic love* to be "any intense attraction that involves the idealization of the other, within an erotic context, with the expectation of enduring for some time into the future" (Jankowiak, Fischer 150). Not all romantic love is passionately erotic (so romantic proper), though. Nor is passion shown explicitly in opera, at least due to the genre's socio-cultural strictures, but rather it is discoursed on – indeed, sung with a flourish.

Theorisation of love *in* opera

If there is any theorisation of love *in* opera, it occurs in Giacomo Puccini and librettist Giuseppe Adami's *La Rondine* (1917),[2] which depicts the dynamic reshaping of forms of love into new sub-categories. *La Rondine* shows a young, beautiful courtesan, Magda (the "swallow" of the title), initially involved with the rich Rambaldo. On unexpectedly finding true love (Act II) with a handsome young man, the naïve Ruggero, and sampling a moment or two of idyllic love on the French Riviera (Act III), Magda nevertheless relinquishes her newfound happiness. She sacrifices the present and the future, and returns to Rambaldo in Paris, lest her past ruin Ruggero,[3] right when his mother has consented to his marriage to his (she believes) 'virtuous' beloved.

Puccini's plotline would seem merely a replica of Verdi's *La Traviata*'s, had it not been for Act I, set in Magda's Parisian parlour. Spurred on by songwriter Prunier, a group of socialites – single, sophisticated, opinionated – debate the latest "fashion rag[ing] in the great elegant world: sentimental love!" / "Imperversa una moda nel gran mondo elegante: l'amor sentimentale!" (*La Rondine* 6). Theirs could be regarded as a 'frivolous' pastime topic, indeed, a *follia* / "folly", in Prunier's terms for the *malattia* / "affliction" or rather *epidemia* / "epidemic" raging amongst women in Paris (7).[4]

Confronted to describe *his* taste in women, Prunier enumerates exemplars from romances and myths (*La Rondine* 17).[5] He thus bows to the tradition – in modernity associated with *Faust* (Goethe's and before him Marlowe's) – to provide a list of the world's female beauties whose memory is enshrined in texts. (Inter)Textually transmitted cultural legacy thus 'binds' Prunier – and at one remove Magda[6] – to idealised romantic love. From Prunier's early statement, at the soirée (Act I), that love is *un microbo sottile* / "a tiny germ" (*La Rondine* 7) and that *un diavolo romantico* / "a romantic devil" abides in everyone's soul (11), and from Magda's courtesan-to-lover transformation (Act II) to her renunciation to love (Act III) and to Ruggero's anti-romantic vision of them having a baby someday, under the *santa protezione* / "sacred protection" of his mother (Act III; *La Rondine* 53), *La*

[2] Libretto after Dr. A. M. Willner and Heinz Reichert; originally commissioned as an operetta.
[3] "Non voglio rovinarti!" / "I don't want to ruin you!" (*La Rondine* 62).
[4] Also *follia* ("madness") is, for Rambaldo, Magda's decision to relinquish her courtesan life (Act II; *La Rondine* 46).
[5] The last in the list is Salome, the biblical seductress who had John the Baptist beheaded and the protagonist of the namesake opera (1905) by Richard Strauss, whom Puccini "honors […] with a snatch of melody borrowed from that opera" ("The Met: Live in HD. Educator Guide: *La Rondine*" 18).
[6] Magda 'saves' Prunier from his writer's block by completing his lyrics for "Doretta's dream" with the image of a passionate kiss: "Folle amore! Folle ebbrezza!" / "Mad love! Mad intoxication!" (*La Rondine* 10).

Rondine unfolds as much as an opera as, I would argue, an operatic meta-romance.

What *La Rondine* also *debates* on, not only enacts, straightforwardly and consistently – views on (romantic) love – other operas feature as their *enacted* subject matter, but only rarely as a topic for discussion. Beyond such generalisation, though, cases vary at both reflective and agentive levels. To better understand this 'enactment' of love, a look at a certain aspect of operatic love 'enhancement' is mandatory.

Love's artificial 'accessories'

Both the operatic medium and the libretti's source texts foster a theatrical view of love, which, moreover, is often triggered or 'enhanced' artificially. Whether potions, objects or artistic creations, such accessories subvert the preconception that romantic love always occurs at first sight.

