

# Opera's 'Wicked Women':

The Presence of Female  
Type in the Bible and its  
Translation to the Stage

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## Abstract

Throughout the Christian Bible and accompanying religious scriptures, female characters display common, defining traits, that mean they fall into certain 'categories' or types of woman. The relatively small quantity of female character profiles found in Christian scripture are continued in art-forms throughout history – in this thesis, opera will be the chosen medium. The fates of operatic heroines and biblical female characters are often extremely similar; therefore, it is interesting to see what happens dramatically when the two worlds collide. Both the Bible and opera as an art-form seem to fixate upon the ideas of the female victim, the dangerous femme fatale, and, to a lesser extent, the heroic woman. These tropes, which take different and numerous forms and guises within the Bible, are explored musically on stage.

Through elements of the operas I have chosen, such as musical interaction, character profiling, and specific staging, I will address the issues facing women who inhabit the pages of the Bible and its various Apocrypha. The works that have been selected for study contain one significant, and often problematical, female character. In this thesis, I will focus on four case studies composed within sixty years of each other, around the late 19<sup>th</sup> century/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These works are *Hagith*, by Karol Szymanowski, *Samson et Dalila* by Saint-Saëns, *Judith* by Serov, and *Salome*, the product of Strauss's music and Wilde's text. With these operas, I will endeavour to show how the problems faced by biblical female characters are translated to stage versions of their original tales, and how inevitable these women's fates seem when the combination of opera and biblical story is so potent.

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## Preface

The scores used throughout this thesis, as bar references in the text and as musical examples at the end of the text, are as recent and reliable as could be found. However, the score which has been used to study *Judith* is, unfortunately, a vocal score with piano accompaniment, with instrumental cues written into the piano part. This is because this opera is extremely rarely performed, and the production of comprehensive orchestral scores is therefore limited. Both IMSLP and the British Library only had the vocal score for this opera, and I have consequently supplemented my study of the work with other writers' knowledge of the score and with careful listening to the instrumentation.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been completed without the help of Dr Áine Sheil, whose supervision, guidance, and knowledge of Opera Studies, have been invaluable.

I would also like to acknowledge my parents for funding my postgraduate studies, and being a constant source of encouragement.

## Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is all my own work, in its original and unpublished form, except where referenced. This has not been submitted for any other award at this, or any other institution.

# Opera's 'Wicked Women': The presence of female type in the Bible and its translation to the stage.

## Chapter One

### Introduction and Literature Review

Work of fact or fiction or somewhere in between, the Bible is an unlucky place for a woman to find herself. Of course, it is difficult for a modern person of either gender to understand the life lived by men and women at the time when the verses and gospels were written. Both testaments, Old and New, contain literature in abundance concerning the hardships of early civilised life, with stories that generations have heard and learned. Justifiably, the ancient nature of the documents comprising this holy book means that the actions and values of the text's characters are archaic. Therefore, the women of the Bible occupy a typically problematic place in the world, which would set the tone of female existence for years to come. However, certain tropes or types come to mind when considering the actions of biblical female characters as a whole, and it is these categorisations that we can see echoed in the equally turbulent and fascinating world that is nineteenth-century opera.

This thesis will investigate the inequality and essentialism with which women have been faced in the Bible, in opera, and in their convergence. Furthermore, it will explore how women have been categorized in a small, but significant, collection of biblical operas, by analyzing the portrayal and plight of their respective female protagonists. This collection of operas comprises Serov's *Judith* (1863), Saint-Saëns's *Samson and Dalila* (1877), Strauss's *Salome* (1905), and Szymanowski's *Hagith* (1922). The questions posed by the following chapters underline the existence of female categorization in biblical texts, and explore to what extent this categorization is continued by and featured in the operatic art-form. It is important to bring together these two areas (the Judeo-Christian religion and opera) because they encompass significant bodies of works that have often been influential in the lives of ordinary people, throughout their respective histories. These works can also be consulted as a reflection of centuries of societal attitudes towards women. Therefore, each union of the two has afforded an opportunity to explore the subject of feminism through examining the biblical tale on which the opera is based, and looking at how the female protagonist of that tale has been depicted in an artistic medium.

The three tropes explored in this thesis reveal a framework within the Bible of different female guises, each with its own history and characteristics. Through these three types, one can begin to see the depth of the categorization and character control of female characters in their respective operas. By using a combination of music, text and character analysis, as well as cultural contextualization, one can create a detailed portrait of three contrasting tropes. The fields of feminist musicology, opera studies, and feminist theology have provided a basis for research, and will be examined in more detail later in this chapter. Factors such as the status of the nineteenth-century diva, and the Judeo-Christian practice of blaming women for original sin are important themes that have shaped the research presented in this thesis.

The operas chosen for study in this thesis, each with a different female character at its heart, span a fairly short period of time. The musicologist Susan McClary, whose influence on this thesis, and the field of musicology, is undeniable, has written of her belief in choosing a wide variety of art on which to theorise. Her explanation that discussing many different ‘musics’ means that one does not constrain one’s work to a particular time but improves one’s understanding of the art-form as a whole, shows an admirable unwillingness to restrict her research field.<sup>1</sup> However, this thesis focuses on a compact time-scale for a few reasons, the obvious one concerning its relatively short length. Also, one could argue that focussing on a relatively short period of time, such as the sixty year span covered in the forthcoming chapters, can prove as rewarding and enlightening an experience.

The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century repertoire featured in this thesis is certainly provocative and significant enough to merit the research that has already happened in its name, plus the ideas put forth here. Susan McClary’s view that one must cover as much music as possible, in order to gain ultimate understanding, is perhaps a valid one, but it inevitably requires a huge breadth of knowledge to address successfully. Furthermore, the main purpose of McClary’s work, it seems, was an attempt to apply the same techniques used in other disciplines, like sociology and literary criticism, to music, so that musicology could advance as a field of study. In this, she succeeded, as her work generated both academic acclaim and controversy – thereby proving, if not its worth, its material significance in the world of musical scholarship. This thesis aims to further the

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<sup>1</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xii.



research into a particular field of opera, specifically in relation to the gender portrayal of its characters, in the vein of such passionate and curious writers as Susan McClary.

The title of this thesis, 'Wicked Women', a trope in itself, references the work of modern biblical academic, Alice Bach.<sup>2</sup> Its context is a book on women's troubled existence in the pages of the Bible, with an introductory allusion to the 'wickedness' that is perceived of a great number of its female characters. The provocative nature of the adjective used encapsulates the purpose of the following chapters: that is, to uncover the biblical history of gender inequality, and follow its journey from religious documents to more modern works of auditory art. Moreover, if it is evident that gender inequality exists, both in biblical subject matter, and in other, more recent guises, then it must follow that one gender is dominating the other. The tropes which will be presented in due course are a result of this imbalance. This thesis aims to lay out how men, traditionally seen as the dominant sex, have succeeded in controlling the female sex: by creating and maintaining categories or classes of women, of which the 'wicked' woman is just one.

One can bring to mind a great number of examples when considering the subject of women as victims in the Bible, as the victim is another female type which has been perpetuated for centuries. Many of these women's names are instantly recognisable to those who have knowledge of the Christian religion, but who also may not have even considered that they are technically victims in their respective verses. Take Eve, for example, the first woman. The fact that the Bible insinuates that Eve was created to be a companion for Adam, a subordinate to the first man, since all the animals God had tried before her had not proved stimulating enough company, is a slight on women's existence in itself. Impulsive, contrary, and immune to thoughts of consequences Eve may be, but the blame placed on her as the sole reason why mankind was ejected from paradise seems, at face value, unfair. Her punishment was far worse than that bestowed on Adam, who, far from being the more blameless of the two, was just as easily tempted as was his female companion. There were two people who succumbed to the snake's charms and ate the fruit from the forbidden tree – yet who succumbed first took on disproportionate importance, and pushed women into a position of blame, guilt, and subservience. And this is only the story of creation. The Bible

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<sup>2</sup> Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), n.p. [introductory page].

does not end with Genesis, and there are many more verses, books, and various Apocrypha featuring the plight of desperate women.<sup>3</sup>

Even some of the more fortunate female characters of the Bible (for example, those awarded sainthoods) were perpetuating stereotypes of women which may have only *appeared* positive. In many cases, good biblical women reinforced values that were impossible to uphold, or encouraged even more passivity and submissiveness. For example, one could consider Old Testament characters like the widow Ruth (as in, *The Book of Ruth*), whose biblical presence was significant enough to merit a sainthood. However, her most notable deeds consist of, in chronological order: following a friend to Bethlehem; working in the fields; and then remarrying someone in order to conceive the bloodline that led to David and, eventually, Joseph. One could not feasibly call this a tale of heroism or bravery, yet Ruth remains a significant and much-celebrated biblical woman.

One could also recall the sisters Martha and Mary, who appear in the New Testament. Although Mary takes the time to listen to Jesus' tales, and Martha appears to find chores more important, one could also understand that Martha, the helpful, proactive sister, is told to be more like her passive sister, Mary, by a man. If read in this way, the story cements the view that women should be seen and not heard. Unfortunately, values like modesty, self-abnegation, loyalty, and submission to fathers, brothers and husbands, were upheld by nineteenth-century Western Society, as Teresa Mangum has pointed out.<sup>4</sup> Her argument here is supported by the lack of power women possessed in all areas of home and public life, which, with modern hindsight, appears stiflingly unjust. Women in this time could not escape the pressures of society, as 'patriarchy and class' were the 'contexts within which nineteenth- and twentieth century women defined their experience'.<sup>5</sup> This view, espoused by Joan Wallach Scott, emphasises the public and private confines that Western women were expected to live within. The problem was that the values of this era were completely detrimental to the development of women, leaving them continually at the mercy of the patriarchy. This is obvious now, with the hindsight we have in the Western world, and one can therefore look back and see the connections between ancient, biblical

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<sup>3</sup> Apocrypha here meaning material that is "extra" to the Old Testament, as used by the Norton Critical Edition of the King James Bible. See Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, *A Norton Critical Edition: The English Bible, King James Version: Vol 2, The New Testament and The Apocrypha* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2012), 608.

<sup>4</sup> Teresa Mangum, *A Cultural History of Women in the Age of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 5

<sup>5</sup> The author here is describing the experience of women in Western/European culture. Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 19.

female struggle and more recent female issues, and what influences the former has had on the latter.

In addition to the Bible having its pitfalls for female characters, living lives of servitude and piety, or condemned by mankind for their wrongdoings, there is also a similar tradition in opera, tragic opera in particular. There is a great connection to a significant part of the operatic canon to be explored, for, as many musicians and music-lovers will know, tragic opera is a dangerous art-form for a female character, particularly in the nineteenth century. Writers such as Catherine Clément have lamented in the past that no matter how strong-willed, vibrant, or tuneful a tragic operatic female heroine may be, she is still at the mercy of a tragic operatic storyline. Tragedy in opera can be seen as far back as mythical-themed opera, such as Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, written in the early seventeenth century, where Euridice is condemned to the underworld by the impatience of her lover, Orpheus. Regarding nineteenth-century opera, where the trope of the dying woman truly begins to take effect, Alfredo cannot cure Violetta of her illness; Mimi cannot be revived by the efforts of Rodolfo; Pinkerton cannot reach Butterfly in time to halt her terrible suicide, and so forth. The words 'too late' echo relentlessly in the graveyard of tragic musical female protagonists, applying themselves perfectly to situation after situation.

The majority of the male forces that operate in these tragic situations are offshoots of a tradition that favours the masculine over the feminine. Even tragic opera's most outspoken, daring, confident heroines eventually meet their inevitable ends: for example, Carmen dies because of Don José's loss of control and innate, fatal jealousy. Similarly, Tosca's only option is to throw herself off the parapet to evade the fate that has befallen her. Moreover, even though these women do not outwardly act like victims, wearing their pride, talent and vitality for all to see, they eventually earn this label and fall into this category through their fated inability to survive the opera's plot. Whether the woman inhabiting a tragic opera is sweet and passive, like Mimi, or haughty and mysterious, like Carmen, one way or another, she will probably not survive the opera, and therefore be classed as a victim. Of course, the women of comic opera, like Mozart's important female characters, can expect a rather more fortunate fate – not all opera is tragic, of course. However, the trope of the female victim which took hold in the nineteenth century is a solid and significant phenomenon that is undeniably linked to the stage, and provides one of the main topics for this thesis.

There are also tropes native to the operatic scene pertaining to certain biblical female characters. Opera is famous for cultivating both the off-stage and on-stage role of the

*prima donna*. This strong vision of a woman is quite relevant when looking at the impact of such religious-themed operas as *Salome*, as certain challenging roles require equally tough actresses to inhabit them. The *prima donna*, as will be studied with regard to nineteenth-century examples in the ‘*Femme Fatale*’ chapter of this thesis, is entirely compatible in her existence with the biblical motif of the *femme fatale*. It is interesting to see how the three tropes that make up the three chapters of this thesis, namely, the victim, the *femme fatale*, and the heroine, also have their different subsections and related patterns, which show up in opera again and again. However, in these biblical operas, motifs like the *femme fatale* are enhanced by such nineteenth-century societal stereotypes as the *prima donna*, as the female-ness of the central woman is highlighted by more than one recognisable, dramatic trait. It also demonstrates that both opera and the Bible contain stereotypes that women can adhere to, although this thesis looks at three of the most significant crossovers. It is important to look at the similarities and differences between women in real life (in this case, women living in the nineteenth century), and women on stage, because, as Susan McClary writes, ‘music does not just passively reflect society’ – it is a ‘public forum’ which influences, observes, and reflects.<sup>6</sup> Gender is just one of the things that society has constructed and moulded, and it can be shown in opera through musical style and signposts.

There have been many feminist readings of various operas and other art-forms over the last fifty years. Musicologists such as Carolyn Abbate, Susan Rutherford, and Mary Ann Smart, have found meaning in opera pertaining to the gender divide, although they differ in their specific opinions on the social impact of the art-form. Their ideas form seminal research on the subject of gender in opera, which has influenced this thesis. One of the most important ideas comes from Abbate, whose outspoken and complex style provides a thought-provoking basis for much modern feminist thought on music. This idea is that whereas ‘seeing a female figure may well more or less invoke our culture’s opposition of male (active subject) and female (passive object)...’, ‘...listening to a female voice is a more complicated phenomenon’.<sup>7</sup> She develops this theory, by arguing that, whilst a female character may be an object to be looked at on stage, ‘aurally, she is resonant’, and therefore the audience becomes a collective passive object.<sup>8</sup> Notions such as passive and active, object and subject, will form part of this thesis’s argument, and they are important

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<sup>6</sup> Susan McClary, *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (Hampshire: Ashgate Pub., 2007), 118.

<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Abbate, “Opera: or the Envoicing of Women”, in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (London: University of California Press, 1993), 254.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

concepts to grasp when discussing gender. The idea that women gain some kind of authority from their role in opera is also echoed in more modern writings. For example, Wendy Heller's 2003 essay on early modern opera states that opera gives women 'the power of the voice', which is an impressive phenomenon unique to the art-form.<sup>9</sup>

Abbate's view on the female voice cements the importance of opera as a medium of descriptive communication. Because the woman on stage is allowed to project her voice and, therefore, her thoughts, feelings, and inner sense of self, out to the audience, she could be seen to transcend the traditional view of passive female. The operatic voice is a great tool of communication, because of the power it wields – many great singers have trained for years, and thus possess enough volume, tone, and stage presence, to convey their characters with seasoned aplomb. Filling an opera theatre with one's vocal and dramatic presence is no small feat, yet countless singers have succeeded in doing so time and time again. It is their performances that have brought these roles, originating in ancient scripture, then written in musical notation, to life. This is why some of the singers who have played the characters featured in this thesis will be discussed – without them, there would be no tropes to witness on stage.

Musicology, in general, has come a long way since the first wave of feminist musicologists began to discuss previously unmapped elements in the late 1970s and 1980s. As the field of musicology widened and took on a more interdisciplinary nature, more and more gender-based issues were explored by academics.<sup>10</sup> It is now understood, by such contemporary musicologists as Heather Hadlock, that 'opera scholarship informed by feminist and gender studies did not fully take flight until the 1980s'.<sup>11</sup> From this modernising era sprung a wealth of musicological work that forms the basis of the discipline as it stands. This thesis takes the work of Carolyn Abbate, Susan McClary, and Catherine Clément as its most significant inspiration. Although their writings may not be viewed as contemporary, they are nevertheless important, as the discourse on gender in opera is far from finished. Hadlock confirms this sustained prevalence, and notes that 'the study of gender and

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<sup>9</sup> Wendy Heller, 'Metamorphoses in Early Modern Opera', in *Culture and Change: Attending to Early Modern Women*, Margaret Lael, and Adele F. Seeff, eds. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 66.

<sup>10</sup> Such pioneering works that emerged as a result of the widening of the discipline include books like Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (1993), Ruth Solie, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (1993), Susan C. Cook and Judy S Tsou (eds), *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (1994) and Sophie Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain and the United States, 1629-present* (1994).

<sup>11</sup> Heather Hadlock, 'Opera and Gender Studies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 258.

sexuality in opera continues to mean the study of female roles, images and performers', which this thesis will also take into account.<sup>12</sup>

More recently, the discourse on music has branched out to include topics such as queerness and race, which offer more insight into the phenomenon and purpose of 'otherness' in relation to music. For example, the collection of essays, *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology (1994)*, contains much insight into various modes of 'otherness', and general musical exploration.<sup>13</sup> This new wave of topics includes writings on essentialism, gay and lesbian readings of significant works, speculation on the sexualities of composers themselves, and the study of modern musics, such as country music, showing how diverse the discipline has become. Moreover, in terms of gender-related musicology, the subject of masculinity has come more sharply into focus, balancing the discourse on gender. Although the aim of this thesis is to highlight the rules and restrictions placed on the lives of tragic female characters, it is interesting to consider their existence in relation to the men with whom they share the stage, and indeed the men who created and adapted their stories. Alexandra Wilson has written of the prejudice which befell the composer Puccini, as his own masculinity was called into question by malicious contemporaries. The man and his music were dismissed as 'feminine', a slanderous judgement, as 'women were widely believed at the turn of the twentieth century to be incapable of any form of significant artistic endeavour'.<sup>14</sup> This shows that men living in this period of time could be subject to the same level of scrutiny and prejudice that women consistently endured in society.