Love potions feature prominently in both *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) and *L'Elisir d'Amore* (1832). However, Wagner's libretto (Act I, scene 3) and music alike make it clear that the substitute potion just inflames pre-existing *love* from *infatuated* to *romantic* proper. Brangäne's love potion, which replaces the lethal one demanded by Isolde before disembarking, merely precipitates the expression of the passion of the two youths on the brink of death.[7] Conversely, the fake elixir renders Donizetti's opera a parody of the tradition of love potions. Its protagonist, Nemorino, suffers from the pangs of unrequited love for Adina, the owner of the farm where he works. On meeting Dulcamara, a quack doctor who allegedly sells a panaceum, Nemorino enquires about a love potion that works like in the *Tristan and Iseult* romance (which Adina reads) and receives it (actually, cheap Bordeaux). The 'elixir' only precipitates Adina's flirtation with sergeant Belcore, in reaction to inebriated Nemorino's feigned indifference to her. Despairing that Adina has agreed to marry Belcore,[8] Nemorino signs up for – or rather sells himself to – the army to be able to buy a second bottle of 'elixir' to win her love. The parody of the medieval *Tristan* romance in *L'Elisir* is all the more telling as in both Donizetti's and Wagner's operas the love potion inflames repressed love.

Just as artificially and parodically work the magic glasses purchased by the protagonist of Jacques Offenbach and librettist Jules Barbier's *Les*

[7] According to conductor Russell Steinberg ("Act I *Tristan und Isolde*"), musically, Act I, scene 5 offers a variant on the Love Theme from the Prelude – which builds on what he calls 'the Tristan progression' – punctuated by both lovers saying each other's name. Steinberg ("The Tristan Progression") explains that his coinage refers to "a progression of four chords" which constitute "the actual love potion of the opera": "They tantalize. They promise resolution with increasing intensity. And they continually deny that promise".

[8] This is Adina's quasi-*empty love* response in reaction to being hurt by the man whom she realises she loves.

Contes d'Hoffmann (1881), the dupe of two, not one, charlatans. In his first story (Act I), Hoffmann is 'seduced' by the graces of Olympia, who turns out to be a female-looking automaton, created by – not the daughter of – the eccentric Paris-based inventor Spalanzani. Hoffmann succumbs to *infatuated love* for Olympia – an angel! – since the magic glasses sold to him by a charlatan, Spalanzani's former partner Coppélius, blur his vision and confuse his mind.

However, the most interesting spur to love, I argue, is (inter)textual and owes to the medieval *fin'amor* conventions and legacy (see Bryson, Movsesian 147). Serenading – as Roméo (*Roméo et Juliette*), Manrico (*Il Trovatore*) and Count Almaviva / Lindoro (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) do – inflames the heart of the beloved to *infatuated love*. Reading romances, as Francesca (*Francesca da Rimini*) and Adina (*L'Elisir d'Amore*) do, or singing love ballads, as Marguerite (Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* and Gounod's *Faust*) does, as in Goethe,[9] also inflames women's heart – only, in a self-inflicted 'wound' of love. Like the princely troubadour of Saariaho's *L'Amour de Loin*, these characters participate in the romance tradition by priming either themselves or their future partners for passion.

Such 'shortcuts' to a love relationship may, at a metatextual and metacultural level, question the very idealisation of love as 'natural attraction'.[10] Not so, though, for either the operatic protagonists or most spectators.

A tentative taxonomy of love in opera

(Nearly) Dying for love

In texts inspired by medieval romance, with its idealised *fin'amor*, the lovers barely meet, as in Wagner's *Lohengrin*. If they do, their love is encumbered socially in manifold ways and sometimes even proscribed.

At the (life's) limit, there is Jaufré Rudel, Prince of Blaye, a twelfth-century French troubadour in Kaija Saariaho and librettist Amin Maalouf's *L'Amour de Loin* (2000), who longs for an idealised love. When he learns from a pilgrim that his "love from afar" (of the title) truly exists in the person of Clémence, Countess of Tripoli, and devotes his songs to her, he is ridiculed by his entourage (Act I). The pilgrim also informs Clémence about her troubadour lover of Aquitaine, only to discomfit her (Act II). Jaufré decides to voyage to Tripoli (Act III), yet he fears that he might not live up to her

[9] Love stories predispose Berlioz's Marguerite (and later Gounod's) to believe in eternal love: she sings a ballad about the King of Thule, faithful to his lost love (Act III, both operas); like Cio-cio-san, a seduced and abandoned Marguerite awaits Faust's return (Berlioz, Act IV).