Recently, musicologists have looked at the relationship between operatic works and the female characters they contain, with reference made to the *performers* bringing life to the parts. This thesis builds upon issues such as the cult of the *prima donna* and the role of the dominant woman in opera still retaining relevance today. Jean Starobinski highlights the popularity of the 'seductress' character in opera, assigning Salome the title of 'perverse seductress', echoing the second chapter of this thesis.<sup>15</sup> The author also makes connections between *Salome* and Dukas's *Ariane et Barbe-bleue*, arguing that whilst both operas contain a woman in the most dominant role, their 'feminine power... imposes its will before

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>13</sup> Brett, Philip, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, eds. *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 134.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Enchantment: The Seductress in Opera* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2008), 163.

eventually failing', demonstrating the frequent futility of dominance within a tragic opera's female character.<sup>16</sup> In the same vein, the role of the 'siren' has been explored, in publications like *Music of the Sirens* – this figure is also important to the tropes covered in the following chapters, as it is akin to the *femme fatale* onstage. *Music of the Sirens* raises such pertinent points as the link between 'hearing and vocality' and both 'women's inferiority' and their 'invitation to comfort or seduction', which undoubtedly resonates with the work of earlier feminist musicologists.<sup>17</sup> In the same book, Lawrence Kramer also notes that the siren character, plus other 'forms of dangerous femininity', takes hold of nineteenth-century art, after a period of relative non-existence.<sup>18</sup>

Contemporary Opera Studies aids the understanding of opera as a complex, multi-faceted art-form, drawing on a wealth of interdisciplinary theory, and taking into account topics such as performers, staging conventions, the critical reception of a work, and, most relevant to this thesis, gender. Of course, when situating the content of this thesis amongst the research of such pioneering operatic scholars as Carolyn Abbate and Catherine Clément, and subsequent gender-related opera literature, one has to understand the importance of some fundamentally different viewpoints. Abbate and Clément, whose work forms an important part of late twentieth-century discourse on opera, have opposing perspectives when it comes to theorising the art-form. This is manifest in their extremely different writing styles, which highlight how musicologists can either present an argument in mostly dispassionate terms, or might find opera too personal to describe without becoming emotionally involved.

Clément, who evidently writes directly from the heart, allows her arguments to flow passionately, influenced by her very personal stance. The fact that she is also an acclaimed French novelist and philosopher may influence her emotive non-fiction essays, and particularly her book, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. Her opinion of opera, which encapsulates the idea that women are the constant victims of operatic plots, weighed down by their ultimately unfortunate fates, makes for thought-provoking reading. It is an opinion which still resonates in some of today's literature on opera. For example, the academic Lawrence Kramer has written of the 'notorious fact that women in opera are more often killed than killers', illustrating how often female characters are victims, rather than figures

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Phyllis Austern and Inna Naroditskaya, eds. *Music of the Sirens* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Kramer, 'Long in Dying Call: Of Music, Modernity and the Sirens', in *Music of the Sirens*, eds. Linda Phyllis Austern and Inna Naroditskaya (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 195.

of strength, within their respective plots.<sup>19</sup> There is a distinctly descriptive bent in Clément's writing, which contains a lot of subjective points, such as the view that, although opera is not 'forbidden' to women, they are only imperative to its cause because of their impending death scenes.<sup>20</sup> They must honour the 'order' which is 'reflected from audience to stage' – one which, presumably, rules that women cannot survive at the top of the pile.<sup>21</sup> This kind of demonstrative, fervent stance, where the author communicates her feelings on the matter at hand, is also common among the feminists and theologians discussed later in this literature review. It shows how both opera and religion can produce many variations of critical writing, many of which contain impassioned interpretations rather than dispassionate assessment, as the topics are so undeniably provocative. This idea will be explored further when feminist theology is discussed.

Susan McClary is able to find academic merit in the work of Catherine Clément, as well as that of Carolyn Abbate. Her foreword to *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* clearly illustrates her stance on Clément's effusive, arguably entertaining, writing, showing how it is just as important as the more clinical side of feminist musicology. Firstly, she is quick to point out that Clément's knowledge lies not in the field of musical scholarship, but rather in literary criticism.<sup>22</sup> This factor permeates the French author's work, in that it affects the style of writing, and often steers the content towards more plot-based subjects. The fact that Clément's work, at the time of the forward's creation in 1999, was not widely read by American musicologists, as the majority were more interested in 'serious feminist criticism' of music, shows the perceived lightweight quality of the book, with specific regard to in-depth musical analysis.<sup>23</sup> However, this thesis endeavours to produce an argument which draws on the descriptive vibrancy of Clément's work, as praised by McClary, because academic writing can suffer from dryness and unimaginative style.

However, one can also criticise Clément's work for its overly opinionated stance, as it often takes an autobiographical route, and chastises opera in a somewhat undifferentiated way for digging the graves of so many female characters, when, in fact, some forms of opera do not routinely kill off female characters. Susan Rutherford, who has written extensively on

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<sup>19</sup> Lawrence Kramer, 'Murderous Women in German Opera', in *Women and Death: Representations of Female Victims and Perpetrators in German Culture 1500-2000*, Helen Fronius and Anna Linton, eds. (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), 144.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Susan McClary, 'Introduction' in Catherine Clément, *Opera or the Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), x.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, x.



women and opera, takes issue with the French writer's stance. Rutherford criticises 'Clément's view of operas' as simply 'containing a series of wrongs against women', as she argues that 'lots of composers were fairly pro-women in real life'.<sup>24</sup> This shows that Clément's personal position is not necessarily shared by other academics. Rutherford cannot uphold the accusation of artistic misogyny that Clément places on the creators of operas, as the composers themselves were, she argues, for the most part, an un-misogynistic group. This is also possibly why McClary acknowledges that much of Clément's book actually 'owes little to standard academic procedure', as with much academia one is encouraged to take a more reasoned, distant approach.<sup>25</sup> Mary Ann Smart, when comparing the differing views of Clément and Susan McClary on the opera *Carmen*, sums up the former's argument as 'Carmen dies' and the latter's as 'Carmen sings', demonstrating Clément's relative pessimism, and McClary's more forward-thinking, 'liberating and instructive' interpretational style.<sup>26</sup>

Clément's approach appears far from systematic, logical thinking, whilst still retaining provocative ideas that can make a reader think. Thus, Clément's work lacks the more standard academic tone of an author like Abbate, as her slightly rambling prose often finds itself lost in the history of her own life and childhood. Yet her use of musical semiotics to further her argument shows that a good grasp of music is present in her work. Semiotics, whilst something that this thesis will not explore in detail, is a way of viewing some of music's subjectivity as a more objective set of symbols. Therefore, one can see that Clément had endeavoured to crystallise some of her views using the idea of signposts within musical language. Some of the ideas she backs up with undeniable musical analysis, such as her exploration into the links between femininity and chromaticism, are extremely influential to this thesis. They also show that Clément's work may be more rooted in musical academia than previously thought.

One can see why the more measured Abbate, whose essays and books contain much more technical language and complex philosophising on music, might disagree with Clément's beliefs. Abbate is less feminist than musicologist, and has written a wide variety of essays, dating from the 1980s. Her work is thus newer than Clément's – for example, *Unsung*

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Susan McClary, 'introduction' in Catherine Clément, *Opera or the Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), x.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Ann Smart, ed., *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6.

*Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* was published more than ten years after the original release of Clément's previously mentioned book. Although both works contain interpretations of female characters and how they are treated in their respective musical narratives, Abbate's work benefits from a further ten years of intellectual discourse, plus an extensive career in musical scholarship. Thus, it provides a critical, measured look into why operas have been composed in certain ways, with reference to other areas of art, such as film and performance studies. Declaring opera to be a tool to communicate feelings on gender or sexuality, or interpreting music as a 'social fact finder', are, therefore, not positions associated with this writer.<sup>27</sup> Abbate's work does not contain as much personal reflection as Clément's, but her viewpoint still makes for controversial, if challenging, reading. Her main criticism of Catherine Clément's book on operatic heroines concerns the French philosopher's pessimism, in only writing of the doom that befalls these women. Conversely, Abbate aims to celebrate the life of female characters, through praising the strength and beauty of their voices. She almost chastises Clément for neglecting the 'triumph' of these women, which amounts to 'the sound of their singing voices'.<sup>28</sup>

As Abbate's aptly titled work, *Unsung Voices*, would suggest, she has much to say about the connections between music and narrative, and her essays, although often concerned with instrumental music or instrumental passages in opera, contain reflections upon the voice as an important medium of communication. This is understandable, given her simultaneous descriptions of music's utter ambiguity; to her, the voice is opera's most narrative feature, as instrumental music can often be too vague a thing to provide constant narrative itself.<sup>29</sup> The idea of the voice being a woman's most powerful weapon on stage is one that this thesis supports, as operatic heroines not only fight to be heard, but succeed in doing so. Their lives may often be cut short, but this does not mean they were fruitless or forgettable – quite the opposite, in fact. Rather than placing a major focus on tragic plotlines and the female characters within them, Abbate's preferred method consists of dealing 'not with the feminine, but with music itself'.<sup>30</sup> It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what 'music itself' means to Abbate, but the idea is definitely connected with an endeavour to study it with an element of neutrality. This view, that music is both significant enough to be studied whilst ambiguous enough to possess countless interpretations, demonstrates just how difficult

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<sup>27</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2001), 51.

<sup>28</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991), ix.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

musical scholarship can be. Therefore, Abbate's reluctance to concentrate purely on gender shows her commitment to tackling the musical art-form as a whole. In this thesis, music is regarded as being as important as other components of opera, such as characterisation, plot, and performance, because none of these things can be neglected when studying a work and its effect.

There is an interesting throwaway phrase used by Carolyn Abbate in her later book, *In Search Of Opera* (2001), which pertains closely to this thesis. In her essay, 'Orpheus: One Last Performance', she mentions the reason for this titular character's tragic fate – namely, 'crazy women'.<sup>31</sup> These two words are loaded, in that they suggest what a lot of feminist thought challenges: the idea that women are, in some way, hysterical, or mentally deficient, because of their sex. Abbate uses the label in a somewhat humorous fashion, yet it is true that many depictions of female characters show the female personality in a light not dissimilar to that of her so-called 'crazy women'. It could be another female trope, a type or label akin to the three that make up the body of this thesis. The casual observation of 'crazy women', made in reference to an opera which contains a completely passive female character in Euridice, highlights one of two opposing extremes which are featured in this thesis – women who voice their opinions, and are therefore perceived by other characters as dangerous (the other extreme being women whose voices are either unheard or destroyed). As Abbate has pointed out with her light-hearted labelling, 'crazy women', like those who kill the hero of this Greek tragedy, exist to make life hard for such men, by displaying traits which are unpredictable and dangerous. On the other hand, Euridice represents the countless female characters that exist only to acquiesce or agonize, presumably in order to pull on the heartstrings of a sympathetic audience. Therefore, even though Carolyn Abbate cannot support the emotional pleas of Catherine Clément's work in her own essays, it is through her subject matter and casual comments that the plight of female suffering is indirectly referenced.

In addition to this observation regarding *In Search of Opera*, one can also find more specific evidence of Carolyn Abbate's relatively balanced view of gender in performance. Although she is correct in stating that in Romantic fictional works it is usually women who embody the 'mesmerized object role', she maintains that 'there is nothing about performance that assigns either gender to any kind of extreme'.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, Abbate believes that performance itself has nothing to do with the fate of female characters, thus disallowing

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<sup>31</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

any kind of trend or norm regarding their on-stage timelines within operas. She may be right, in that the act of performing was open to both men and women in the nineteenth century, and both actors and actresses were lauded at the time, with demanding roles created for both genders – a sign that both male and female performers could occupy a ‘powerful position’ in art<sup>33</sup>. However, performance is generally regarded as the staging and execution, rather than the creation, of opera, unless one counts the blurring of boundaries whereby singers contribute to scores. And whilst performance, as a concept, may not discriminate against either gender, in that it needs both to survive (at least within nineteenth-century opera), that which must be performed is a different matter.

With regard to the relatively late stage at which gender entered musicological discourse, Marcia J. Citron argues that musicology was only just ‘coming of age’ in the 1990s, after successful feminist input at the meetings of the American Musicological Society in the 1980s.<sup>34</sup> She adds that musicology had ‘made only modest gains compared with other fields’, showing its relative slowness in adopting and applying areas like feminist thought.<sup>35</sup> As noted earlier, Hadlock echoes this sentiment in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*. In the same vein, McClary notes that not many musicological scholars had tackled subjects like opera’s clearly ‘gendered characters’, or the ‘binary opposition’ that male and female personalities create on stage.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, even by the early 1990s, such issues remained largely unexplored.

By and large, the 1990s was a crucial time for feminist musicology, as it produced many forward-thinking works. In the few years between the first publication of Susan McClary’s *Feminine Endings*, and the publication of her introduction to the book *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, McClary has become critical of her own past work. For example, she re-evaluates her past need to justify her feminist opinions in her first essay on *Bluebeard’s Castle*. Now, one can see that the difficult gender issues which McClary brought up in these essays do not need justification, but rather honest discussion and analysis, which is part of what this thesis aims to achieve. The fact that the author recognises that her work, which was only published a decade earlier, appears slightly dated

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<sup>33</sup> Female singers were catered for with such demanding, memorable 19<sup>th</sup> century parts as Verdi’s Violetta and Gilda, whilst male singers could take on the challenges of Wagner’s Siegfried and Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin.

<sup>34</sup> Marcia J. Citron, *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), x.

indicates how quickly the discipline of musicology had moved forward. Nowadays, essays concerning gender in musical drama generally contain less of an accusatory tone, and, as McClary mentions, abandon the 'call to action' message.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, personal opinion almost inevitably penetrates the criticism and interpretation of art, and feminist musicology is not an exception to this.

There is also a point on which Carolyn Abbate and McClary share the same manner of thinking. This concerns the thorny issue of the 'Other', a label which stands for everything that is *different* about a place, a people, or even a single character. It is a concept which will be mentioned numerous times in this thesis, as it pertains directly to the operas under consideration. McClary pinpoints the appearance of the 'Other', as a force of difference in opera, to the nineteenth century, in her work on Bizet's *Carmen*. It is important to note that in *Carmen*, 'otherness' is expressed through race and class. In this case, the 'Other' is the gypsy woman, Carmen, who has actively 'infiltrated home turf' by spreading her exotic, sensuous ways through the factories and bars of Seville.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, one can see why 'otherness' became a common feature of many art-works during the nineteenth century – it allowed for a clear distinction between characters, and set-up divisions and tensions that would make for effective dramatic content.

Regarding the nature of 'Otherness' in nineteenth-century French opera, of which *Samson and Dalila* is an example, the theme of the exotic stands out as one of the main characteristics of the concept. As McClary notes, exoticism is an integral part of *Carmen*, as the titular character herself is a foreign influence in Don José's world. Her main issue with other musicologists here is that they often theorise on the existence of the exoticism in the opera, yet they seem to identify it as an 'unproblematic' thing.<sup>39</sup> Due to the fact that much of this use of the exotic and oriental stemmed from a history of confusion over the unknown, particularly in French literature and music, one can see why McClary takes issue.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the exotic came to function as 'one of the most compelling constituents of opera', and provided composers with an opportunity to create memorable, striking melodies and glamorous scenes.<sup>40</sup> For example, exoticism in the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>38</sup> Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 34.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>40</sup> Till also makes the point that costume designs, sets, and elements of dance, could, likewise, be made hugely attractive and interesting when the concept of exoticism was involved – yet more reason for its utilisation.

form of the blatant Orientalism which pervaded some of the music and much of the staging of late nineteenth-century French opera, was often a pointedly evocative feature.<sup>41</sup> Edward Said, whose work covers the topic of the Orient as something which was not properly understood by Western society, refers to this idea of orientalism as having become a 'semi-mythical construct'.<sup>42</sup> This shows how little was actually known about 'the East', which led artists to 'impose' their own ideas and history onto the concept. In operas such as *Samson and Dalila*, it was used as a sort of code for adjectives like 'feminine' and 'seductive', and became the 'projection of a male fantasy of the feminine'.<sup>43</sup> Most composers and writers, however, had not visited the East, and were therefore using their concept of the Orient as a way of projecting their own artistic ideas onto an entire culture. Some French writers, such as Victor Hugo, were using the Orient as a way of illuminating social problems in the West.

Another writer who should be mentioned at this juncture, whose work covered exoticism, and orientalism in particular, is Ralph P. Locke. His 2009 study of this subject, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections*, explores some of the ways in which composers use music to signify foreign cultures. He notes that conjuring exoticism in music was a way of linking it to 'some especially fascinating, attractive, or fearsome place', showing how important a feature it could be within a piece.<sup>44</sup> However, the fact that 'East Asian and Sub-Saharan musics were largely unknown during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' meant that composers would often 'invent musical materials that could somehow be perceived as acceptably other'.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, music that was distinctly 'non-exotic' would be used in opera, to describe something that was foreign or culturally dissimilar, demonstrating what little grasp composers actually had of world musics at the time. The types of exotic musical signifier that composers used will be highlighted in this thesis, as they are used to signify exoticism in the operas covered, and are hugely intertwined with

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Nicholas Till, "An Exotic and Irrational Entertainment: Opera and our Others, Opera as Other", in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till, 298-324 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 300.

<sup>41</sup> For much of French history, the Orient was said to refer to 'North Africa and the Near and Middle East', although many writers began to think of it in the more modern English fashion (as the Far East) around 1900.

Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental Other: Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*', *The Cambridge Opera Journal*, No. 3, Vol 3 (1991): 264.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), xviii.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Brett, 'Eros and Orientalism in Britten's Operas', in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, eds. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary C. Thomas (London: Routledge, 1994), 236.

<sup>44</sup> Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

the concept of the 'other', including, as Locke describes, that most 'basic' of 'binary categories': gender.<sup>46</sup>

There is much evidence to support the fact that consonant harmony is a musical attribute that has been aligned with 'maleness', whilst more complex, chromatic music is perceived as being more feminine. This thinking originates in Renaissance music theory, which stated, according to Kirsten Gibson, that masculine-sounding music was associated with 'natural keys not adorned with chromatic inflection, and with solid, open intervals'.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, 'effeminate music' was more likely to contain 'chromatic inflection and small intervals, particularly the semitone'.<sup>48</sup> This kind of thinking ties in with the preconceived ideas in Christianity, which state that men are often thought to be strong and logical, whereas women are the weaker, more emotionally complicated sex. Chromaticism in music generally seeks to be resolved with consonant harmony, as if the latter emerges triumphant over the former. Therefore, this could be equated with the plight of women as they are defeated by the strength of the male status quo. Indeed, for centuries, chromatic notes could not be left unresolved at the end of a piece of music, as if order constantly needed to be restored. If one reflects upon the features of chromaticism itself, one can find a few links with the Christian idea of femininity. For example, chromaticism's lack of concrete harmonic form could be equated with the idea that women are more flighty and emotionally erratic. Also, its abundance of colour, as it brings such descriptive intrigue to music, shows the huge range of emotion that women are capable of possessing and displaying. Its exotic nature, which extends mostly from its Eastern connotations, also exudes the sensuousness that women were always thought to exhibit, due to their connection with earthly thoughts and desires.

The nineteenth century also saw the misdiagnosis of female hysteria popularised in Western Society. This condition could be equated with the loss of order and control introduced into music with chromaticism. Its frequently dissonant qualities illustrate the loss, or, to use a more fitting word in this thesis, lack, of harmonic stability in a piece. Therefore, it is no surprise that chromaticism features heavily in the female-centric operas that follow, given its time-worn association with the gender.