[10] So do also Cupid's arrow, perhaps their cultural archetype, and Shakespeare's flower juices in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

expectations and regrets his impulsiveness (Act IV). The closer to Tripoli, the more Jaufré's anguish erodes his health to the point of death – in Clémence's arms – after exchanging vows of love, in a tragic show of self-defeating *fatuous love* (Act V). Only in a medieval-inspired text can a lover literally die – theatrically – from love when he faces no adversity.

A variation on this case is *Turandot* (1926), Puccini's final opera,[11] where Prince Calaf pledges his life for the hand of Princess Turandot in an ultimately gratuitous sacrifice,[12] happily averted. Set in the Imperial City of Peking in ancient China, the plot[13] is underpinned by "the classic mythological battle of the sexes" in which "the male […] relentlessly pursues his female quest" (Fisher, *Puccini's* Turandot 21). Originally, Calaf knows Turandot only by her reputed beauty; once arrived at the imperial court, he is appalled by her cruelty: the unfortunate suitors unable to answer her riddles meet their death. When Turandot haughtily warns Calaf, "Stranger! Don't tempt your luck! / There are three enigmas, but one death!", he confidently defies her death threat, "No, no! There are three enigmas, but one life!" (*Puccini's* Turandot 69). He completely disregards her preceding words, "no one will ever possess me!" – uttered twice here (69) and repeated after her double defeat (72, 82). Anyone presuming to marry Turandot – and render her submissive – courts death.[14] The plot subsequently unfolds as Calaf's bid to heal Turandot's inherited trauma (my twenty-first century therapeutic assessment) by fostering her emotional re-routing to passion (i.e., *infatuated love*) before reaching the promise of *consummate love*. Answering the three riddles is as much Calaf's test of (originally, *empty*) *love*[15] as Turandot's through emotional meltdown. Indeed, Calaf answers her third riddle ("the ice that generates fire, what is it?"): "It is my fire that melts you: it is Turandot!" (71). Calaf, the "archetype representing the nobility of love", has aspired to convert Turandot, the archetype of "the woman who fears love", from revengeful misandry to "a

[11] As Puccini died in 1924, *Turandot* was completed (Act III, scene 2) "from Puccini's own drafts by his pupil, Franco Alfano, under the supervision and direction of Arturo Toscanini" (Fisher, *Puccini's* Turandot 11).

[12] Calaf has "offered his life for you!", the crowd admonishes Turandot. The princess is horrified that his solving of her riddles will render her "a slave dying of shame" (*Puccini's* Turandot 72). Calaf eagerly challenges Turandot to answer his own riddle, promising: "Tell me my name before sunrise, and at sunrise I will die" (73); this dual challenge binds Calaf even more to Turandot, for it entails either his forfeit of life or hers of her glacial armour.

[13] Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni's libretto is based on Friedrich von Schiller's 1804 adaptation of Carlo Gozzi's dramatic fairy tale *Turandotte* (1772); *Turandotte* had inspired other composers before Puccini (Fisher, *Puccini's* Turandot 20-21).

[14] Unlike its predecessor texts, Puccini's opera provides a motivation for her misandry. In Act II Turandot recounts the story of her ancestress Lo-u-ling, raped and murdered during a Tatar invasion, and claims that Lo-u-Ling "is revived in me" (*Puccini's* Turandot 68): "The horror of her murder remains engraved within me!" (69).