Before delving into the myriad of ideas held by feminist theologians, which have hugely impacted the theology-related arguments in this thesis, one must first consider feminism as

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>47</sup> Kirsten Gibson, *Masculinity and Western Musical Practice* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 57.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 57.

a subject. One writer whose work has been instrumental in bringing modern feminist ideas to wider public attention is Simone de Beauvoir, whose seminal book, *The Second Sex*, was published over half a decade ago. Whilst her analytical approach was a modern development, the subject itself was 'not new' to women, and is described, in her words, as simply 'irritating'.<sup>49</sup> However, her probing of exactly why women had always been 'Other' is important, as it illuminates the history of women from all backgrounds and religions, not just Christianity. De Beauvoir looks at the issue of gender inequality from a number of different directions – for example, she touches upon the idea of 'biological need' as something which eternally keeps men and women in much the same social situation.<sup>50</sup> Although man needs woman to provide him with offspring and sexual satisfaction, this does not lead to female empowerment. Women's usefulness is harnessed without recognition or remuneration, and they are further subjugated by their own dependence on men to provide stability. In fact, the constant oppression of women can benefit men in many 'subtle' ways, as even the weakest or least masculine of men can look at women and see one lesser than himself.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, de Beauvoir has highlighted in her book some of the main concerns that pervade this thesis. The notion of women as 'Other', the unwholesome symbiotic relationship that can propagate between men and women, and the continued oppressive force of conforming to conventional gender roles, inspire large parts of the following thesis.

De Beauvoir's views on religion form a precursory argument that is continued and developed by many of the feminist theologians mentioned in this thesis. Very early on in *The Second Sex*, the author mentions that Jewish men 'thank God for not making them a woman' in an ancient daily prayer.<sup>52</sup> This statement shows how the Jewish religion views women in general, emphasising their inferiority within the faith. Man is actively grateful to his maker for his given sex, so to be made a woman must be, in some way, a worse fate. Whilst Judaism is not the religious focus of this thesis, it shares a great many values and writings with the Christian religion (for instance, the shared God), and is therefore a relevant topic. When discussing the negative effect of Christianity itself, de Beauvoir remarks that 'Christian ideology played no little role in women's oppression'.<sup>53</sup> De Beauvoir's opinion on religion in general is, unsurprisingly, an unfavourable one. She states

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<sup>49</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.



that 'religions forged by men' are somewhat reflective of a 'will for domination', which is a feature the author attributes to the entirety of the male sex.<sup>54</sup> Many of the male characters examined in this thesis undoubtedly exhibit domineering characteristics – even those who are seen as heroic, like Samson, can show their inherent authoritarianism by not listening to those older and wiser than themselves. Historic accounts and stories of women such as Eve have presented religious bodies with 'ammunition' that adds to the ill-feeling surrounding the female sex from the male point of view.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, this thesis is centred on the theme of women in biblical opera – therefore, the area of theology which is arguably the most pertinent and enlightening here would be related to the Christian feminist writers, who emerged as a group in the 1960s. The first and possibly foremost of these is the radical feminist Mary Daly, an American philosopher and theologian whose inimitable style of prose projected a passionate post-Christian outlook. Her work chronicles her own journey, from a woman trying to find the good in Christianity, to one who cannot reconcile the religion with modern notions of gender equality. The second book in her oeuvre, *Beyond God The Father*, holds many views of note for those studying the development of feminism within theology. Like many other Christian feminist works, it tries to explain the ancient androcentrism that is present in this religion, and deals with issues such as the 'planetary sexual caste system', which, according to Daly, is the cause of most of the gender inequality in the world.<sup>56</sup>

The majority of material in *Beyond God The Father*, as with several of Daly's other books, resonates significantly with the contents of this thesis. A large quantity of the ideas and concepts Daly puts forward are found in the operas covered later on, such as the history of women filling the scapegoat and victim roles, and patriarchy's creation of the condemned 'Other'.<sup>57</sup> Daly's accusations culminate ideologically with the view that 'Christian theology widely asserted that women were inferior, weak, depraved and vicious', and thus they suffered decades of 'barbarous cruelty'.<sup>58</sup>

Rosemary Radford Ruether's general view of men has many similarities with Daly's, in that she places much historical blame for inequality on the male sex. For example, she touches upon the idea of 'male transcendence', or a need to break away from and oppose

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1986), 2.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 95.

women.<sup>59</sup> This is due to the male desire to control the world around them, including the 'reproductive processes' of the other sex.<sup>60</sup> Ownership of women and their bodies is a sobering subject, as it forces them into a position of submission, and confines them to 'the realm of necessity'.<sup>61</sup> The issues discussed here focus on the power play between men and women, which has historically put women at a disadvantage. This is a significant observation, as it shows how inequality directly impacts the lives and choices of women, and how difference can drive distance between two groups of people. The aspects of the conventionally male psyche that are thought to fuel this distance are such traits as dominance and assertiveness – attributes that have been gifted to men through the course of history. Of course, one must remember that these qualities are associated with men because of centuries of cultural and social tradition. The construction of their gender has developed over the course of history to include different stereotypical features than those ascribed to women, and this is in part rooted in ancient documents like those which make up the Bible. As Teresa de Lauretis notes in her thesis on 'The Technology of Gender', 'the representation of gender is its construction', which forms part of the history of Western Art.<sup>62</sup> As Art is a representation of events, ideas, and emotion, it is not surprising that the societal formation and preservation of gender is both reflected back at us in, and ultimately perpetuated by and hence constantly constructed by, art-forms like music and opera.

It is interesting that modern writers like Radford Ruether and Daly can trace gender injustice back to the early days of Christianity, as this huge time span illustrates how long the issues have been present in society. The issues of the male need for control, and women's struggle to find true freedom from established regimes, are important in this thesis, as they are both themes in the operas which will be explored.

The question of whether men or religion are the main problem with regard to women's liberation is one that many different writers tackle. Daphne Hampson, another post-Christian feminist, argues that the emergence of feminism has all but negated the doctrines of the ancient religion. Whilst the case she makes against the compatibility of feminism and Christianity in her book, *Theology and Feminism*, is nothing new, she even marks out the word 'feminine' as a barrier to female expression.<sup>63</sup> The idea of femininity, as the practice

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>62</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, 'The Technology of Gender' in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden, Mass./Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 715.

<sup>63</sup> Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 96.

of being female and therefore conforming to all outdated notions of womanhood, has a destructive power over women. Again, it is a cultural construct of the expected personality, ambitions, looks, and most importantly, limitations, of women as a group. The word 'feminine' conjures images of delicate beauty, passivity, grace – associations which, at first glance, do not appear harmful. However, these expectations decrease the likelihood of women being associated with qualities like strength, intelligence, and self-confidence; positive characteristics that men have claimed for themselves. This issue has filtered down through the centuries, losing some of its hold and potency, but is still present in the modern views of the sexes. As Hampson writes, the concern is not that women are not, and have not been, present throughout history – it is that their presence has *barely* been recorded, and when it has, it has been shaped by men, therefore distorting the perception of the sex. The result of this one-sided historical evidence is a great deal of 'false understanding', as Hampson details.<sup>64</sup> Her assessment of the 'feminine' concludes in the opinion that women are definitely at a disadvantage, as their 'roles' in life are more limited than those which are open to men. This idea of confining and pigeonholing will be very important in this thesis, as it is practices such as this which lead to the forming of tropes. These tropes control women's actions even further, and often spell disaster for female characters in works of art, particularly in tragic opera. The desire that feminists and strong female characters have to lead an autonomous life is, as Hampson articulates, at odds with the 'heteronomous position' in which a Christian places themselves.<sup>65</sup> This idea of a banned female autonomy is also reflected in the operas discussed in the following chapters.

An essay of Phyllis Bird's, 'Images of Women in the Old Testament', reinforces the injustice of the Bible's first part. As all of the female characters in this thesis are based on women in the Old Testament, the fact that it is referred to as 'a man's book' shows that they were quite possibly doomed from the start.<sup>66</sup> Bird underlines the difference between some of the books within the Old Testament, owing to a discrepancy in how independent it seems the women of ancient Israel were allowed to be. This was perhaps due to the 'great cultural change' taking place in the country at the time.<sup>67</sup> However, one thing is certainly clear:

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>65</sup> Daphne Hampson, *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996), 1.

<sup>66</sup> Phyllis Bird, *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 41.

<sup>67</sup> Much of this change was due to the religious revolutions and the conquering of various regions that took place in the Hellenistic period.  
Ibid., 47.

namely, that women were mainly referenced as the 'adjuncts of men' in these scriptures.<sup>68</sup> This is why stories such as that of Judith are extremely rare and special – deeds recorded in relation to male influences were the norm. Yet Bird does make the point that even Judith may be categorised in a way that alludes to male dominance. Although the character appears later in this thesis as a pillar of 'heroine-ism', she is also, importantly, a widow. Bird denounces the widow as 'just a "subtype" of the wife', illustrating that even a strong woman like Judith was once simply the spouse of a more important male figure.<sup>69</sup>

The provocative nature of feminist biblical study in general is tackled very succinctly by the writer Rita M. Gross. In her introduction to the subjects of Feminism and Religion, she acknowledges their academic aspects, but brands them both 'controversial' topics. This, she explains, is due to the fact that they are 'emotion-laden systems of belief that directly affect people's lives'.<sup>70</sup> The two things encourage such a huge amount of personal response from the people who study them that the act of studying becomes rather difficult. It is hard not to let one's own judgement preside over the scholarship and discussion of such things, which is possibly why feminist theology, one combination of Feminism and Religion, is a fairly modern invention. The demonstrative, and often subjective, force behind the works of feminist theologians like those discussed here is usually fairly clear, showing Gross's accuracy in highlighting and explaining its existence.

There exists little literary convergence between the fields of opera studies and the Judeo-Christian religion. One example of this would be Michael Kreps's informal 1998 work *To the Devil with Opera*, a book that underlines why operatic stories and biblical stories are often very similar. For instance, Kreps points out that opera plots often centre around three things; namely, religion, sex, and myth, much like the Bible's own contents.<sup>71</sup> However, although this book contains many relevant points, it is not an example of an academic text on the subject of opera and religion. Susan Rutherford has found many points of religious interest in Verdi's operas. In her book on the composer, she dedicates a chapter to prayer found within Verdi's works, as many of these operas contain references to religion. There are countless examples of Verdi using prayer, such as the Ave Maria, in the arias he created, especially in those written for female protagonists. However, some of his operas, like *Don Carlos* and *Aida*, challenge the notion of 'organized religion'.<sup>72</sup> Verdi's use of God in

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>70</sup> Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Kreps, *To the Devil with Opera* (London: Cardinal Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>72</sup> Susan Rutherford, *Verdi, Opera, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 85.

his operas is also interesting. In the context of Verdi's operas, God is 'ultimate sanctuary – death', rather than a force that can exert influence on the world below, which rages on autonomously.<sup>73</sup> This thesis does not focus on the idea of God in opera, although, as the head of the Judeo-Christian religion, He remains an important figure. Rutherford's writings on Verdi show evidence of the limited literary convergence between opera and religion in an academic context, yet do not investigate the issues contained within this thesis. The limitations of these works therefore provide a reason for more research on the convergence of these topics.

In a thesis by Clair Rowden focusing on Catholicism and Republicanism in opera, one can also find relevant and informative views concerning works from the fin-de-siècle. Rowden details the different ideologies, such as anticlericalism, feminism, and Catholicism, that were being reflected in 'cultural products and their reception' in French fin-de-siècle society.<sup>74</sup> This demonstrates the variety of contrasting cultural influences to which composers were exposed whilst creating their works, and why Western audiences may have reacted in certain ways to provocative subjects like the ones featured in operas like *Salome*, within an apposite culture and time period. Feminism in particular became more of a widespread issue, as around this time in French society, 'women's voices... began to be heard'.<sup>75</sup> The fact that women had started to make themselves more conspicuous in society could explain why operas featuring strong female characters, such as *Samson and Dalila*, were so popular during this time, and why the cult of the *prima donna* gained momentum. The wave of independence and dissent emulating from the feminist movement was reflected back at the public through artistic media, with opera, as a genre that could stand to be called 'the nation's image' by Rowden, being especially enlightening.

The operas studied within this thesis have been chosen and explored for a few different reasons, although there exists a sizeable population of other biblical-themed operas, composed both within the sixty-year period, such as Verdi's *Nabucco* and Massenet's *Hérodiade*, and composed outside of this period. Of course, biblical opera composers working during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would have been more likely to choose a part of the much larger Old Testament as a source of inspiration, as most of Europe at the time was staunchly Christian, and may have found a New Testament retelling

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>74</sup> Clair Rowden, *Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition in the Opera: Massenet's "Hérodiade" and "Thaïs"* (Weinsburg: Lucie Galland, 2004), 1.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 7.

more offensive.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, Wagner himself left behind the outline for a biblical opera based upon the story of Jesus Christ, comprised of five acts that followed the son of God from Galilee, all the way to his eventual condemnation. However, this drama was never finished, owing to the composer's diminishing faith, and the Ring Cycle emerged instead. There also exist more Apocryphal operas, such as Carlisle Floyd's 1955 work *Susannah*, an updated and adapted version of part of the Apocrypha of Daniel, telling the tale of a virginal girl shamed by town elders. Moreover, one could find other important biblical stories, like those of Moses and the Last Supper, as the bases for operas by Schoenberg, Rossini, and Birtwistle. Therefore, one can see how relatively frequently the thematic content of the Bible's Old and New Testaments has pervaded opera, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

However, the four operas featured in the coming chapters are drawn together, as each contains just one female protagonist, who will be proven to conform to at least one of the tropes which this thesis details. Two of the operas focus on Old Testament tales, whilst *Salome* is based on New Testament material, and Judith's titular gospel is designated apocrypha. Therefore, a range of different religious texts appear in the four operas, which also takes into account the relative, disproportionate sizes of the Old and New Testaments. Moreover, whereas *Judith* has its story lifted, almost in its entirety, from apocryphal source material, the character of Salome is given only the briefest of mentions in the New Testament, and not mentioned by name. The detail and depth of the stories on which each of the four operas is based therefore varies quite dramatically. The variation in both the length and the type of biblical source origin leads to a more comprehensive view of biblical women, and the way in which different composers and librettists embellished and portrayed their stories. Additionally, each of the four composers was working from a different position regarding their nationality, and national operatic tradition, again providing more variation between the chosen operas.

Each chapter of this thesis examines one of the three female tropes, using one or more examples from the four chosen operas to describe the trope's meaning and features. Firstly, the ages-old stereotype of the victim is explored, with reference to the young figures of Hagith and Salome. Next, the dangerous femme fatale is studied, with Dalila at the fulcrum of this trope. Lastly, the more positive type of the heroic woman is discussed,

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<sup>76</sup> Anthony Axe, 'A Voice Crying in the Wilderness: The Biblical Hero in Opera with Specific Reference to John the Baptist', in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, No 313, ed. Martin O'Kane (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 308.

with Judith the Jewish heroine providing the main focus of the chapter. The thesis is structured in this way so as to highlight the less favourable aspects of female categorization, before moving onto a type that stands out as being more empowering and progressive, showing the range of types that can be found in biblical opera.

## Chapter Two

### Victim

Many of the biblical scholars referenced earlier in the introduction to this thesis view the Bible as a source of ammunition for keeping women in a position of subservience, providing motivation for a prolonged imbalance between the sexes. Even in the nineteenth century, thousands of years after the Bible's creation, religious ideas were still being used to condone and extend prejudices held by Western society. Eve's fall, as mentioned previously, was cited as an example of the huge amount of weakness women were thought to display when faced with temptation. The fact that the first woman ever created, according to the Judeo-Christian religion, was held responsible for humanity's first great failing has negatively impacted their existence in the Western world. Eve, as the human perpetrator of 'the first transgression', is charged with 'poisoning human nature at the root' – a crime which has never been forgotten.<sup>77</sup> It has been noted that the 'early Christian Fathers', those tasked with advancing the religion in its infancy, saw the story of Genesis as primarily a tale of 'the dangerous sexual lure of womankind', and the havoc it could wreak.<sup>78</sup> Eve's role in the book led to the character's lifelong banishment from Eden, as a punishment for introducing death and suffering into human life. Ever since the creation of the Bible, women have not been able to free themselves of the shame that the Judeo-Christian religion heaped upon them. Tales of women who make their own decisions and act without the permission of men continue the male view that 'it is the female body that suggests the failure which its society wants to keep hidden'.<sup>79</sup>

Of course, many would argue that the presence of the Virgin Mary in the Bible's New Testament proves that Christianity's general view of women is an inclusive, balanced one. It is true that the Eve/Mary balance is an important factor in the longevity of the religion, as traditional faiths that 'taught men to think solely of Eve crumbled into anti-social sexual philosophies', whereas Christianity promoted an 'equilibrium' and 'self-respect in the female mind'.<sup>80</sup> However, even if followers of the faith are taught that Christianity is built

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<sup>77</sup> John Caird, *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1899), 206.

<sup>78</sup> Margarita Stocker, *Judith, Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (Bath: Bath Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>79</sup> Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 187.

<sup>80</sup> It should be noted that this view is that of a man, and comes from a book that is more than sixty years old, and therefore may have lost some of its relevance with regard to today's more inclusive, modern studies into theology.



on more than one type of woman, the fact still remains that Eve's disobedience has only served to disadvantage the sex.

It has also been pointed out that many of the more fortunate female characters of the Bible (those who are generally well-thought of or are viewed as saintly) were perpetuating stereotypes of women that were not conducive to the development of society. In many cases, 'good' biblical women reinforced values that were impossible to uphold, or encouraged even more passivity and submissiveness. Although not one of the operatic characters studied in this thesis, Mary, the counter to Eve, and whose presence goes some way to improve the Christian religion's general view of women, also occupies a surprisingly grey area. Mary, arguably the female cornerstone of the Catholic religion, is remembered for her important part in the birth and life of Jesus. However, one should note that she ultimately had no choice in this matter, and was simply picked from a life of obscurity by God to act as a vessel for a greater life force. The Virgin Mary is admired and worshipped for having 'delivered of the saviour'<sup>81</sup>. The same cannot be said, however, of Eve, Mary Magdalene, and of the many sad, silent, and abused women that feature in the Old Testament. Given the importance of female victims in the Bible, it is hardly surprising that this theme filtered through to Western Art and to opera in particular.

### **The elevation of the female victim in opera**

Despite a continuing tradition of comic opera, which often portrayed female characters as capable of having initiative and self-determination, during the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of female victims were created within the art-form. Although one should not characterize opera in an undifferentiated manner, more female characters began to meet their demise on-stage, as the genre of tragic opera became increasingly fashionable. The Italian opera school of the nineteenth century provides many instances of the grand, tragic denouement. At the beginning of the century came Rossini's *Otello*, turning Shakespeare's Desdemona into an ill-fated mezzo-soprano role that ends in a grisly murder, at the hands of a jealous husband. Continuing the theme of Shakespearean plays as source material, *Macbeth*, and its strong-willed yet doomed anti-heroine, Lady Macbeth, is the subject of a tragic work by Verdi. The opera's conspiring and desirous wife character is somewhat reminiscent of Eve. Many would argue that Lady Macbeth is not a sympathetic character – yet her descent into madness, due to her lust for power, can evoke pity.