[15] "He does it for love!", Liù exclaims on hearing the second riddle (*Puccini's* Turandot 71).

yearning for his love" (Fisher, *Puccini's* Turandot 22). Indeed, when a vanquished Turandot refuses to yield to the "sacred oath" and "sacred law" and marry Calaf ("Do you wish me in your arms by force, cold and unwilling?"), he challenges her: "I want your love to be ardent!" (*Puccini's* Turandot 72). After vanquishing her anew, Calaf wisely urges Turandot to return to human feeling: "Princess of death! Princess of ice! / Descend to earth from your tragic heaven! / […] Your soul is in the Heavens, but your body is near! / […] Ah, feel the essence of life!" (82). Notwithstanding her residual resistance,[16] if her third riddle pivots on Turandot as the answer, then, being an enigma to herself, she has been yearning for romantic love all along, despite her glacial second nature. "Your ice is a lie!", Calaf proclaims (82) before kissing her and melting her iciness (83-84). Turandot, now raw flesh exposed, admits:

> *I saw how much you wanted to die for me*!
> And I despised you. But I feared you!
> In your eyes I saw the light of a hero.
> In your eyes a superb assurance.
> And I hated you for that!
> And *I loved you* for that! […]
> Ah! *Defeated by the burning passion that you instil in me*. (*Puccini's* Turandot 84)

When, at dawn, Calaf confidently volunteers his name to a melting Turandot, which could cost him his life, she reveals her answer to his riddle before the Emperor: "His name...is Love!" (85). Both are saved in and by love, for, as the crowd cheers at the end, "The light of the world is love!" (85).

Conversely, in both ancient texts and Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), Orpheus does not offer himself in sacrifice to redeem Eurydice from the clutches of death. Rather, the legendary (near-*consummate*) *love* of Orpheus for his bride, which spurs him to visit the underworld, unwittingly sacrifices her. His longing loses Eurydice to Hades and leaves him disconsolate – and, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (11.1-60), vulnerable to the Maenads' sacrificial dismembering for having subsequently scorned women's love. However, Ranieri de' Calzabigi's libretto refuses to fully observe the plotline of Virgil's *Georgics* (4.453-527) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (10.1-85). In praise of (the God of) Love, the chorus heralds Eurydice's revival: "Amor returns Eurydice to you; / already she revives and recovers / all the flower of her beauty" (Act II, scene 2). Incredulous at her fortunate revival (Act III, scene 1), Eurydice nevertheless (mis)construes her husband's reserved behaviour – for, mindful of his contract with Jove (Act I,

[16] She attempts unsuccessfully both to reverse her defeat by appealing to the Emperor (*Puccini's* Turandot 71-72) and to learn the answer to Calaf's riddle about his name (74-81).

scene 2),[17] Orpheus never looks at her, nor speaks – as annoyance and distress possibly caused by her change in appearance, whilst his asides and then speech show his plight. Indeed, the entire Act III, scene 1 is one long exchange of heart-breaking laments. Panic-stricken that she has lost his love, Eurydice cries, in response to Orpheus's "To look at you would be disastrous": "Ah, faithless one! / And this is your welcome! / You deny me a glance / when I should expect / from a true lover / and tender husband / embraces and kisses". Hearing Orpheus promise her that he "will always come after [her] / like a haunting shadow", Eurydice wonders: "What life is this now / which I am about to lead? / And what fatal, / terrible secret / does Orpheus hide from me? / Why does he weep and grieve?". Eurydice's "I am consumed with grief; / will you not console me?" nearly persuades Orpheus to turn his gaze to her; he refrains until she faints, when he feels his "heart is torn" and impulsively turns to look at her. However, here her second death is not the end of it.[18] Disconsolate, Orpheus contemplates suicide – for love – (Act III, scene 1), only to be stopped by Amore (the God of Love), who revives Eurydice: "Orpheus, you have suffered enough for my glory; / I give you back your beloved Eurydice. / I seek no greater proof of your fidelity. / Here she is: she rises / to be reunited with you" (Act III, scene 2). Back on earth, in the temple dedicated to Love, the couple, alongside shepherds and shepherdesses, celebrate the triumph of love (Act III, scene 3).

There is a self-sacrificial undertone, too, in Lohengrin's chivalrous undertaking to save Elsa, in Richard Wagner's opera (1850). Nonetheless, I would ascribe it rather to the medieval romance convention, for Wagner based his libretto mostly on Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. Set in Antwerp in 930, the plot of *Lohengrin* presents a borderline love case, where the protagonists' relationship unfolds dynamically, if conventionally. Duchess Elsa, wrongly accused by Count Telramund, her guardian, of having murdered her brother, expects her innocence to be vindicated providentially, as she has dreamt. A mysterious knight arrives in a boat magically drawn by a swan,[19] offers to be her champion, vanquishes her detractor and thus saves her life. Before engaging in combat, though, her champion pledges to marry Elsa – which corresponds to the psychologists' *empty love* – on condition that she never enquire about his identity (Act I). Their only expression of love occurs in the bridal chamber (Act III), when the newlyweds exchange vows of love – in a *fatuous love* protocol. However, her surging suspicion about his identity

[17] Amore relays Jove's conditions thus: "Restrain your glances, / refrain from words".