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John Langdon Davies, *Sex, Sin and Sanctity* (London: Gollancz, 1954), 102.

<sup>81</sup> Margarita Stocker, *Judith Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (Bath: Bath Press, 1998), 4.

Her story also echoes the biblical character of Jezebel, a regal sinner featured in the Hebrew Book of Kings, who artfully incites her husband to worship false idols, and dies horribly as a result. Verdi also composed the ever-popular *La traviata*, containing one of opera's best-loved, but most unfortunate heroines: Violetta. Violetta's position as a courtesan renders her similar to the biblical figure of Mary Magdalene, who has been commonly labelled a reformed prostitute since the Middle Ages (although no evidence for this description can be found in the gospels). The Old Testament contains many references to prostitution, and other opera characters like Berg's Lulu, and Massenet's Manon, can count the profession as their own.

Some women in opera become victims of their own fraught minds or circumstances. The shocking spectacle of female suicide became an ever-more popular end to operatic plots in the nineteenth century, although it is not a common occurrence within the Bible. Vincenzo Bellini created Norma, the titular Druidic High-Priestess, who has no choice but to end her own life in a fiery demise. Similarly, Puccini's enduringly successful works, the majority of which are nineteenth-century creations, follow the lives of female characters such as Madame Butterfly, whose story ends in an emotional combination of grief, loss, and suicide. Tosca's death is also self-inflicted, in a moment of defiance and desperation. Turandot escapes this fate, but *La bohème's* sweet and gentle Mimi is fatally struck down with consumption. Her death is particularly saddening, as she dies in her sleep, silently, with nobody by her side.

Later, Wagner dominated German opera with complex, multi-faceted heroines, such as Senta and Isolde, many of whom were inevitably dead by the end of their respective works. The trend of the female victim continued into the twentieth century, showing how prevalent the trope had become, perpetuated by tragic heroines like Tosca, Mélisande, and, later, in the hapless female characters of Berg. Berg's *Lulu* features an eponymous female character whose unceremonious death takes place off-stage, at the hands of a minor male character, whilst *Wozzeck's* Marie is the long-suffering wife of the titular male. Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, premiered in 1946, portrays the rape of an innocent woman. The opera's plot mirrors the abuse suffered by women and perpetrated by men in the biblical books of Judges and Deuteronomy. For example, in the Book of Judges, the Battle of Gibeah is initiated by the rape of a woman by several men from an opposing tribe. Shakespeare's avaricious yet unfortunate anti-heroine reappears in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, although this reappearance is confined to the opera's title. However, the female protagonist in this work is similar to Shakespeare's original creation, in that she suffers from great hubris and ultimately pays the price for this. The first opera to

be studied in this thesis also features an interesting, headstrong female protagonist, whose fate is equally dramatic and dire.

### **Szymanowski and *Hagith***

Karol Szymanowski is widely considered to be one of the most significant Polish composers of recent times. Indeed, it has been remarked that ‘in the first half of the twentieth century, there was no greater composer in Poland than Karol Szymanowski’ – praise indeed for a man whose music was often not well-received in his lifetime.<sup>82</sup> Not a lot is known about the composer’s private life, as he was a very secretive person whose only pseudo-autobiographical novel, *Efebos*, was mostly destroyed in a fire in 1939. This is unsurprising, considering that the composer was hiding his homosexuality from the public and his family, a decision which must have caused great pain. This was not the only emotional trauma he suffered in his life, due to Polish political unrest, and lack of public recognition for his music.

Fantasy and myth were important factors in Szymanowski’s compositional output. The composer’s views on myth are interesting to consider when one is analysing *Hagith*. In an article of his, entitled ‘History and Myth’, the composer outlines the importance of myth within national history. His insistence that ‘historical fact always lies at the root of the myths which have come down to the present day’ shows how much faith he placed in ancient stories that possessed some semblance of truth.<sup>83</sup> The fact that Szymanowski saw ‘the beauty of history’ in mythical writings also makes his choice of a semi-historical subject for his opera *Hagith* more significant.<sup>84</sup>

Despite not being overly religious himself, and having a sexuality which, at the time, would not have been acceptable to the Christian Church and its followers, *Hagith* was not Szymanowski’s only biblical opera. However, the overriding themes that feature in this opera have a fairly mythical quality to them. The ‘damsel in distress’ character, as it were, is a case in point, as it is a trope very commonly found in folklore and fairy tales.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>82</sup> Stanislaw Golachowski, *Szymanowski: His Life and Times* (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1986), 71.

<sup>83</sup> Karol Szymanowski and Alistair Wightman, *Szymanowski on Music: Selected writings of Karol Szymanowski* (Exeter: Toccata Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>85</sup> Some well-known fairy tales that feature a ‘damsel in distress’ type, who needs to be saved by a brave male character, include *Rapunzel* and *Snow White*, by the Brothers Grimm, and Charles Perrault’s *Sleeping Beauty*. The archetype also influenced elements of Gothic and Victorian Literature, but can be found as far back as Ancient Greece, in such myths as the tale of Perseus and Andromeda, and, to some extent, Theseus and Ariadne. Modern feminist writers like Angela Carter

this, plus the biblical story's tragically dramatic denouement, is what drew Szymanowski to the subject matter. His most well-known opera, *King Roger*, written several years after *Hagith*, contains a more surreal pseudo-biblical plotline, and mixes religious themes and musical styles from different countries to create something unique. Conversely, *Hagith* draws on one book of the Bible for its plot – a book which is often said to mix the historical and the legendary, making it prime material for the composer's opera. Richard Nelson, in his commentary on the first and second Books of Kings, refers to the narrative as being 'history-like', and full of 'legends, miracle stories, folktales and fictional constructions'.<sup>86</sup> One can therefore understand why the verses appealed to the composer, owing to their content's historical and fictional elements.

*Hagith* follows the opening passages of the first Book of Kings in a very loose, somewhat 'freely drawn' fashion, with changes made by the librettist, Feliks Dörmann.<sup>87</sup> One thing to note is that, in the Bible, the unfortunate female character on which the verses focus is named 'Abishag' instead of 'Hagith'. The latter name was taken from a character who had a different relationship to the aged King than that of the operatic protagonist.<sup>88</sup> It is not entirely clear why this change appeared in the libretto, but it makes little difference to the course of the opera. The main disparity between biblical tale and opera concerns the detail into which the opera goes, much like the embellishments Wilde and Strauss heaped upon the tale of *Salome*. It is a complex and exciting opera – however, as a part of Szymanowski's musical output, *Hagith* is almost entirely forgotten. When it was first premiered, there had been high hopes for the performance – it was intended to 'make the composer's career' and 'boost his income'.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, it managed neither of these things, and has been described as a 'flawed' and 'unconvincing' work, due to its stylistic inconsistencies.<sup>90</sup> The Viennese Opera would not perform it, and the eventual premiere, which took place in

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have produced literature (e.g. *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: An Anthology of Subversive Stories*, 1986) that subverts and disapproves of the figure, as it perpetuates the idea that women are weak and helpless.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987), 1.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen Downes, *The Szymanowski Companion* (Dorchester: Ashgate, 2015), 145.

<sup>88</sup> The name 'Hagith' has been described as a 'close derivative of the name of David's first wife', which could be said to bring 'oedipal and incestual overtones' to the work.

*Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>89</sup> Stanislaw Golachowski, *Szymanowski: His Life and Times* (New Jersey: Paganiniana Publications Inc, 1986), 27.

<sup>90</sup> Stephen Downes, *The Szymanowski Companion* (Dorchester: Ashgate, 2015), 110.

Düsseldorf, was not a success. Warsaw, Szymanowski's home capital, also gave the opera a 'cool reception', cementing its general lack of success in joining the operatic canon.<sup>91</sup>

### **Oppression and male dominance in *Hagith***

The oppressive culture in which Hagith exists is overwhelmingly patriarchal, which is detrimental to the character's life and freedom. Hagith's position as a servant also contributes to her low status and means she is unable to practise freewill. She fleetingly falls in love with the Young King Solomon, before his father, the Old King, demands she lie with him as a means of rejuvenation. Her angry refusal sparks the Old King's sudden death, for which Hagith is blamed entirely. Therefore, her culture and place in society help to secure her unfair death.

There are signs pointing to the general depravity of a prejudicial atmosphere right from the beginning of the opera. The sinister qualities of the opening music to the work cannot be ignored, as the sound world that the composer creates relies on features such as heavy dissonance and contrasting timbres to immediately introduce a foreboding effect. For example, the feeling of tension is heightened in a very literal sense by quickly adding instruments of higher pitches to the muted bass instruments of the orchestra, so that the climb to crescendo in the fifth bar becomes a sforzando of frightening magnitude (bars 1-5).<sup>92</sup> After this erratic ascent is halted, the shock dies down, and the loud, high C the orchestra reaches is repeated twice, each at a lower pitch and volume (bars 6-7). The following rumbling C sharp pedal played by the double basses and contrabassoon is integral to the opera, becoming a frequent feature of the thick, chromatic texture (beginning bar 9). Its presence adds to the menacing feel of the music, and the constant peaks and troughs in excitement are enough to create an atmosphere of unease from the outset.

It is extremely telling that the first voice heard in the opera is not that of the main character, or even of the chorus. In fact, it is a character who is one of the most responsible for the sentencing of Hagith at the end. The Doctor appears onstage with his deep, baritone register matching the ominous depth of the chromatically descending orchestral bass-line, and begins immediately to outline the importance of finding a girl to heal the dying King (Rehearsal Mark 1). The time signature changes to compound duple time at the exact

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<sup>91</sup> B. M. Maciejewski, *Karol Szymanowski: His Life and Music* (London: Poets and Painters' Press, 1967), 45.

<sup>92</sup> Score of *Hagith* used throughout:  
Karol Szymanowski, *Hagith: Complete Edition* (Vienna: Universal-Edition, 2013).

mention of the word 'Mädchen' (girl), and it is as if the first thought of the opera's only female character upsets the time signature in some way, her mere presence in the narrative being dramatically conspicuous and inflammatory (Four bars before Rehearsal Mark 2). Hagith's sex makes her stand out - she is led to her death because of it, and it is very early on in the opera that we see the beginnings of this idea manifest themselves in the music.

With regard to the concept of 'other' within the opera, reference can be made to the observations of Ralph P. Locke, in his work on orientalism and exoticism. Many of the features Locke defines as giving a work faux-exotic characteristics, concerning late nineteenth- and twentieth-century composers, appear in *Hagith*, often contributing to the main character's aura of 'otherness'. In general, the intense chromaticism, disjointed feel to melodic lines, and periods of silence between musical episodes, give a sense of the kind of musical exoticism Locke describes in *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections*. However, there are specific moments where the exotic detailing is heightened. For example, there is a violin solo at Rehearsal Mark 68 that follows an extremely exotic melodic shape, reaching the highest extremities of its range, and winding chromatically over a sparse orchestral texture. Overall, the strings and harps in the opera are used frequently to give an air of mystery and orientalism, providing a striking effect, and intensifying the feeling of 'other' that pervades the Old King's court. The main character herself enters the opera by singing a scale composed of whole tones, which Locke associates with exoticism. Hagith also produces a 'crying' sound at Rehearsal Mark 86, adding a descending slide effect to her cry of 'my King', demonstrating another of Locke's oriental signifiers.

The personalities of the male characters in the opera are often made apparent quite quickly through their vocal lines, and accompanying parts. They are often, in shape and content, completely different than those of Hagith, illustrating her isolation from the opposite sex in the opera. For example, the Doctor has a relatively simple vocal line throughout his first stage appearance, yet the orchestral undercurrent is turbulent, and filled with acciaccaturas and duplets pushing against the time signature (Rehearsal Mark 1). Once the character leaves the stage, the orchestra switches to a more lyrical style, with a more melodic feel to the music emanating from the lilting crotchet-quaver patterns played by the higher woodwind instruments (3 bars after Rehearsal Mark 2). The relative orchestral calm following the male character's exit prompts the feeling that the Doctor is not a benign force in the opera, which later will be proved. Moreover, there is a large decrescendo and long pause before the Old King begins to sing, which produces a sizeable amount of tension (bar

before Rehearsal Mark 3). The apprehension preceding the King's entry is justified, as he is a bad-tempered, bitter force with which to be reckoned. His character, like the Doctor's, is clearly defined in his first bars of music. He is the opera's main antagonist, and consequently, is musically least akin to Hagith.

A short theme that recurs during the Old King's opening passages concerns a short, pianissimo phrase, played by divisi violas and cellos, that contains a dissonant tremolo before landing on a similarly discordant chord (from Rehearsal Mark 3). It is repeated four times as a pseudo-introduction for the King, adding to the air of discomfort and mystery. The first time it appears, its second beat is accented – this musical feature is very important to the music of the King. Much of his vocal line relies on the sharpness of the accent, from his very first exclamatory note to his death scene. His entry laments the appearance of the frost, conveying his distaste for the cold; this distaste is also heard in his rancorous dislike for most everything else, particularly his state of health, and the popularity of his son (third bar of Rehearsal Mark 3). One can also hear this in the difference between the King's first scene, and the chorus entry that follows. There is palpable despair in the King's repeated cries pleading with the Doctor to bring him a cure, in the frantic chromatic semiquaver run that leads up to his exclamatory 'Away with it!', and in the erratic nature of the orchestra underneath, constantly pushing against the vocal line with sextuplets, septuplets, and sudden time signature changes (second bar of Rehearsal Mark 12). The spiky, irregular aspects of the music further underline the King's misery, with the sforzandos and marcato markings both conveying and intensifying the depiction of the monarch's discomfort. As the King and Doctor finish their fevered duet, with the King imploring the Doctor to hurry ('eilt euch, eilt'), the orchestra slows and diminuendos, regaining some sort of sense of regularity, as if the King's exit has prompted a relaxation (6 bars before Rehearsal Mark 24). Conversely, the chorus entry is full of vigour and vitality, due to its maestoso tempo and air of hushed excitement (Rehearsal Mark 24). This is because the chorus is singing of the Young King who, contrary to the older monarch, is Hagith's ally and love interest in the opera.

### **The importance of the Young King**

As with so many operas which detail the sad fate of a woman, *Hagith* contains a male character who, through his values and actions, essentially proves not all men are oppressors, whilst adding romance and tension to the drama. This need to provide the

young female with a male counterpart reflects the idea of 'complementarity', which is an idea that pervades Christian ethical issues.<sup>93</sup> In short, the view that male and female are 'made for each other' is confirmed by the presence of Hagith and The Young King. This youthful royal fits the description here, appearing as a potential hero, soul mate, and protector.

There are many ways in which one can interpret the Young King as a sympathetic male protagonist through his music. Regarding the chorus's introduction to the character, the trumpet calls have a traditional air of heroism about them, and the lively trills and staccato that permeate the other orchestral parts add to the lighter tone (Rehearsal Mark 24). However, one cannot escape the continuously ominous C natural pedal in the timpani part that sounds beneath this section (from Rehearsal Mark 35). This recurring musical feature signals that tragedy is never very far away, and that its presence is felt even in the opera's more pleasant moments. The *molto passionato* that follows is very distinctive of the expressive qualities that the Young King's music often possesses (Rehearsal Mark 36). His passionate character is shown clearly in his first entry, which carries far more emotional, melodic value than that of the Old King. There is no doubt that the music remains intensely chromatic, but it acquires a sense of grandeur and greater consonance through the lyrical instrumental and vocal lines, and the markings such as 'passionato' and 'espressivo'. These directions in the music expose the Young King's passionate, romantic character, which connects almost instantly with Hagith. This cements his position as her male counterpart, despite their different backgrounds.

When the Young King begins to sing, he starts with an ascending question, asking after his father (2 bars before Rehearsal Mark 38). It is a simple introductory vocal line, and its ascension feels full of hope and curiosity, bringing a sense of calm to the proceedings. One can see the contrast between his character and that of his father in the latter's answering phrase, which reverts to the fitful, accented musicality and *agitato* marking that is typical of the Old King (Rehearsal Mark 38). The two argue dramatically in their first meeting about the Young King's ascension to the throne, as the Old King's agitation creeps into his son's music, leading to a theatrical leap of a sixth in the Young King's anguished 'Verbannung!' (Rehearsal Mark 46). The volume and density of the chords playing underneath this confrontation adds to the notion that the two Kings are locked in a serious power struggle, highlighting one of the downfalls of this patriarchal society. That the Young King's vocal line

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<sup>93</sup> Alison Webster, *Found Wanting: Women, Christianity and Sexuality* (London: Cassell Publishing, 1995), 5.



becomes unpredictable in the presence of his father, but softens and takes on a more lyrical quality when he meets Hagith, emphasises their complementarity. Therefore, the Young King's music is a clue to the fact that he and the titular heroine can be read as kindred spirits. He is the only character in the opera that does not dismiss Hagith because of her gender, and doesn't add to her status of 'victim' by condemning her. In fact, it is merely bad timing that stops him from saving his love, who, as a young, unmarried woman, *needed* saving from the upper echelons of the patriarchal society.

That Hagith needs to be saved by another is a definite feature of the 'victim' type. There is no obvious way that this female character could have helped herself out of the horrific circumstances in which she is eventually placed. Even her entrance in the opera, which only comes after the three main male characters have been introduced, marks her out in a way that suggests she is used to the suffering of a life of servitude and low prospects. When the Young King asks who she is, she replies with her name, starting on a high G, then falling to the A flat below (Rehearsal Mark 59). These faltering few notes that serve as the titular character's introduction are sung at a pianissimo dynamic, and emphasised with a fermata – the entry, therefore, becomes a reticent sigh, accentuating Hagith's lowly position as a powerless servant girl.

Even after Hagith finds her love, and loses some of the shy, respectful attitude for authority that was underscored in her entrance, she is unable to successfully break out of her subservient lifestyle. The events that unfold are completely out of her control, and even if she had agreed to the Old King's demands, she still would have been unfairly victimised. If death had not found her, then absolute unhappiness would probably have been her fate instead, meaning that a classic 'happy ending' was out of the question, whichever way she chose to react to the Old King's last wish that she lie with him. Her escape from the scene after refusing to acquiesce to the Old King's demands and inadvertently causing his death would also have been impossible, according to the victim trope. Thus stands the inevitability of her capture and her death. However, the fact that a man exists who could have saved her if he had been in the right place at the right time highlights the futility of hope for Hagith in the opera. The character of the Young King may be a sympathetic one, unlike the other male characters who inhabit the work. Yet, in a way, the Young King is the most to blame for Hagith's death, as only he could have saved her. He is manoeuvred into the 'hero' role, but cannot fulfil its expectations, due to his own unfortunate state of affairs. This shows how every man who comes into contact with Hagith in the opera is, in part, responsible for her fate. Therefore, we can see from this overpowering society of complete

'maleness' that Hagith, a young woman with her own set of principles and ideas, could never have survived. Her lone female voice in a sea of traditionally dominant men was extinguished merely because of its existence.

### **Salome as victim**

Even though Salome, the character of operatic and literary fame, is mainly remembered for her adherence to the *femme fatale* stereotype, she also possesses many qualities that pertain to the 'victim' type. Of the four operas detailed in this thesis, *Salome* is possibly the most well-studied, to date. Its tale of a young and strange princess, who comes across a Christian prophet in her Jewish court's jail, and is changed irreparably by this meeting, has its origins in a small piece of religious apocrypha. However, the character was so interesting that it blossomed into the subject of many works of art, such as paintings and plays.

Richard Strauss saw Oscar Wilde's theatrical version of the story in an early German production, and was so enamoured that his opera bears the exact text of much of the play as its actual libretto.<sup>94</sup> However, the appearance of the character in the Bible is so fleeting that she isn't given a name – she is only referred to as 'the daughter of Herodias', or, more descriptively, 'the damsel'.<sup>95</sup> These mentions are the earliest of their kind, and come from the New Testament's gospels of Matthew and Mark. 'Salome' was the name, which ironically means 'peace' in Greek, given to Herodias's daughter at a much later date.<sup>96</sup> It was Wilde who conjured up the horrific fate of Salome; a character who moved from theatre to opera stage in a matter of years. The question remains why he ascribed this fate to the Salome he created, as the biblical incarnation of the princess lived to a reasonable age and married twice in the process.<sup>97</sup> The opera's libretto carries the same lilting repetitions that make the play so haunting – a far cry from the more frivolous and farcical scripts for which Wilde is more often remembered today. Strauss's music helps these recurring words and ideas to linger and enchant with its challenging unpredictability and evocative style.

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<sup>94</sup> The original play script was shortened by about a third to form the libretto for the opera. Kurt Wilhelm, *Richard Strauss: An Intimate Portrait* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1989), 98.

<sup>95</sup> Laurence Gilman, *Strauss' Salome – A Guide to the Opera with Musical Illustrations* (London: John Lane Company, 1907), 17.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 17,

<sup>97</sup> Wilde is also credited with such outlandish and elaborate additions as Salome's passion for Jochanaan, and her unprompted request for his head. Laurence Gilman, *Strauss' Salome* (London: John Lane Company, 1907), 2.

One of the most significant differences between *Salome* and the previously discussed *Hagith* is the extent to which they have been performed. Strauss's shocking work was, and has remained, a popular piece of entertainment – for example, between 2009 and 2014 it was the fortieth most performed opera in the world.<sup>98</sup> *Salome* has a long and varied performance history, with countless singers taking on the titular role, and much literature on the character herself. This thesis will uncover how much of the titular character's identity relates to the victim archetype, or whether Salome's cruel eventual fate is, in any way, deserved.

### **The child within**

Firstly, one must put aside the age of the singer and focus on the character's youth. She is a mere girl in the libretto, a childlike princess – Narraboth, in his wistful opening lines, describes her as 'pale', 'fair', and with feet like 'little white doves', showing how delicate and innocent she appears to him (third bar of Rehearsal Mark 2).<sup>99</sup> What evokes the most sympathy when considering all elements of Salome's difficult personality are her tender years and consequential unworldliness. The moments of the opera in which Salome's youth and innocence are most emphatically conveyed are those involving her parents, particularly her mother. However, when the mysterious prophet, Jochanaan, is on stage, Salome's sexual appetite is often too pronounced to see her as anything but a *femme fatale* or deviant, as she is consumed with lustful thoughts. Due to this frightening appetite, the character can appear less and less innocent, thus somewhat taking away from her victim status. However, when we see the young Salome next to her mother, an overbearing, spiteful woman who has married her dead husband's brother and therefore incurred the wrath of the most moral character in the opera (Jochanaan, as he is a prophet in the story, and therefore connected to God), we understand the daughter a little more.

The incestuous marriage aside, Herodias is Salome's only true parental figure, with her father dead, and her step-father as far from a healthy, familial presence as it is possible to

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<sup>98</sup> According to Operabase. Hagith was the 672<sup>nd</sup> most-performed in this time frame.  
<http://operabase.com/visual.cgi?is=opera&by=Strauss,R>

<sup>99</sup> Score for *Salome* used throughout:  
Richard Strauss, *Salome* (Dover Publications: Mineola. 1981)  
[http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/d/d8/IMSLP01663-Strauss\\_-\\_Salome\\_Scenes\\_1-3\\_\\_Complete\\_score\\_.pdf](http://conquest.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/d/d8/IMSLP01663-Strauss_-_Salome_Scenes_1-3__Complete_score_.pdf)

be. Herodias conforms to the stereotype that Alice Bach coined the 'phallic woman'.<sup>100</sup> Her treatment of her husband, whose influence might be expected to outweigh hers, 'challenges the smooth running of the system', as it breaks the 'masculine monologic discourse' to which powerful men would be accustomed.<sup>101</sup> She has also been referred to as the 'phallic mother', a description which invites obvious comparison with behaviour conventionally associated with men.<sup>102</sup> One way in which Herodias could be viewed as 'phallic mother' is with regard to her cunning, domineering personality. As has already been mentioned, she tries to control those around her, including her husband, which goes against the patriarchal system. The contempt she shows for Herod, undermining his will and criticising his decisions, is a trait passed on to her daughter – both women break conventional norm by exercising their power over men. However, Herodias's power stems from her marriage to Herod, whereas Salome's is purely sexual. Herodias also has fewer apparent weaknesses than her husband, who bends easily to Salome's will. The possibility of this terrible mother figure influencing the characteristics of her daughter, who is still at an impressionable age, is extremely high. Therefore, Salome's deplorable behaviour can be attributed to a parent who ultimately failed at their most important life task.

Salome's mother has much to answer for, regarding her offspring's tragic eventual outcome. The child in Salome has much curiosity in the world and its contents, and has apparently not been properly educated in that which she ultimately craves above all: love. When we first meet Salome, she is showing her curiosity in wondering aloud why Herod looks at her in a particular way – she does not, however, come to a conclusion about this until later in the opera (Rehearsal Mark 22). She displays no familial feeling for her step-father at all in her first lines on stage, and condemns people of different races with an unfounded hatred that seems practised, as if repeating views which she has heard all her life (Rehearsal Mark 26). All of the sins committed by this character could, in some way or another, be credited to a lack of understanding. Salome wants to understand Jochanaan, even when other voices in the opera proclaim the prophet's words to be incomprehensible and dangerous<sup>103</sup>. However, it is the misinformed way in which the girl goes about forming

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<sup>100</sup> Bach uses Dalila, who will be discussed in relation to her wicked actions later in this thesis, as an example of a 'phallic woman'.  
Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 187.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>103</sup> In fact, it has been pointed out by Derrick Puffett that Salome is the *only* character who even attempts to engage with Jochanaan, and that she is therefore the most willing to listen to his

a connection to Jochanaan that ends with both victimised characters dead at the end of the work. Salome also cannot appropriately express her feelings for people, hinting at stunted emotional growth. For example, her musing that ‘the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death’ shows that she knows love exists, but that it is also elusive and inscrutable to her.

Salome also places great importance in the moon, referring to it as a ‘little silver flower’ and a ‘cold and chaste virgin’ (Rehearsal Mark 30). These descriptions may also refer to the way in which Salome sees herself, as she is, at this point in the plot, all of those things. Her scrutiny of the moon is only interrupted by the voice of Jochanaan, which immediately proves fascinating to the young Princess. The upward trajectory of Salome’s vocal pitch when she asks whose voice it was she heard mirrors the natural pitch rise of a question, and the tempo becomes faster as she is excited by the prospect of this mysterious stranger (Rehearsal Mark 31). One could read this as a sign of Salome’s loneliness, and her yearning for human contact – her connection to the cold, isolated moon severed by a new hope. From this point on, the entire opera follows Salome’s quest to become closer to the prophet in whatever way she can.

It is a completely human thing to crave a meaningful relationship with another person, or to want love; ergo, one cannot reprimand Salome for seeking the bond she desires. The fact that she confuses or associates feelings of love with similarly passionate feelings of a hurtful, damaging nature, shows how destructive love can be when not nurtured or imparted properly. Being a child, the main way in which she might have learned how to love and be close to other people would have been by watching and being encouraged by her family. Therefore, her failure to understand and articulate her own feelings becomes more comprehensible, as her family is so dysfunctional. Children are impressionable beings – they are vulnerable to their surroundings and the people with whom they have contact. It cannot be coincidence that Salome has, from an early age, witnessed ‘misplaced trust, patriarchal lust... mixed desires... wantonness and degeneracy’, and then displays equally atrocious behaviour when she is able.<sup>104</sup> One can only pity Salome her endeavour to

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prophetic voice. If this is the case, perhaps Salome is the character who least identifies with the Jewish faith, as she wishes to converse and connect with a Christian man.  
Derrick Puffett, *Richard Strauss: Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 109.

<sup>104</sup> Caryl Clark, “The Dirt on Salome”, in *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories*, ed. Clair Rowden (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 156.

cultivate the new emotions she encounters, as her age belies the depth of emotion Jochanaan's appearance prompts.

### **On Salome's mental health**

Another way in which the more sympathetic aspects of Salome's character are highlighted has been touched upon slightly in Carolyn Abbate's essay, 'Opera: or the Envoicing of Women'. The writer makes the point that Salome mistakes Jochanaan's head falling to the ground for the sound of the executioner's sword dropping to the floor in an action showing reluctance or cowardice.<sup>105</sup> However, one could also see this mishearing as a subconscious effort on Salome's part to disbelieve that Jochanaan could be dead. There is no actual sound in the music or stage directions to indicate what the head falling should sound like; in fact, there is dead silence (Rehearsal Mark 307). Therefore, the audience cannot know how muffled or confusing the sound which Salome hears must be. By this point in the opera, her mental state has deteriorated shockingly, meaning that everything she sees and hears could be irreparably distorted in her mind.

Salome's psychological descent is also apparent when she asks for the head of Jochanaan. As Herod implores her many times to change her demand, his ideas for gifts becoming more and more extravagant, Salome remains fixated on the prophet's head, completely and utterly immovable. In fact, her dogged persistence and refusal to say anything but 'Give me the head of Jochanaan' borders on the extreme. The final time she requests the head, she is worked up to the point of wildness, as directed in the score (3 bars before Rehearsal Mark 298). The first four notes she sings of this final request are accented, and her musical phrase ends on a rapidly descending flourish that falls from a high C flat. Locke's oriental signifiers detail how a vocal cry, plus a distinctive use of the soprano vocal tessitura, can imply an exotic undercurrent, showing how Salome's music here emphasises her difference from the other characters onstage. This display of tenacity turning to madness shows how Salome can be seen to 'snap', driven to uncontrolled ferocity by the singular nature of her only desire. Her constant repetitions of how she will kiss the head when she finally has it also highlight the worrying stasis of her failing mind (from Rehearsal Mark 314). Consequently, one cannot presume her to be lucid enough to distinguish the world with any semblance of clarity. This calls into question how accountable Salome could claim to be

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<sup>105</sup> Carolyn Abbate, "Opera of the Envoicing of Women", in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (London: University of California Press, 1993), 247.

– her misreading of the world around her shows how her senses are unravelling, thereby showing how her actions become more and more irrational.

Salome's mental health is arguably a point of contention that points towards a 'victim' status. Essentially, if her mind isn't clear or healthy, then her actions are out of her control. Ergo, one could say that this depravity stems from an imagination run wild, to the point of madness. Strauss's score for the opera has been described in the past as 'the music of insanity' – the argument here is that much of this insanity stems from its main character.<sup>106</sup> Other authors, too, have picked up on Salome's disengagement from total mental stability – Linda and Michael Hutcheon, for example, attribute her 'disconcerting character' to a 'psychic lack of fit'.<sup>107</sup> Thereby, the fact that she is neither completely the virginal victim, nor something altogether darker or more sensual, means that her actions exude an air of uncertainty and inappropriateness, as if she does not quite belong in this musical world.

Something that would contribute to this abnormal state of mind would be the theme of uncertainty regarding Salome's desires in the opera. Salome is very often doubted by other characters onstage, who invariably question and disbelieve the things she says, misjudging her motives and underestimating her spirit. For example, Herod assumes Salome has made a mistake in asking for the head of Jochanaan, and that it cannot be what she really wants. He believes her mother's influence to be the cause of this mistaken longing, as he cannot imagine that such darkness could spring from such an innocent, youthful mind. His offering of other, valuable things in return for Salome's dance shows his disbelief, even though he bequeathed his royal favour to her without thinking of the consequences. Herodias is also guilty of misinterpreting her daughter's actions, further fracturing their familial relationship. She wrongly presumes Salome's request for Jochanaan's head to be an expression of daughterly duty, much as Herod does. Yet through watching Salome's growing interest in the prophet throughout the opera, an audience member might well be expected to conclude that this is false; Salome's obsession with Jochanaan has prompted her demand, rather than her mother's hatred of the prophet. Herodias's self-centred, implacable nature is reflected in her assumption here, and may be the main reason why

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<sup>106</sup> The author is referring to a connection between music composed by Strauss and Berg for *Salome* and *Wozzeck* respectively, as both composers had to compose music that evoked feelings of madness.

Edward Lockspeiser, *Music and Painting: A Study in Comparative Ideas from Turner to Schoenberg* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1973), 58.

<sup>107</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, 'Staging the Female Body: Richard Strauss' *Salome*', in *Siren Songs*, ed. Mary Ann Smart, 204 – 222 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000): 208.

Salome displays such wanton characteristics herself, such as stubbornness and anger. These various queries and miscalculations must serve to make Salome's world more unclear, as she is reminded of her relative youth and inexperience at every turn. The doubts of others lead to her own second-guessing of events, like her mis-hearing of the sound of Jochanaan's execution in the cistern. This shows Salome's failing grasp of reality, as she is constantly bombarded with the assumptions and misunderstandings of others, adding to her illusory perception of the world around her. Her already fragile mental state therefore can only deteriorate throughout the opera, until she is truly without hope. The request for a man's head in order to gain sexual fulfilment must be, after all, the result of psychological imbalance – no one of sound mind could feasibly ask for something so foul.

The fact that Salome performs a dance to the music of the opera, ceasing the flow of singing in order to use her body instead, could, likewise, point towards mental deterioration. Female sexuality and mental illness were being explored as being dangerous, intertwined concepts by the medical profession at the time of the opera's creation. In certain pertinent areas of nineteenth-century Europe, for example France and Germany, women were considered prone to such 'female maladies' as madness. The German psychologist, Sigmund Freud, argued a case for the existence of hysteria, and in many French lunatic asylums, the sexual or 'deviant' behaviour of female patients was often diagnosed as a 'mental illness' of some sort.<sup>108 109</sup> Dance is an activity which makes use of the body's shape, and can conjure up notions of sensuality and earthliness. Therefore, in this century, where the 'pathological dominated the medical discourse of female sexuality', and said pathology 'directly linked hysteria to the dancing body', one could see Salome's temptation to dance as a sign of her hysterical tendencies coming to light.<sup>110</sup>

On the subject of dangerous women and hysteria in opera, Romana Margherita Pugliese argues that the reason Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* gained more recognition at the *fin-de-siècle* was partly due to an extraordinary new cadenza, and partly because the audience became more open to the concept of the non-virginal, non-docile madwoman. By the end of the nineteenth century, the opera's controversial 'mad scene' had become its most famous part, enabling the opera to 'reinvent itself', with its 'dangerous' female character at

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<sup>108</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Hysteria beyond Freud* (California: University of California Press, 1993), 315.

<sup>109</sup> In fact, doctors would often diagnose female patients with 'monomania', which was a condition thought to originate from the menstrual cycle – menstruation was thought to be the cause of many neurotic disorders at this time.

James F. Macmillan, *France and Women 1789 – 1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 102.

<sup>110</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, 'Staging the Female Body: Richard Strauss' *Salome*', in *Siren Songs*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 214.



the centre.<sup>111</sup> Pugliese attributes this new lease of life to the century's growing interests in the female psyche and physiology, citing the research of such scientists as Frenchman Jean-Martin Charcot as an influence on the art and music of the period. As such, the "vogue" for madwomen stimulated by Charcot' was 'rendered more acceptable' on-stage by these scientific efforts to understand insanity in women.<sup>112</sup> Although, by contemporary standards, this research was somewhat misguided and may have done more harm than good in advancing women's place in society, it did ensure that audiences were more receptive to the 'madwoman' character, which is echoed in *Salome*.

Music itself, at times, also plays a part in how an audience might view *Salome's* death as a wrongful, terrible occurrence, instead of an act of violent justice. As observed by Renée Cox Lorraine, the music *Salome* sings immediately before her sudden death is 'diatonic, ethereal, and beautiful' (from Rehearsal Mark 359). The prominence of the harp, soaring up and down at this point, and the stirringly loud volume of the rest of the orchestra, emphasise the strange, uplifting beauty of the scene. She is also described as being bathed in moonlight right after her final vocal line, shining in her moment of triumph (Rehearsal Mark 361). This is in contrast to the music that scores her sudden demise, which is 'unstable and dissonant' (from Rehearsal Mark 362).<sup>113</sup> Clearly, this is due, in part, to the nature of the action it describes, which is equally unpleasant. Yet considering what *Salome* has just done, in demanding a man's death then kissing his disembodied head, one would imagine her music at this moment to be of a darker, more dissonant nature. However, it is surprising in its joy.

Strauss chose to make this climactic scene one of triumph, as if written from *Salome's* point of view, rather than scoring the awfulness of her decision. The music seems to fleetingly support *Salome* in her darkest moment, instead of chastising her. It also becomes frenzied at the point of her demise, frantically illustrating the brutal events happening onstage. The moment Herod orders his soldiers to kill *Salome*, the orchestra bursts into frantic life, with the strings scratching out semiquaver runs, accompanied by fortissimo chords from the brass and woodwind (final 9 bars of the opera). Only the viciousness of the death is portrayed – there is, musically, no justice for the innocent prophet who has lost his life because of a young girl's cruel wishes. The music here, therefore, speaks on behalf of the

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<sup>111</sup> Romana Margherita Pugliese, 'The Origins of *Lucia di Lammermoor's* cadenza', in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol 16, No. 1 (March 2004), 35.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>113</sup> Renée Cox Lorraine, "Recovering *Jouissance*: Feminist Aesthetics and Music", in *Women and Music: A History*, ed. Karin Pendle (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001), 7.

titular character's feelings, and no one else's. In 'Opera or the Envoicing of Women', Carolyn Abbate discusses an issue raised by Lawrence Kramer, pertaining to his insinuation that the music in *Salome* might be 'Herod's accomplice'.<sup>114</sup> Given Salome's eventual fate, this view is not out of the realms of possibility. Yet, with regard to the way Salome's victory and demise are illustrated, one could answer this question with another: if the music were Herod's accomplice in a total and complete way, then why does it appear to support Salome's position?

### **A question of love**

Whilst it would be foolish to presume that Salome's feelings for Jochanaan are as deep and pure as those felt by other operatic characters, like Wagner's Isolde and Puccini's Mimi, there might be a slightly different viewpoint. Herodias's obvious lack of traditional, affectionate maternal feeling, displayed in her coarse pride at her daughter's sickening attitude towards Jochanaan, coupled with the fact that the princess seems to have no contemporaries in the court of which to speak, shows that Salome is starved of all kinds of love and affection.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, her need for the attention of Jochanaan could be read as a severe manifestation of loneliness and a need to connect with another human being on a deep, emotional level – the desire to escape association with the chaste, solitary moon.