[18] Gluck grudgingly consented to a happy ending to comply with the circumstances – "the festive celebration of the Austrian emperor's name day" (Bedel 39) – of his opera's premiere "before Empress Maria Theresa and much of the Viennese court" (38).

[19] Unbeknownst to anyone, the swan is Gottfried, Elsa's vanished brother: he is under the spell of Ortrud, the evil wife of Telramund.

– ignited by Ortrud and Telramund (Act II) – makes Elsa break her 'vow of silence'. The precipitation of events – her husband fights Telramund and his acolytes, who have burst in – leaves no room for the consummation of marriage (as also happens with Shakespeare's Othello and Desdemona); in fact, given the conditional marriage, their *love* can never become *consummate*. Elsa eventually learns the identity of her husband – Lohengrin, Parsifal's son and a knight of the temple of the Holy Grail –, yet at the cost of losing him forever and herself dying from grief. Love cannot be allowed to circumvent (supra-)human vows and pledges.

Star-crossed love

A strong operatic undercurrent features star-crossed love (which often ends up in death), even as the reasons for it may differ. Arranged marriages can only be shunned, by women loving someone else, either by a ruse (Gounod's Juliette) or by lapse into madness (Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor). Only rarely, such as in Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment* (1840), can the woman (Marie) marry the man of her choice (Tonio), despite all adversities, thanks to the opera comique conventions.

Some lovers are star-crossed because of their family background, as in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* (1867), an adaptation – not unprecedented in opera[20] – of Shakespeare's tragedy about the scions of feuding families.[21] Jules Barbier and Michel Carré's libretto follows Shakespeare fairly closely with respect to the lovers' progression from being love struck at the ball (Act I) to Juliette's committed love response to Roméo's declaration of love (Act II) to their night of *consummate love* in Juliette's bedchamber (Act IV).[22] The final scene, however, departs from Shakespeare, due to Gounod's familiarity, according to Hamilton (n.p.), with both Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* (1839)[23]

[20] E.g. Georg Benda's (1776), Nicola Vaccai and librettist Felice Romani's *Giulietta e Romeo* (1825), Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, set to Felice Romani's revised libretto, Berlioz's dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette* (1839) and Tchaikovsky's overture-fantasia (1880) (Hamilton n.p.).

[21] Shakespeare based his play on Ovid's story of Pyramus and Thisbe, in *The Metamorphoses* (4.55-166), which is itself represented – indeed, theatrically mis-represented – by the mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

[22] Gounod's opera offers four duets of the lovers: "Ange adorable" (Act I) echoes formally and discursively Shakespeare's sonnet embedded in the lovers' first encounter at the Capulets' ball; the balcony scene duet "Ah! Ne fuis pas encore!" (Act II) is a hopeful exchange of love vows; the scene in Juliet's bedchamber (Act IV) starts solemn ("Nuit d'hymenée") and evolves to passionate ("Non, ce n'est pas le jour!"); and the brief final reunion in the tomb scene (Act V), with no counterpart in Shakespeare but owing to Garrick's adaptation, offers a moving finale (Hamilton n.p.).

[23] For *Roméo et Juliette*, Berlioz's librettist Émile Deschamps used both Shakespeare's text and David Garrick's adaptation (in the French translation by Letourneur), especially the finale, which restores the ending of Shakespeare's *source* (Rushton 18-20).

and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1865).[24] When Gounod's Roméo comes to the Capulet crypt (Act V), he experiences, successively, seeing Juliette's 'death', drinking the poison he has brought and *hallucinating that its effects are suspended*. Whilst dying, Roméo shares his final moments – and *the dream of their blissful future together* – with the newly awakened Juliette, before she stabs herself with his dagger.

Other lovers suffer and die because their (*romantic*) *love* is adulterous: most famously, Wagner's Isolde (married to King Marke) and Tristan die for love. So too do Zandonai's Francesca da Rimini (married to Giovanni Malatesta) and Paolo Malatesta. In both works, of medieval inspiration,[25] the man woos the woman on behalf of a relative (elderly uncle and deformed brother, respectively) and the two youths fall in love instantly. In Zandonai's opera, Francesca is tricked by her brother (Ostasio) to marry Giovanni (Gianciotto) Malatesta, yet to believe that his brother Paolo, who acts on his behalf, is her suitor. Love-stricken (i.e., experiencing *infatuated love*), Paolo wishes to die in battle, during an attack on the Malatesta palace (Act II). When Paolo finally declares his love to a troubled Francesca, their kiss emulates the Tristan and Isolde romance, which she is reading (Act III). The lovers' death – when Francesca shields Paolo with her body – owes to a plot between Malatestino, the youngest Malatesta sibling, who suffers from unrequited love for Francesca, and Gianciotto, warned by Malatestino about Francesca's infidelity (Act IV).

In Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* (1859), Amelia (married to Count Anckarström) and Gustavo (i.e., King Gustav III of Sweden, 1771-92) barely admit their love for each other (Act II), when they are interrupted by her husband, the king's loyal secretary and friend, who warns Gustavo about an assassination plot. Yet, Amelia and Gustavo have been in love for a while, and, tormented by guilt, she has even asked a fortune-teller for advice how to cure her love (Act I). Unlike in either Wagner or Zandonai, in Verdi *love* is not *consummated*; in fact, the king wishes to send Amelia and her husband abroad. Given the shady circumstances when Gustavo asks Anckarström to escort the veiled lady – Amelia – back to the city, the count, on realising her identity, believes his wife has been unfaithful to him (Act II). Although ready to kill Amelia, Anckarström changes his mind and joins the conspirators: he

[24] Gounod echoed the first phrases of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in the opening of "Juliette's Slumber" interlude (Act V), whilst his librettists "probably followed David Garrick's version of [Shakespeare's] play's ending, which had also served Berlioz [in his *Roméo et Juliette*]: Romeo is still alive when Juliet awakens from Friar Laurence's potion" (Hamilton n.p.).

[25] Wagner's libretto draws largely on Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan und Iseult* (*c*. 1210); Tito Ricordi's libretto draws on Gabriele D'Annunzio's play (1901) and fills in the blanks of the story in Dante's *Inferno*.

will murder the king at the masked ball (Act III) – all for misplaced jealousy and a revengeful drive 'disguised' as political imbroglios.

In Ruggero Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* (1892), Nedda, the young wife of Canio (an actor and the leader of an itinerant *commedia dell'arte* troupe in Calabria), is in love with Silvio, a young villager. She plans to run away with Silvio, to the jealousy of Tonio the clown, whose unrequited love for Nedda makes him reveal to Canio her infidelity (Act I). Act II's play-within-the-opera both stereotypes the wife's unfaithfulness – for Nedda's character Columbine plots with Beppe's Harlequin, her sweetheart, to poison Columbine's husband Pagliaccio (played by Canio) – and offers Canio the opportunity to pursue his private affairs on the stage. Stepping out of character, the jealous Canio demands unsuccessfully that Nedda reveal the name of her lover; enraged, he stabs Nedda and then Silvio, who has rushed to her aid from amongst the spectators. The onstage *commedia dell'arte* infidelity ends up in actual death for offstage infidelity. In grand opera and Leoncavallo's verismo opera alike, adultery ends up in death for either one lover or both.

Political entanglements too may obstruct love, as is the case of Manrico and Leonora and of Cavaradossi and Tosca, who are persecuted respectively by Count di Luna and Baron Scarpia, both of whom obsess about the woman whilst holding political grudge against the man. In Verdi's *Il Trovatore* (1853), inspired by a contemporary text,[26] the plot, although set in Spain during the Peninsular War (1808-14), sounds at times truly medieval. Manrico and Leonora, constantly challenged by Count di Luna,[27] will never consummate their marriage (Act III): theirs is *infatuated love* which ends up as *fatuous love*, much like Shakespeare's Othello and Desdemona's or, less so, Wagner's Elsa and Lohengrin's on their respective nuptials. When Manrico is captured by the count and faces execution (Act IV), Leonora 'yields' to their persecutor (yet self-poisoning prevents any intimacy), hoping thereby to save Manrico's life. However, her sacrifice is in vain.