Other operas, including the ones covered in this thesis, tell tales of men and women falling hopelessly in love after a short meeting. This plot line is quite convenient to an art form that normally only lasts on stage for a matter of hours, where one therefore needs a love story to begin with the utmost swiftness. This way, an audience can invest in the relationship of the two characters, before it often meets its untimely demise and provides a highly expressive, heart-wrenching ending. Opera, as a part of the theatrical tradition, also uses rapidly developing stories in its depiction of romance, and is full of ill-fated relationships that end almost as suddenly as they begin. As Susan Rutherford points out, while lots of women die alone in opera, lovers will often die together.<sup>116</sup> Although this does

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<sup>114</sup> Carolyn Abbate, "Opera, or the Envoicing of Women" in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (London: University of California Press, 1993), 239.

<sup>115</sup> One could argue that Narraboth is a source of love to Salome. However, his affection in the opera barely seems to go beyond a superficial kind of infatuation with the Princess, as he only talks of her beauty. Salome's response to Narraboth's feelings is to selfishly use them for her own gain – therefore, she does not see Narraboth as a character worthy of her regard, which discounts him as a potential source of fond emotion.

<sup>116</sup> Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 12.

not always happen, there are many examples of this plot device in operas throughout the centuries – as one lover passes away, the other cannot live without them, and follows suit. Rutherford is apt in her observation of this trope, which applies to such works as *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Tristan and Isolde*. In fact, reviewers who were writing of the opera's first ever performance even likened *Salome's* climactic moment to Wagner's most romantic opera. Indeed, the more open-minded reviewers watched, and, 'instead of being repulsed by her kissing of the decapitated head, they compared that moment to the ecstatic apotheosis in the final of *Tristan and Isolde*'.<sup>117</sup> This shows that, even with the provocative subject which shocked many audiences at the time, some viewers and critics were able to see the beauty in such a horrific moment. To some, at least, the act referenced a deeply emotional connection, even if its perversity revoked the sweeter connotations attached to such a thing.

Moreover, in some operas where this feature is present, the female protagonist dies after the male protagonist – one could take the two afore-mentioned works as examples of this. Other examples would be Brünnhilde refusing to live without Siegfried, Senta choosing to save the Dutchman and ascending to heaven with him, Tosca committing suicide to join Cavaradossi, and Ariadne following Bacchus into the realm of death in Strauss's own *Ariadne auf Naxos*. It is as if the woman in question, referring to Juliet, Isolde, and others, could not envisage a life without her male counterpart, and therefore finds a way to join him in death. This operatic plot line was well-established by the late nineteenth century, and, technically, is part-replicated in Strauss's opera.

Of course, because of the dark, unrequited nature of Salome's feelings for Jochanaan, one cannot equate the 'dying lovers' theme with this opera to a large extent. However, it is true that she is attracted to him within minutes of their first meeting, forming a strong, life-changing attachment over a very short space of time. She spends the duration of the opera cultivating this attachment, feeling its effects, and doing all she can to ensure that Jochanaan knows of her presence, whilst ignoring all who are not him. At the end of the opera, when she finally accomplishes that precious moment of physical contact which she has been craving over the course of the work, she expresses excitement and ecstasy. Furthermore, she does not survive for very long after Jochanaan is murdered by the executioner, her wish having been fulfilled. The timing of her death, right after her love's

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<sup>117</sup> Joy H. Calico, 'Staging Scandal with *Salome* and *Elektra*', in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 67.

execution and her deepest wish coming true, is quite in keeping with the trope of the dying lovers. Could Salome live without Jochanaan, once she had decided he was meant for her? One can only speculate – however, the opera’s reference to the trope is certainly thought-provoking. Strauss may not have meant to allude to the canon of operatic lovers’ deaths, as the rest of the opera breaks all convention with the traditional tragic love story. Yet the timing of Salome’s death, as it happens minutes after Jochanaan’s, coupled with the depth of feeling, even considering its unrequited nature, provides a skewed vision of Rutherford’s dying lovers’ motif.

## Chapter Three

### *Femme Fatale*

If the female victim, in art and in other aspects, is one side of a coin, it could be argued that the other side pertains to the *femme fatale* type. Where the victim in art forms like opera is typically submissive, passive, and arguably created to evoke feelings of sympathy in the recipient, the *femme fatale* portrays a very different, opposing set of characteristics. She is often in possession of a great deal of power, which tends to be sexual in nature, and ensures that men especially are both entranced by and afraid of her. This power is sometimes of an uncertain morality, although it is easy to portray the *femme fatale* as a force for evil or as an antagonist.

Owing to the antiquated view that men were the natural heroes of stories, the idea that a woman could feasibly possess an equal amount of power provoked unease. Therefore, it was easier to put the *femme fatale* into a more indefinite space, in ethical and moral terms. Her confidence in being a sexual being, and knowing that the male weakness for sex was something that could be used to her advantage, heightened the aura of danger surrounding the type. This was especially prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, since sexuality as a concept became 'carefully confined', and was 'moved into the home'.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, any female character whose knowledge of her own, and others', sexuality could be used as a weapon would have proved an immediate threat to the men around her. Moreover, whilst female victims are forced into situations by others that often turn out to be unlucky for them, *femmes fatales* will assess their situation and work out how to use it to their advantage. Whether this proves successful can only be determined from the outcome of the opera, and these denouements can vary from opera to opera, depending on a number of factors.

Many of the features accredited to *femme fatales* are often more commonly found in male characters, such as the desire for power and influence. The overall 'maleness' that one could ascribe to this type also takes away some of its gender clarity. This would make the typical *femme fatale* even more of a threat to the harmony of an artistic work, due to its abundance of ambiguity through female dominance and opinion. It is easier to make assumptions about, and build up a picture of, a character if their attributes are well-

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<sup>118</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978), 3.

defined. However, if parts of their identity are blurred or completely unexpected, this can lead to more detachment from the character, or an unwillingness to identify with them. Therefore, the appearance of traits conventionally associated with men in a woman on stage, such as arrogance, cunning and audacity, could lead to a disconnect between the expectations and actual representation of a female character.

Elements of the *femme fatale* personality also appear somewhat in other common female character types that can be associated with opera, including such stylistic stock characters as 'the Gorgon, the Siren, the madwoman [and] the prostitute'.<sup>119</sup> Examples of operas which contain these stereotypes include *The Magic Flute* (the Gorgon, i.e. The Queen of the Night), *La traviata* (the prostitute, i.e. Violetta), and *Lucia di Lammermoor* (the madwoman, i.e. Lucia). None of these caricatures of women are particularly flattering, apart from the 'Siren' which will be discussed later in this thesis – however, they all have some connection to the *femme fatale* trope, whether it presents in the form of strength, sexual power, or a dangerous nature. Therefore, one can see how often the trope appears in opera, under many different guises, and in many genres and across many eras.

The trope of the *femme fatale* is also an important and relevant one in the context of this thesis, due to the time period covered by the four operas. At the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of the dangerous woman became extremely popular – fashionable, even – within the world of art and music. Indeed, the writer Bram Dijkstra, in his critique of this era, summed up that 'the *fin-de-siècle*'s fantasies to form the primal woman' were a reaction against the female sex, perhaps trying to reclaim 'those paradisiac days before woman had forced the evolutionary process into motion'.<sup>120</sup> He notes that turn-of-the-century writers, composers, and artists alike, were undoubtedly drawn to depicting biblical examples of 'emasculating feminine perfidy', such as those of Judith, and Samson and Dalila, often exaggerating the deviousness and depravity of the women featured.<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, in an essay focussing on the sudden, heightened popularity of the *femme fatale*-driven opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, in *fin-de-siècle* society, Romana Margherita Pugliese argues that the reason this opera gained more recognition was partly due to an extraordinary new cadenza, and partly because the audience became more open to the concept of the non-virginal, non-docile madwoman. By the end of the nineteenth century,

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<sup>119</sup> Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, eds., *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>120</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 364.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

the opera's controversial 'mad scene' had become its most famous part, enabling the opera to 'reinvent itself', with its 'dangerous' female character at the centre.<sup>122</sup> Pugliese attributes this new lease of life to the century's growing interests in the female psyche and physiology, citing the research of such scientists as Frenchman Jean-Martin Charcot as an influence on the art and music of the period. As such, the "vogue' for madwomen stimulated by Charcot' was 'rendered more acceptable' on-stage by these scientific efforts to understand insanity in women.<sup>123</sup> Although, by contemporary standards, this research was somewhat misguided and may have done more harm than good in advancing women's place in society, it did ensure that audiences were more receptive to the *femme fatale* character, and thus impacted *fin-de-siècle* culture, bringing the archetype to the forefront of Western opera.

### **The *Femme Fatale* in biblical and operatic tradition**

The biblical tradition of the *femme fatale* can be traced back to such women as Jezebel and Lilith. Of these two characters, the former is known for inciting her husband to worship false prophets, showing a dangerous amount of influence and a disregard for significant Christian rules. The latter is associated with creatures of the night in the ancient Hebrew tradition. Therefore, in the Judeo-Christian faith, the trope began to emerge from the beginning of the practice of writing.

Opera's reliance on the strong, independent, yet wily, female trope is also extremely evident. As mentioned before, characters such as Carmen and Lulu are the subjects of popular operas, with both female protagonists making dangerous and dramatic decisions that lead to their deaths. Their magnetic, unique personalities, which shine brighter than those of the other characters that occupy their respective works, are red flags to the male contingent on-stage. Although both female characters have many of the qualities of the *femme fatale*, neither is particularly murderous or malicious in their intent or demeanour. Other operatic *femme fatales*, like The Queen of the Night, exude a far more threatening and fanatical strain of the trope, illustrating its variation within the art form. This

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<sup>122</sup> Romana Margherita Pugliese, 'The Origins of Lucia di Lammermoor's cadenza', in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol 16, No. 1 (March 2004), 35.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

incarnation of the *femme fatale* appears in the works featured in this thesis, which seeks to prove that within opera ‘the reservoir of villainous women is always brimming’.<sup>124</sup>

### **Dalila the *Femme Fatale***

The operatic character in this thesis who could instantly be deemed a fitting example of the *femme fatale* trope is Dalila, from the work by Saint-Saëns. The opera’s plot, which comes from The Book of Judges, concerns Samson, whose dalliance with the scheming and beautiful Dalila has fatal consequences. It is an opera which remains in the popular canon, and is widely considered to be Saint-Saëns’s ‘operatic masterpiece’.<sup>125</sup> There are many parallels one can find between this opera and *Salome*, not least the presence of a strong and scheming main female character, in both plot and music.<sup>126</sup> For example, there is a sensuous, dance-like musical sequence in both works, which provides an exotic and erotic element to the proceedings. There is also a male character in each who, according to common preconceptions, should be much stronger in resisting the main female character than he actually is. The composers both played with the idea of biblical temptation, and the consequences of giving into it. Thirty years before *Salome* was composed, the tragic tale of Samson and Dalila, based on the verses from The Book of Judges, was set to music by Saint-Saëns. The result is his only opera to remain in the performance canon. Although the Bible, unsurprisingly, focuses on Samson’s bravery and the sadness of his downfall, the opera concentrates on the actions and motives of Dalila. The work has been referred to as an ‘erotically charged’ piece – further explorations into the scheming character of Dalila will reveal why this is so.<sup>127</sup>

In the Bible, Samson is portrayed as a hero, blessed with huge strength and a great deal of righteousness. The Book of Judges details how he was wise enough to lead the Israelites for twenty years, and strong enough to kill a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey. The good deeds for which he is celebrated are not recounted in the opera, however; it is merely the way that he meets and is charmed by Dalila which is explored. Incurring the wrath of

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<sup>124</sup> Derrick Puffett, *Richard Strauss Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>125</sup> Arthur Hervey, *Saint-Saëns* (New York: Dodd Mead & Company, 1970), 4.

<sup>126</sup> Huebner remarks that the opera’s second act is very Dalila-heavy – she not only sings in each section of the act, but ‘dominates’ the important ‘seduction duet’ between her character and Samson, making it clear who is driving the opera’s plot at this point.

Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin De Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 208.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



the Philistines, Samson is targeted by the High Priest of Dagon. Dalila is employed as a means of distraction and trickery, in that her beauty is assumed to be great enough to seduce the Hebrew hero. Unfortunately for Samson, the High Priest is correct in his assumptions, and Dalila is able to use her womanly charms to gain Samson's trust. The fact that he eventually gives up the secret of his strength to her in exchange for her affections shows that in this world, as in *Salome's*, women hold a great amount of power. This power, in the wrong female hands, is also extremely dangerous, and can bring about death with frightening ease. In this case, unlike *Salome*, the death at the opera's denouement extends to the entirety of the characters onstage. The slaughter is directly caused by Samson's grief, although it is clear that Dalila's deceit is the reason for this damning display of violence.

Dalila's two arias are very popular songs for the operatic mezzo-soprano. They both occur at quite pivotal points, in the first and second acts, and their lyrics are clever in hiding the character's true feelings. The dramatic irony of the story means that, for anyone watching the whole opera, Dalila's falseness should be quite apparent, yet the hero himself hears truth where others hear lies. This adds to the sympathy with which one might view Samson, thus making Dalila seem even more unlikeable. His goodness and heart-warming, yet slightly pitiful, trust in Dalila contrast completely with her own wickedness and relative cunning. They are polar opposites in character, and often their respective musical lines and accompanying themes are very different. Dalila's first aria, 'Printemps qui commence', which is discussed later in this chapter, is a prime example of the character's delicate yet insincere musical language (Rehearsal Mark L, Act 1, Scene 6).<sup>128</sup> The delicacy of this aria is easy to discern, in the gentle string accompaniment, and the simple, repeated musical phrases, like those starting on bars 1 and 8. The rising tone which begins these phrases, which becomes a recurrent feature in the song, also creates a sense of familiarity. However, the insincerity stems from the song's lyrics, which describe Dalila's hope that love will return to her soon – a sentiment directed at a captivated Samson, and meant entirely as bait for his defeat.

Contrast is used cleverly to make Dalila appear even more appealing to Samson in the first act of the opera. Near the end of this act, as Samson begins to fall under her spell, the only voice of reason telling him to use caution regarding this woman is that of the Old Hebrew. This character speaks words of great importance, yet they fall on deaf ears. His comparison of Dalila's voice with a snake's venom echoes the story of creation – his labelling of the

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<sup>128</sup> Score of *Samson and Dalila* used throughout:  
Camille Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Dalila*, (Edwin F. Kalmus: Boca Raton, 1987).

female character as a temptress is perceptive. The fact that the face of reason belongs to an old, male character is interesting, as it not only reinforces the idea that Hebrew men are the only force for good in this story, but also provides a superficially unattractive counter to Dalila. Her words are honeyed, and her agile, high voice is delicate and feminine, whereas the Old Hebrew is blunt and truthful in his warnings. Using antiphony between the two voices, Dalila's, and the Old Hebrew's, is an interesting move by the composer (from Rehearsal Mark O, Act 1, Scene 6). The different messages of the two vocal lines, juxtaposing warning with enticement, also prove that contrast is a heady weapon in Saint-Saëns's arsenal. The angular, functional quality of the Old Hebrew's lines, made up of simple, stepwise movements and restrained leaps of fourths and fifths (3<sup>rd</sup> bar of Rehearsal Mark O), is noticeably dissimilar from Dalila's soaring up and down her mezzo range, using more complex rhythms (Rehearsal Mark P). The fact that Dalila succeeds in the musical battle between these two contrasting voices seals Samson's wretched fate, as the Old Hebrew is correct in his accusations.

### **Samson and the Siren's Song**

Before Dalila sings her aria in the sixth scene of Act One, the women of Dagon set the scene in the sweetest, most angelic way possible. They sit on the steps of the temple, each with a garland made of flowers, singing of subjects such as beauty and springtime (4<sup>th</sup> bar of Scene 6). This idyllic scene is accompanied by music that enhances the pleasant atmosphere. Even if the music begins in a minor key, its pianissimo dynamic and small, neat, repeated phrases are sweet enough to provide a sense of anticipation. The expectant music and the framing of Dalila by other Philistine maidens are clever ways to push the scene forward, towards its emotional climax: Dalila's aria (Dalila's entrance begins at Rehearsal Mark B, Scene 6).

Before this occurs, the *allegretto* tempo of the music, plus the rhythmic use of the tambourine, allow for a dance to take place (Rehearsal Mark F). Dance is, of course, one of the foremost seductive tools of the *femme fatale*, and it is used to great effect in this opera. The music and the rhythmic movement of the female characters onstage help to create a show worthy of Samson's attention, even if he is understandably reluctant to be drawn in to the world of the Philistines. However, the dramatic, intense tone of the music which comes just before this scene gives way perfectly to the playfulness and beauty of the dance. The trap for Samson is slowly being laid, with Dalila at its centre.

The directions given in the score state that Samson, when greeted with this view, cannot take his eyes off Dalila, in spite of himself (Samson enters with an aside in the 10<sup>th</sup> bar of Scene 6). Dalila is also explicitly referred to as 'l'enchantresse'. This label contributes to the idea of the female character as a darkly magical entity, able to entice even the most pure and strong-willed of men with her spell of beauty. Furthermore, if the woman is seen as having power equal to some sort of enchanting magic, then it is even less the fault of the man if he succumbs to her will. Equating Dalila's seductive skills with a force greater than that of a mortal human being means Samson can barely take any blame for giving up his secret to her. It also helps to render Dalila as being distinctly 'other', in that she cannot be connected to God or Samson's people in any way. The purity of the Israelite people's faith in God, which is encompassed in the character of Samson, is offset by Dalila's sensual power in such a way that her very presence is tinged with the opposite of godliness. Therefore, one gains an insight into how the composer and librettist might have wanted the character to be viewed by the audience, with this simple label in the stage directions. Samson's free will is called into question when considering that Dalila's power over him has a charmed quality about it. She is built up to be mentally and emotionally stronger than the hero, whose physical strength cannot save him from the song of the enchantress.

'Printemps qui commence' is heralded by a very definite change in the opera's mood. The tempo switches to a slow waltz-like tempo, with a lilting softness to it, creating a serene, settled ambiance on-stage (Rehearsal Mark L, Scene 6). This is aided by the warmth emanating from the calm bed of string sound that forms the song's introduction. Referring back to the Locke signifiers of exoticism, one can see that Saint-Saëns has included some of these features in Dalila's music. For example, in 'Printemps qui commence', the texture of the introduction is quite bare, with the luxurious melody sitting on top. There is also much melismatic writing for the alto singer, which again conjures an air of orientalist decadence. This is emphasised by the more syllabic parts of the opera's male characters, further marking Dalila out as a foreign force within the opera.