In Puccini's *Tosca* (1900), another 'revenge' opera with political entanglements, if in the verismo (rather than Romantic) style, Floria Tosca, a celebrated opera singer, loves painter Mario Cavaradossi, who has helped an escaped prisoner, Cesare Angelotti (Act I). Their *romantic love* (however much peppered by Tosca's jealousy) is soon challenged by Baron Scarpia, chief of the secret police, who obsesses about Tosca and will blackmail her for sexual favours in exchange for the life of Cavaradossi, charged with treason (Act II). Yet, Tosca has learnt Verdi's Leonora's lesson about whose life

[26] Salvatore Cammarano's libretto – completed after his death by Leone Emanuele Bardare – draws on Antonio Garcia Gutiérrez's *El trovator*, translated for Verdi by his second wife, Giuseppina Strepponi.

[27] Count di Luna is the commander of the Royalist Aragon troops, whilst Manrico is the leader of the partisan rebel forces.

should be sacrificed: she stabs Scarpia dead after she has secured a safe-conduct paper for Cavaradossi. Nonetheless, Tosca loses her lover to the sly cunning of the lusty baron and commits suicide to avoid arrest.

Social and other incompatibilities also ruin lovers and lives alike: Bellini's *Norma* (1831) is one such case.[28] As the Druids' high priestess and the daughter of Oroveso, the leader of the Sicambri warriors in Gaul in 50 BCE, Norma is torn between religion and politics in relation to the Romans, all the more so as she has broken her chastity vows for the love of Pollione, the Roman proconsul in Gaul (i.e., her people's enemy), to whom she has borne two children. Confronting Oroveso and the Druids, determined to fight their conquerors, Norma dissuades them from an unsuccessful fight, whilst feeling pulled apart between duty and revenge for forlorn love: "He [Pollione] shall fall! I shall punish him… / (But… my heart will not let me.) / (Ah, come back to me, charming, / as in the days of our first, devoted love / against the whole world" (Act I, scene 4, Bellini 89). Thus, Norma finds herself trapped in a love triangle: her anguished self, the unfaithful Pollione and his new love, soon revealed as Adalgisa, the young novice priestess at the temple of Irminsul.

Pollione, in whose heart "that old passion [for Norma] has died" (Act I, scene 2, Bellini 77), pictures her anger as "appalling, terrible" (81). Yet, with his love reciprocated by the pure Adalgisa, he feels that "A power greater than theirs [the Druids'] / protects and defends me; / it is the thought of the woman I adore, / it is the love that has inflamed me. / I shall burn the evil forests / of that god who is my rival / for that heavenly maiden, / and overturn his blasphemous altar" (85). Pollione has a young man's impulsiveness tinted by Romanticism's sense of the dramatic.

By contrast, Adalgisa feels torn between her vows, her love for Pollione and her loyalty to Norma, from whom she wouldn't steal him, despite his pleas that she follow him to Rome (Act I, scene 6).When Adalgisa eventually confesses her guilt (Act I, scene 8), Norma – though unaware of the identity of Adalgisa's lover – recognises her own seduction through promises ("This is how I was seduced", Bellini 107) and compassionately releases the novice from her vows. Once Adalgisa names her lover (Act I, scene 9), Norma warns her against his deception, whilst also venting her anger.

[28] Felice Romani's two-act libretto draws on Alexandre Soumet's five-act verse tragedy *Norma, ou L'infanticide* (which premiered in Paris in 1831), "with its echoes of Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs* and Euripides' *Medea*" (Rutherford 11). Bellini and Romani excised the play's Christian undertone and especially Norma's madness and infanticide (Rutherford 22).