The fact that the part of Dalila is written for a mezzo soprano is fully exploited during the first vocal phrase. Rather than writing the role for a soprano, Saint-Saëns chose a lower tessitura for the female antagonist. Perhaps this was because the operatic tradition often dictates that the main heroine, or female protagonist, is played by a soprano singer. The high vocal register is agile, pure, and, at least since the point when operatic castrati disappeared, unabashedly feminine. Many of opera's most famous heroines, including those from Mozart's, Verdi's, and Puccini's works, are in possession of a soprano voice,

whether it be lyric, dramatic, or another vocal subsection. However, Dalila's first aria begins mid-range, and contains a modest compound-second leap in its first few bars (8<sup>th</sup> bar of Rehearsal Mark L). The slightly deeper tessitura of the mezzo soprano is appreciated in moments such as this, because it allows for a more sensuous, unctuous sound. As Susan Rutherford wryly details, 'operatic lust [belongs] primarily to the lower register', and Dalila's persuasive arias prove no exception to the rule.<sup>129</sup> There is hidden meaning behind the pretty lyrics, as Dalila is an experienced and clever *femme fatale* with a personal agenda.

### **The impact of race**

Another interesting thing linking the femmes fatales discussed in this thesis is the fact they are of a different race than the heroic male figures of the operas. This adds to the general feeling of 'Otherness', as Susan McClary, and many others, might see it, that surrounds their character. The creation of 'vampirish, treacherous women' who served as magnetic antagonists in musical works became quite popular in the nineteenth century, coupled with the fact that they were also 'marked racially as 'Other''.<sup>130</sup>

Being female figures that inhabit worlds of an Eastern, rather than familiar Western, nature, Salome and Dalila were also likely to be portrayed easily as both 'objects of desire', and women who could 'actively desire' themselves.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, not only are they treacherous women, but they are in possession of opposing religious belief systems. Salome's Jewish heritage is at odds with the Christian figure who speaks from the cistern. It has been noted that the general view of the Jewish people in nineteenth-century Western culture was not a favorable one. In fact, Anne L. Seshadri makes the point that during this time, 'Jews were perceived as being a nation apart' by the predominantly Christian West, showing how nineteenth-century audiences may have held prejudices against the race portrayed in *Salome*.<sup>132</sup> Every character in the opera is of Hebrew origin, as they are all part

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<sup>129</sup> Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera 1830-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 228.

<sup>130</sup> Carolyn Abbate 'Opera, or the envoicing of women', in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (London: University of California Press, 1993), 338.

<sup>131</sup> Male Western fantasies of Eastern women would typically feature said women as odalisque-type figures, who were therefore completely sexually available and experienced. Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental Other: Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*', *The Cambridge Opera Journal*, No. 3, Vol 3 (1991), 269.

<sup>132</sup> Anne L. Seshadri, "The Taste of Love: Salome's Transfiguration", in *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2006), 25.

of Herod's court, except, of course, for Jochanaan. None of these figures are particularly likeable in any way – even the nameless Jews who sing before Jochanaan enters are locked in a meaningless quarrel. Moreover, a character such as Narraboth, who should engage the audience's sympathy at his death, does not engender much compassion, spending the majority of his time onstage in a state of cowardice and weakness. The most one may be able to feel at Narraboth's sudden, melodramatic display of suicidal intent is pity.

Lastly, the three members of the Jewish family at the heart of the opera's conflict do not constitute a stable unit. The King, the Queen, and the Princess all exhibit traits which shock and sadden, exuding a general sense of unpleasantness. Jochanaan is deep, powerful, and enduring in his song until the end, which contrasts with the aura of superficial excess and moral depravity that emanates from the Jewish court's rulers. Salome's music, on the other hand, contributes to her position as 'other' by appearing more erratic and exotic than that of Jochanaan. For example, the huge range required for the performing soprano reflects the wide scope of the character's personality, perhaps equaling Jochanaan in power, but not in stoicism. The fact that Salome's vocal lines can reach the heights of a high soprano's tessitura, but can also stray into the territory of a typical alto, highlights the character's changeable personality and fitful temper. Additionally, some of the instrumental music accompanying Salome's actions connotes 'other' in different ways. The chord that forms the climax of the scene in which she kisses Jochanaan's head is highly chromatic, a terrifying mix of clashing notes and unsettling volume (bar before 361). Moreover, the oriental feel to the music of The Dance of the Seven Veils is possibly the opera's most overt use of exoticism, manifesting in the abundance of percussion and interesting rhythmic patterns. The Dance can be seen to represent 'Salome's exotic and sinuous evocations of her teenage erotic fantasies and desires', with sensual features such as an 'insinuating oriental theme' and 'luxurious melodiousness'.<sup>133</sup> These elements of the music help to create the atmosphere with which Salome sets herself apart from the other characters, showing herself to be surprisingly adept at the art of physical seduction, given her age and inexperience.

Religion is also something that sets Dalila apart from Samson. Her people, the Dagonites, do not present a particularly positive image, owing to their spiteful treatment of Samson. The latter's main crime is to fall too deeply in love with a seductive female to heed the warnings of the other Hebrews, exposing a great deal of stupidity and stubbornness, but little in the

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<sup>133</sup> Burton D. Fisher, *Richard Strauss's Salome* (Coral Gables, Fla: Opera Journeys Publishing, 2002), 21.

way of malice. However, the Dagonites' plan, as well as being extremely harmful to the wellbeing of the Hebrew people, is also carried out in an underhand fashion. Rather than sending an army to use force to defeat their enemies, the Dagonites employ a woman to toy with the emotions of a heroic figure, in order to extract information and debilitate him completely.

The operation carried out by Dalila is one that wreaks gross emotional damage, which she neither seems to consider nor care about. Her coldness is only matched by her willingness to complete the task, as her hatred of Samson's people drives her actions. This coldness of spirit contrasts deeply with Samson's fresh and sweet emotion that is awakened in him due to the lies of Dalila, as his genuine feelings mirror her false ones. All of the deviousness contained in the plot to overthrow Samson reflects undeniably badly on the Dagonite people and their female weapon, as the opposing characters are mainly comprised of calm, sage, old Hebrew men. Every contrast between Dalila's people and Samson's people is heightened by their differing beliefs, as their influences and approaches are wont to show. The music of the opera also marks her as 'other', even in its instrumental sections. For example, one can immediately notice the difference between the opening of the first act and the second, which is driven by Dalila, and starts with a hushed flurry of string activity and held flute chords (Act 2, Prélude). These things emphasize the atmosphere of anticipation that falls just before we meet the Dagonite women. Moreover, the Bacchanale, which takes place in scene 2 of act 3, has an explicit exoticism that provides the perfect accompaniment for a wild and erotic dance. The memorable semi-quaver rhythms in the lower strings, timpani and, unusually, castanets, and the swirling, pentatonic melodies, immediately suggest orientalism. This music is a lot like Dalila: charming, exquisite, superficial, and perhaps meant to be utterly irresistible.

Therefore, one can see the importance in designating the antagonistic *femme fatale* as not only 'other' in terms of gender, but also in terms of race. It helps to create another barrier between the hero and his eventual enemy, whilst adding an element of exotic mystery to the female character – and it has been mentioned before in this thesis how misguided nineteenth- and twentieth-century opera could be when portraying the exotic. As Nicholas Till sums up this concept of exoticism that punctuates these operas through their female antiheroines, 'the term exotic has come to mean much more than merely foreign' – indeed,

it becomes a marker for all those things that connote difference, of which one can be afraid, like the 'feminized/barbaric/pagan other'.<sup>134</sup>

### **Salome: showing a different side**

It is important to note that, whilst the female types examined in this thesis are undeniably present in opera and in biblical texts, it is also possible for the types to co-exist in one character. Some of the characters within this thesis provide evidence for this, as they could be interpreted by different people in different ways, depending on one's preconceptions of women. This illustrates that, whilst female character types do exist, one can find some flexibility when analysing them in relation to women in opera. Therefore, although, in the previous chapter, Salome was discussed in a sympathetic light, acknowledging her innocence and tragedy, her character also relates to the *femme fatale* ideal. Indeed, some authors have classed her with such characters as Dalila and Carmen, referring to her as an obvious example of 'the typical *femme fatale* in the long operatic tradition'.<sup>135</sup>

There are many reasons why Salome could fit into both categories of female character, perhaps providing evidence as to why the opera and the anti-heroine have been the subjects of many books and essays since its creation. Firstly, Salome suffers from an all-consuming kind of possessiveness - a trait she has clearly absorbed from her step-father. This possessive streak is illustrated in the attitude she has towards the body of Jochanaan, which, in a way, could be interpreted as a longing for ultimate control. In other words, if she cannot possess Jochanaan's body and soul, then no one can. This is perhaps why Salome cannot be content with the thought of Jochanaan simply spending the rest of his days in his cistern prison. His life had to end, so that she could be safe in the knowledge that no one, not even God, could be the focus of his attention.

Salome's spite is also mirrored in Herod's actions at the end of the opera. His horror at seeing what Salome does with Jochanaan's corpse could be tinged, not only with disgust and fear, but with jealousy. Salome danced for him only - he employed his gaze to look at her, but did not touch her. Her general aversion to being in Herod's presence,

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<sup>134</sup> Nicholas Till, "An Exotic and Irrational Entertainment: Opera and our Others, Opera as Other", in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till, 298-324 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 299.

<sup>135</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, 'Staging the Female Body: Richard Strauss' Salome', in *Siren Songs*, ed. Mary Ann Smart, 204-222 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 210.

understandable due to his constant, unpleasant fixation, cannot go wholly unnoticed by the ruler. His delight in finally gaining a dance from the girl is tempered by his realisation that she is both mentally disturbed, and completely uninterested in him sexually, preferring the company of a body-less head. Thereby, one can see again the surprising similarities in the characters of Salome and Herod, despite their apparent dissociation. This dichotomy between the two figures is echoed in the fact that, although the opera makes use of many keys, almost to the point of atonality, two keys stand out above the rest. The two most important keys, identified by Derrick Puffett as C and C#, could be said to represent the male characters who are at odds with each other - namely, Herod and Jochanaan.<sup>136</sup> If this were the case, one would view the key of C as being closer to Jochanaan, as his music is frequently of a more diatonic style, and also uses keys that are close to C, such as E flat major. However, if the key of C were taken instead as a link to Herod, one could see the two keys as a deliberate manifestation of the power play between Herod and Salome (with whom the key of C# is most associated).<sup>137</sup> The key contrast almost becomes a battle as both fight for their right to be heard. Even though Jochanaan is a powerful man of great integrity and faith, who counters the gross decadence of Herod, the entire opera is out of his control. His words and actions do almost nothing to help his fate. Whilst his voice begins the chain of events that spiral out of control, it is the reactions of Salome and Herod that influence the lives of other characters like Narraboth, and lead to the final bloody show-down. Therefore, it doesn't necessarily follow that the presence of two keys illustrates the opera's two main male characters – rather, it may stand for the contrast between the two most active characters in the work, as their interplay is more frequent and developed than that which passes between Herod and Jochanaan.

The places in which both of these active characters begin the opera are also important to note. The significance of Jochanaan's low position below the stage only becomes clear when he begins to sing. His eerie, disembodied voice, with its pious reckonings, awakens Salome's imagination and desire, without her seeing his physical form. She listens, rapt with attention, drinking in every word that drifts up to her. As Jochanaan does not know that she is listening to his song, Salome therefore becomes equal to a common voyeur, taking pleasure from something which is not meant for her. However, instead of viewing

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<sup>136</sup> Derrick Puffett, *Richard Strauss: Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 82.

<sup>137</sup> Whilst the key of C is much more commonly associated with Jochanaan, Herod can also lay claim to it. It has been remarked that even though 'neither C minor nor C major is exclusively Herod's key', it is also true that 'he is rarely referred to in any other'.  
Ibid., 94.



something forbidden, Salome listens without licence, and interprets the song in her own, twisted way. It awakens her deviance, with its vengeful language, calling to a part of her that does not yet understand itself. Musically, this manifests itself firstly in the pitch of Salome's vocal line. After Salome hears the low male voice for the first time, she responds in kind, and the lower register of the soprano tessitura is explored. For example, when demanding to know who cried out from the cistern, the first note Salome sings is an E flat, which is only a minor third above the note Jochanaan lands upon in the preceding bars (Rehearsal Mark 31). From this point on, she also begins to use more sexual language, highlighting how Jochanaan's rough words have entered into her speech too.<sup>138</sup> This shows how easily the girl is influenced, and how the lust for Jochanaan seeps into her music immediately, setting off the chain of events that lead to his and, eventually, her death.

The contrast between Jochanaan, who remains a devout and dutiful Christian until his death, and the wilful Salome is made very clear in the opera. This only succeeds in creating more distance between the two characters, as her actions next to those of the saintly figure in the cistern seem worse than if they were simply juxtaposed with those of Herod, for example. Jochanaan, for all his implacable resentment of Herodias, is the dark hero in a palace full of excess.<sup>139</sup> We hear this in the horn calls and string flourishes that accompany his entrance (2 bars after Rehearsal Mark 11), as they call to mind an image of a dashing, heroic man – the dishevelled yet determined prisoner who rises from the cistern instead is therefore a surprise. The bravery suggested by the music may not be plainly apparent in the character, but his resolve and commitment to God in the face of his murderous enemies is, in many ways, admirable. The fact he is not seduced by Salome's advances also shows Jochanaan's strength of character, whereas the former's weakness for the prophet indicates her impurity. This is made even more shocking by the way that the two characters break convention with type.

Traditionally, the young, virginal girl would be the purest, sweetest, and perhaps most conventionally likeable, character in a work – one can cite many plays and operas that support this. For example, a large number of Shakespeare's plays, like *Romeo and Juliet* and

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<sup>138</sup> Linda and Michael Hutcheon also bring up this point in their work, noting that Jochanaan is the first character in the entire opera to use 'the language of sexuality', and this language is then thrown back at him when Salome develops her strange attraction.

Linda and Michael Hutcheon, 'Staging the Female Body: Richard Strauss' *Salome*', in *Siren Songs*, ed. Mary Ann Smart, 204 – 222 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 210.

<sup>139</sup> 'Dark' in the sense that, despite his Christian beliefs, he uses coarse and sexualised language to describe Herodias, which is also overheard by her young daughter. He is far from an uncomplicated hero.

*The Tempest*, feature young, innocent women whose purity is admired by those characters surrounding them. Likewise, Wagnerian opera contains some important virginal heroines, like Senta, whose delicate music often necessitates both projection and purity in the soprano that sings the part. However, in Strauss's opera, the composer takes great delight in portraying the young girl as potentially the most sordid and depraved, amongst many unpleasant characters. Even though Salome has all the physical traits associated with the type of the untainted virgin, Jochanaan is the symbol of purity. This means that Salome seems even less pure, edging even closer to ground normally occupied by *femmes fatales*, despite her appearance and tender years. The use of colour in the opera's libretto also illustrates the opposite natures of the two characters. Like the pure moon (which is likened, tellingly, to a virgin), Jochanaan is described as being ivory white, emphasising his abundance of virtue and his unspoiled soul. Conversely, the prophet criticises Salome's gold eyes and shimmering eyelids, gold being a sign of wealth and, by extension, greed. This is echoed in the girl's appetite for the prophet, which is truly greed of the flesh.

Although Salome fulfils part of the conventional types of both the *femme fatale* and the victim by meeting her demise, there is an onstage death in the opera which perhaps appears even more 'feminine'. Narraboth is a character whose obsession for another rivals even that of Salome – unfortunately for him, it is the titular girl whose affection he craves. This man is the very definition of a plaintive, lovesick tenor for whom love is an unfortunate affliction. His music is therefore extremely different from the low, masculine sound-world that Jochanaan inhabits, and he spends much of his time onstage either attentively yet fruitlessly addressing the princess, or fantasising dreamily about her. He is even abjectly ignored by the princess during their first on-stage meeting (from Rehearsal Mark 34).

Her musical lines interrupt his, as she asks questions of Jochanaan, showing that she does not view Narraboth as an equal in the slightest (9 bars after Rehearsal Mark 34). The fact that Narraboth is an overly sensitive, weak-willed character could, according to common perceptions of the sexes, prompt him to appear 'feminine'. Considering Salome's possession of many typically 'male' qualities, Narraboth is then filling the emotional space usually filled by a female character. His 'maleness', as it were, is usurped by that of Salome, showing her to be even more masculine than imagined.

### Salome: the impact of masculinity and male gaze

Salome's relative masculinity is a topic of much contention in literature surrounding the opera. Carolyn Abbate's essay regarding Strauss's work, where she makes many a comparison with the equally unlucky but far more passive heroine Euridice, discusses this gender confusion in great depth. In order to delve into the opera further, Abbate highlights the fact that Patrick Conrad's 1978 film, *Mascara*, asks us to consider some interesting points about *Salome* and gender. For example, Salome's clear possession of 'some frightening sign of maleness' is a view the film seems to promote, and one which accentuates the opera's themes of gender confusion and authoritative voice.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, Abbate discusses *Mascara's* proposed viewpoint, which suggests that opera itself is a genre 'that so displaces the authorial musical voice onto female characters that it largely reverses a conventional opposition of male (speaking) subject and female (observed) object'.<sup>141</sup>

The role reversal in *Salome* and Narraboth has been touched upon, although the former remains observed by the latter, as she is by almost every other male character in the opera. However, there is also the obvious unconventional interplay between Salome and Jochanaan, which suggests the exchanging of gender roles. Not only does Salome take the position of the more impure figure in their short, fraught on-stage relationship; she relegates Jochanaan to a more traditionally female standing. This is partly achieved by the girl being aurally voyeuristic, in listening to Jochanaan's mysterious theme without his knowledge. Abbate rightly describes the conventional female condition as being that of the observed party – here, it is the man who is being visually and aurally preyed upon.<sup>142</sup>

The male gaze is a feature of much feminist thought, yet in *Salome* there is both male *and* female gaze to contend with. In a way, one could equate Salome's predatory, prurient actions with those of Herod, who embodies the traditional idea of the male gaze in the work. Her ties to the antagonist's personality, in that his greatest flaw (his lustful treatment of the opposite sex) is also hers, make her worst characteristics more apparent. In the same way, Herod's weakness in allowing Salome to get, momentarily, what she wants at the expense of his comfort, makes Salome's persuasive strength appear much stronger.

Dramatically, the opera as a work condemns the male gaze. Much of this is accomplished by the Page of Herodias, a character that exists to warn those onstage in a portentous fashion,

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<sup>140</sup> Carolyn Abbate, "Opera: or the Envoicing of Women", in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (London: University of California Press, 1993), 225.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

but to whom nobody listens. The Page cautions Narraboth against looking at Salome, yet the latter refuses to be swayed by the former's logic, and is consequently driven to suicide. Narraboth's yielding to the male gaze is his character's own undoing; his weakness, regarding the act of following through with his desires, manifests itself in his unwillingness to go on living. Throughout the opera, it is as if Salome understands the boundaries and danger of the concept – yet the opera becomes suspended at two critical points, when Salome is the sole subject of the gaze. Salome's dance and her final 'monologue' are the two moments in the opera where the character 'becomes a spectacle for the audience', intentionally playing up her purpose here as an object at which to be looked.<sup>143</sup> Although at these points, it seems as though Salome is in control and playing with the other characters' and audience's perceptions (and for a time this is true), she is eventually manipulated by the gaze, instead of manipulating it. Her treatment of Jochanaan as an object which she must possess, a kiss which she must have, shows her submission to this hungry, possessive voyeurism. Moreover, once Salome herself succumbs to the pull of voyeuristic existence, voicing her desire to look upon, touch, and own Jochanaan's body, she must cease to exist. Her giving in to that masculine observation of another is the signal for her downfall, as it completely expunges any innocence she may have once had. Her surrendering to temptation, as Eve learned before her, will not be forgiven, and leads directly to her death.