In Act II, Norma dually revenges herself on Pollione for his consistent refusal[29] to return to her: she calls her people to "[w]ar, / slaughter, annihilation" of the Romans (139) by striking the shield of Irminsul (Act II, scenes 6-7) and unsuccessfully threatens him – when his very life is at stake (Act II, scene 9)[30] – with both infanticide and killing Adalgisa (Act II, scene 10). Norma does not intend to act on her threats, though. Rather, she denounces herself before the Druids as the guilty priestess who must die to placate the offended god (Act II, scene 11). Moved, Pollione repents and volunteers to share her fate on the pyre: "My love has been reborn with my remorse / […] Let us die together, / my last words will be, 'I love you'" (Bellini 155). The opera ends, however theatrically, with Pollione uttering his belief that on Norma's pyre "a purer, holier, / everlasting love will begin" (Bellini 165). In *Norma*, as in *Tristan und Isolde* later, *amor vincit omnia*.

Conclusion

Whichever theory or taxonomy we examine, it appears that our idealisation of romantic love is no more than a sugar-coated sociocultural construct (as in the androgyne or Cupid stories). This construct renders certain biological aspects desirable, mandatory or unavoidable, whilst downplaying the undesirable interactional aspects sanctioned, however, by patriarchal society. At the same time, opera as a form of high culture – aimed originally at the upper- and upper-middle classes – largely ignores the biological aspects and outcome of love. If, for psychologists, romantic love entails physical intimacy, for opera creators it often remains platonic or, at most, the hot topic of a declarative aria – in alignment with nineteenth-century bourgeois moral codes (see McClary xviii).

It would be beautifully optimistic to claim that, irrespective of the physical circumstances and outcome, operatic representations of love demonstrate the truth of Virgil's apophthegmatic *omnia vincit Amor* in the tenth of his *Eclogues*.[31] After all, most lovers do enjoy the privilege to declare their love; a few even consummate it. In a few cases, even physical demise, not just social adversity, fails to separate the lovers: the dying lovers – whether Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet or Norma and Pollione – envisage an afterlife of eternal reunion in love.

[29] "I am ruled by this love [for Adalgisa] / which is greater than you [Norma] or me" (Bellini 117).

[30] The rites demand a sacrificial victim, and Pollione would easily make one for having profaned the Druid sanctuary (Act II, scene 8).

[31] Deserted by his beloved, the poet Gallus voices his grief for unrequited love, yet his lament ends on a different note: "omnia vincit Amor: et nos cedamus Amori" / "Love conquers all; let us, too, yield to Love" (Virgil, Eclogue X, line 69).

Yet, quite appositely for the medium, love in opera is pre-eminently theatrical, a declarative event to be eavesdropped on and enjoyed acoustically, as well as to be watched, not voyeuristically – for the bourgeois sensibilities of the medium would prohibit it – but aesthetically in the lovers' suave trysts and furtive kisses. Between the zero degree of a lover dying from (*fatuous*) *love* in the absence of adversity, but troubled by low self-esteem (Jaufré in *L'Amour de Loin*) and the 'paroxysmal' degree of a lover dying from grief at losing their beloved (Isolde and Elsa in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and *Lohengrin*, respectively), there are many degrees and shades. Some men have a penchant for *empty love* (Calaf in Puccini's *Turandot*; Wagner's Lohengrin at the beginning); women too may occasionally display it (Adina for Belcore in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, if *in reaction* to Nemorino's hurtful behaviour); others for *passionate love* kindled at first sight (most star-crossed lovers, male and female). Some lovers commit suicide when their love is either jeopardised (Leonora in *Il Trovatore*) or seemingly annulled by death (Romeo and subsequently Juliet, or even Tosca, whose suicide shows both the lengths of her grief and her desire to circumvent arrest). Others die murdered by jealous husbands, whether the former proclaim their innocent (i.e., platonic) love (Gustavo in *Un Ballo in Maschera*) or have dared love outside the wedlock (Nedda in *I Pagliacci*). Others yet defy death, when they are demanded to recant their love, even as they may suddenly and theatrically 'change heart' and die for love (Pollione in *Norma*).

Dying from, and for love, in opera, is a sublime and sublimating act: it provides for the spectators' catharsis and glosses over all biological and social asperities associated with 'the flesh' (the latter traditionally reviled in Christianity). Such death – alongside the circumstances which have led to it – deserves closer scrutiny, especially intersectionally in relation to gender, class and ethnicity, wherever applicable, which I will undertake in Part 2 of this article. The present corpus will be expanded to include other operas as well, which will indirectly also expand the tentative taxonomy proposed here.

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