The manner of Salome's death is such that the issue of male gaze is brought into question. Lawrence Kramer writes that it is a 'combination of her perversity and her orgasmic intensity' that provokes her step-father into demanding that she be murdered'.<sup>144</sup>

Whatever the eventual cause, Salome's death is quick, nasty, and full of meaning regarding the impact of the male gaze. Herod orders her execution, but also demands that the lights of the court be extinguished at the same time. Carolyn Abbate notices the significance of Herod completely erasing Salome from the world in every physical sense, showing that she 'must be not only killed but eliminated from sight'.<sup>145</sup>

As sight underpins the notion of the male gaze, this refusal to see Salome could be interpreted as many things. These include the idea that Salome has fulfilled her purpose to Herod, by dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils, and can therefore be disposed of for doing

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<sup>143</sup> Lawrence Kramer, 'Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex,' in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2/3 (November 1990), 281.

<sup>144</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 141.

<sup>145</sup> Carolyn Abbate, "Opera: or the Envoicing of Women", in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (London: University of California Press, 1993), 227.

something wrong. Also, one could see this turn of events as Salome's failure to conform to the male gaze's view of the passive woman. Arguably, Salome refuses to be gazed at by Herod without knowingly orchestrating it herself, therefore blurring the boundaries between active and passive. Even in her dance of seduction, she is actively playing the part of the seducer, in return for getting what she wants. However, her active status in the power play here renders her too 'male' for the male gaze, thus she cannot be the completely passive or ingenuous subject of Herod's lustful scrutiny which he desires. It is also interesting to note that the thing that irritates Salome most in the opera is the notion of cowardice. As bravery is a quality that would traditionally be associated with men, because of its association with war, soldiering and the protection of property, the fact Salome reviles those who possess none of it equates her further with common perceptions of masculinity.

### **The Femme Fatale and the Prima Donna**

A connection can be made between the character of the *femme fatale* and the nineteenth-century stereotype of the *prima donna*. The typical *prima donna* role would encompass many of the things exuded by a *femme fatale* - a dominant attitude, for example, and a lust for power and attention. The *prima donna* trope refers, generally, to the actress or singer playing the character, rather than to the character itself - however, the similarities between fictional and factual are numerous. The *prima donna* was an understandably 'puzzling phenomenon' in the nineteenth century, standing fearless on a very public stage whilst her female peers were enduring dwindling social power through growing forms of gender-biased indoctrination.<sup>146</sup> However, this century still saw many women fitting the description of the ambitious female opera singer, whereby a talented performer could become almost goddess-like in her star power.<sup>147</sup> The most gifted of sopranos could become part of this 'powerful stereotype' and were afforded their diva demands, showing how a young woman could bend the operatic world to her will if she desired.<sup>148</sup> This air of confidence and mystery surrounding the *prima donna* helped to fill a venue, drawing even more people to see a particular opera, and perhaps gaining said work the positive reviews it needed.

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<sup>146</sup> Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera 1830-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33.

<sup>147</sup> Rupert Christiansen, *Prima Donna: A History* (Bath: The Pitman Press, 1984), 11.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Although her work focuses more on the music of opera, rather than its performers, even Carolyn Abbate acknowledges that those who possess an extreme amount of accomplished vocal talent can appear 'superhuman', inspiring 'worship and hysteria' in captivated audiences.<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, these things are often instigated by the *femme fatale* characters themselves. *Salome*, with its polarizing themes and a highly demanding vocal score, is an example of an opera which requires a *prima donna* of the highest standard to realise the title role. Some of the most popular Salomes of the past have embodied the role in such a way that it became even more scandalous and fascinating to audiences.

The first Salome, Maria Wittich, was a competent singer, but was found to be 'stiff and matronly' in her acting of the part, as she thought it 'improper'.<sup>150</sup> Her refusal to adhere to some of the more salacious stage directions must have lessened the impact of the opera. The other end of the performance spectrum is taken up by such singers as Ljuba Welitsch, whom Strauss concluded had 'everything for the part', and was therefore 'sensational'.<sup>151</sup> This was partly because of her striking looks, and partly due to her vocal interpretation of the character. Her first performance of *Salome* took place in 1944, and was so successful that she went on to play the role hundreds of times throughout her career. This shows that hiring a credible and talented singer, with a large amount of personality, acting talent, and charisma, is integral to the success of a complex, difficult part like that of Salome. A *prima donna*-type performance is required of the singer taking on the role, as its dominance on stage must be tempered with such other qualities as childish innocence. The first singer to take on this challenge at the New York Metropolitan Opera in 1907, Olive Fremstad, experienced the scandal associated with playing such a depraved character in an equally shocking opera. One well-connected member of the audience on opening night was 'so shocked by its lasciviousness' that the opera's run was cancelled after that first performance.<sup>152</sup> This shows just how disturbingly provocative the opera could be to audiences of the time.

In fact, many accounts of past performances of *Salome* show how important the central singer was to the success of the entire performance. Reviewers were as tough on performers in the early part of the twentieth century as they are today, and their critiques of particular singers give insight into how meticulously the opera should be cast. There was a level of significance, for instance, placed on the singer's decision to perform the Dance of

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<sup>149</sup> Carolyn Abbate, "Music – Drastic or Gnostic?", *Critical Inquiry: Vol 30*, No. 3 (2004): 508.

<sup>150</sup> Kurt Wilhelm, *Richard Strauss: An Intimate Portrait* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1989), 100.

<sup>151</sup> Rupert Christiansen, *Prima Donna: A History* (Bath: The Pitman Press, 1984), 264.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

the Seven Veils herself.<sup>153</sup> Many past Salomes, such as Maria Wittich, chose to abstain from dancing this part of the opera, instead letting a prima ballerina stand in for them.<sup>154</sup> This would be due to reasons such as the singer's age, weight, or simple self-consciousness preventing her from exuding the delicate sensuousness needed for such a seminal moment. However, of course, the disruptive nature of a changeover before the scene would mean that the Dance would be less impactful, overall, meaning that some of the character's *femme fatale* smoothness or effortlessness would be lost. Therefore, it was seen as more impressive, and more conducive to the *femme fatale* character, if the singer could both sing and act the part, and dance the dance.

The first singer to portray Salome in Britain, in the 1910 Covent Garden production, took it upon herself to perform the Dance. This soprano, Aino Ackté, was praised for having done so, as it 'preserved a most significant piece of realism'.<sup>155</sup> Her general appearance and understanding of the role meant that the production was well-received, and extremely well-attended, although this was also due to the scandal surrounding its conception. Dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils was a feat also attempted by sopranos such as Göta Ljunberg, in the 1924 Covent Garden production.<sup>156</sup> Given the success of these productions and of the singers themselves, one wonders whether the voice is always the most important part of casting Salome. Ackté has been described as having an 'adequate' voice, and the afore-mentioned Ljuba Welitsch lost much of her vocal ability after a few years of playing such demanding roles.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, maybe a lot of the popularity of a particular production's Salome rests on the singer's other qualities. An ability to dance with a degree of grace is a desired skill, as is a pleasing countenance, and a great depth of acting performance. Even though Salome's voice is her most potent attribute, her main tool of communication, and her music itself is of a greatly difficult standard, there are many other factors a director must consider when casting the character. The singer must be multi-talented in a way that other operatic parts do not call for, and project the darkness of the *femme fatale* whilst emulating youth and innocence with ease. This makes the part of Salome especially apt for the *prima donna*, as it gives an opportunity to show off how impressive and capable a performer can be – it pushes a soprano to her limit.

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<sup>153</sup> Alan Jefferson, *The Operas of Richard Strauss* (London: Putnam and Co. Ltd., 1963), 48.

<sup>154</sup> Kurt Wilhelm, *Richard Strauss: An Intimate Portrait* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1989), 100.

<sup>155</sup> Alan Jefferson, *The Operas of Richard Strauss* (London: Putnam and Co. Ltd., 1963), 48.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 45; Marilyn Horne and Jane Scovell, *Marilyn Horne: The Song Continues* (Fort Worth: Baskerville Publishers, 2004), 107.

It must be said that many great performances of the role of Salome have been given without the singer herself participating in the Dance of the Seven Veils. However, if this is the case in a certain production, then a clear distinction is made between the singing Salome and the dancing Salome, and between the methods of voice and movement. There is a divide or disconnect between the two modes of communication, for even if the dancer is brought onstage in the most seamless way, they are still a different stage presence. Considering the fact that dance is often considered to be the most feminine of the arts, with its strong reliance on expressive form and connection to corporeality and sensuality, the possible disconnect at this point would be an interesting choice. One could look at the break between Salomes as the character's mind distancing itself from the horrible, sordid task she is asked to perform, breaking the façade of the *femme fatale* for a while. To shield her inwardly fragile self from having to truly experience dancing for her step-father in a provocative, risqué way, Salome's mind fractures. Therefore, it is not really Salome performing the dance, but rather going through the motions, as it were, as if acting on auto-pilot. This would be very much a typical mental reaction to an unpleasant or disturbing event, as conditions like dissociative personality disorder could demonstrate.

Another viewpoint on this possible feature of the opera concerns gender identity. It has been mentioned before that Salome displays many traits more typically associated with the male gender, such as her dominant personality. Consequently, the Salome we see (and hear) for most of the production leaves as soon as the character truly becomes objectified. The links between sight and the feminine, and sound and the masculine, also provide explanation here. As the character becomes the passive object of the male gaze in this scene, her voice is extinguished and silent for several minutes. Her body, on the other hand, comes into its own, growing exponentially in importance: if she does not please Herod using her feminine poise and rhythm, she will not be able to achieve her goal. By renouncing the use of her voice at the request of the King, Salome also gives up any semblance of masculinity she may have otherwise possessed. This shows that, even though Salome's masculine qualities allow her to be brave in her demands, and strong in her will, her method of gaining her prize is to focus attention upon her most feminine qualities. Onstage, whether or not this would appear as a conscious decision of Salome's would possibly depend on factors such as the smoothness of the changeover, or the differences between actress and singer, and dancer. One would, presumably, have to match the vocal talent of the *prima donna* singer with the dancing skills of no less than a prima ballerina.



It is interesting to consider how this variation in performers could affect the overall impact of the production, as the Dance of the Seven Veils is an element that can be performed in so many different ways. Nowadays, the scene has become almost as legendary as the opera itself. Therefore, the decision to switch the singer for a dancer at this crucial moment in time is one that must plague a director, as finding a true *prima donna* with a 'triple threat' talent, as it were, is certainly no mean feat. It could be a successful way in which to portray mental distress, or highlight a disconnect between different states, if one wanted to play with these ideas. On the other hand, it could also simply be a good way of saving an aging singer from cavorting around on stage with all the ease and audacity of a salacious sixteen year old girl, if such an act would prove too much trouble.

Strauss's inspiration when creating the character of Salome did not just come from Wilde's script, or the translation of his play. It is also thought that the actress playing the part when the composer first saw the translated work, and her interpretation of the part, may have inspired his operatic creation. The role was taken, for the first time in Germany, by Gertrud Eysoldt. Her brazen performance, notable for its 'spellbinding' quality, and her deft grasp of 'dark eroticism', fully conforming to the *femme fatale* stereotype, seems to have pushed Strauss to compose music that invites a certain kind of singer.<sup>158</sup> Namely, one who could push herself to the extremes of her vocal and physical limits, in order to fit the character's powerful personality – a performer who could embody the *femme fatale*. The eventual interpreter of the operatic Salome role, Maria Wittich, may not have possessed the youthful countenance, or graceful dancing skills, that Strauss may have wished for – however, her performance must have been satisfactory enough to make the premiere a scandalous success.

It has been remarked upon that, when one thinks of the typical *prima donna*, one's mind does not immediately turn to German singers.<sup>159</sup> Yet this German opera thrived due to the performance of Wittich, who filled the titular role with her reportedly excellent voice.<sup>160</sup> The scandal surrounding the opera's themes also called for a singer who could distance herself admirably from the work in reality, which Wittich managed due to her position as the dutiful yet talented wife of a civic leader.<sup>161</sup> Therefore, one can admire how strong-willed the singer must have been, in cultivating the performance of a most dark and

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<sup>158</sup> Joy H. Calico, 'Staging Scandal with *Salome* and *Elektra*', in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

insalubrious character, whilst maintaining a very respectable image for the public.<sup>162</sup> Even though the operatic diva of the nineteenth century had their moments of liberation, exhibitionism, and intrigue, nineteenth-century women in society did not have this luxury. This would make the events unfolding on stage take on more of a sense of singularity, as dangerous, unchecked women such as Salome were not encouraged to exist in real life.

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxvii

## Chapter Four

### Heroine

Until this point, we have seen how women have suffered from negative prejudices and stereotypes in biblical opera, and how these things influenced how composers have portrayed them. Whether victim or *femme fatale*, the picture painted so far has been rather bleak and unforgiving. However, there is a third trope that could apply to female characters in biblical opera: the heroine. This role is possibly more seldom-seen than the other two previously studied, which could be due to many reasons. These include the fact that, classically, the qualities it takes to be seen as a 'hero' are conventionally more associated with the male sex. Because of their position as heads of families, political leaders, or members of the military, throughout history men have had to show traits such as bravery, strength, awareness, and logical intelligence. We see this reflected in the men of the Bible, whose stories are still familiar to us today. For example, Noah uses a great amount of calm and physical strength when building his Ark, believing in God's word and doing His will without question; David slays Goliath with absolute fearlessness, with total disregard to the physical differences between them; Jesus educates great numbers of people, with his peacefulness and reason providing comfort to those in need. All these men exude attributes of a traditional 'hero', and are remembered for them.

Heroic qualities helped the male sex to dominate most of the world for centuries after biblical times as well. For example, it has been noted that the 'specifically sexual basis of male power' still present in the West throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was only a little threatened by female emancipation.<sup>163</sup> This shows that it is widely accepted that men retained their hold on society because of their sex, and that this prolonged the 'patriarchal social structure' against which women began to fight.<sup>164</sup>

Conversely, when 'male' attributes appear in a female character, it is often with a great deal more unexpectedness and fanfare. According to history, women are not natural saviours or leaders. In fact, far from empowering the female population, Christianity as a system has had some 'disastrous consequences' for women, regarding their 'self-understanding and self-esteem'.<sup>165</sup> They have not been allowed to identify as anything

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<sup>163</sup> Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality c1850-1950* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1994), 2.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>165</sup> Anne Loades, *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1990), 2.

which is not expected of them. This is why it is important to pick out instances where female characters do not just exist to be a romantic foil and/or family relation to a more complex male character. Also, it is interesting to contemplate why some heroines are viewed as such, and why many female characters cannot be deemed worthy of this label.

Ruth, Esther, and Judith are important because they all broke with the traditions and conventions of their societies.<sup>166</sup> One way in which women come across as heroic in the Bible is through abstinence and devotion to God. Whilst this isn't the most daring or epic way to gain recognition, due to the ancient rule that a women's place was in the home, this was often the only option open to the sex, in order to prove their worth. This is why, for instance, Ruth is seen as a seminal Old Testament character, and was duly made a Saint, owing to her goodness. However, Ruth's good deeds, chronicled in her own book of the Bible, amounted to supporting a friend, working in the fields, and then happening, quite by chance, to conceive an important bloodline. This shows that women's heroism often lay in different skills and qualities than men's. Perhaps the modern feminists of today would read these qualities as different expressions of passivity, but there is no doubting that loyalty, faith, and serenity, are admirable traits. Yet the biblical heroine this thesis chooses to turn its attention to is an unusually cunning and bold one, with characteristics that would place her in league with many male characters of note.

### **Judith, force for good**

The first appearance of Judith and her eponymous book is in the Septuagint, which is an old Greek translation of Hebrew writings.<sup>167</sup> She is the female character who speaks the largest number of words in the entirety of the book. In comparison to characters such as Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary, and Eve, Judith actually says hundreds more words – over 2500, in fact. They may only amount to a tiny fraction of the words in the Bible (purported to be over a million), but the fact remains that Judith's tangible voice is the strongest of all the biblical women. This is because her actions and demeanour are some of the most forthcoming, important, and, therefore, genuinely interesting, creating a fascinating character to examine. Moreover, her tale warrants an opera of true drama and intrigue, owing to its dark subject matter and traditionally devious antagonist, in the form of Holofernes.

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<sup>166</sup> Toni Craven, *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (London: SPCK, 1990), 30.

<sup>167</sup> Kevin R. Brine, 'Introduction', in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, Elena Ciletti, Kevin R. Brine, and Henricke Lahnemann, eds. (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 6.

One composer who took on the task of creating a work based upon the exciting elements of Judith's tale was the now often-forgotten Russian, Alexander Serov. Serov was one of the most prolific composers of opera in Russia, in the time period covering the mid- to late-nineteenth century. However, he is not remembered as such today, as a result of being eclipsed by the relative popularity of the group of composers labelled 'The Five', which included Balakirev and Cesar Cui. *Judith* was the first opera he composed, and wasn't finished until he was over forty years of age, owing to his prominent career as a music critic – it is because of this profession that Serov was prone to disagreements with other composers, and was therefore a rather singular and solitary man.<sup>168</sup> However, this work, plus his next (another story involving a woman seeking bloody retribution for her people), would prove successful enough to cement his reputation as an extremely important composer of opera – even if today, both *Judith*, and the later *Rogneda*, have fallen out of the general canon.<sup>169</sup>

The story on which Serov's first opera is based is adapted from the Book of Judith. This deuterocanonical work holds a problematical place in biblical history, meaning different denominations of Christianity and Judaism hold it in differing states of regard. For example, it is included in the Catholic Old Testament, assigned the designation of 'Apocrypha' in the Protestant Church, and completely ignored by the Jewish faith.<sup>170</sup> This disparity in acceptance stems from the book's obvious errors in historical fact, and its fantastical, anachronistic nature. Many modern scholars would point to the book being more fictional than non-fictional, and some of its subjects are distinctly anhistorical.<sup>171</sup> However, this does not diminish its artistic value, nor lessen the prominence of its brilliant yet calculating heroine. In summary, the book follows the siege of the Jewish people in Israel by the army of the King, Nebuchadnezzar, and his tyrannical general, Holofernes. As the army camps near the town of Bethulia, Israel's saviour is introduced in the form of the widow, Judith. The second half of the book's sixteen verses describes how Judith gains the trust of the general, then visits him while he is under the influence of alcohol, and beheads him, thus depriving the army of its leader and, consequently, its motivation. At the end of the book, the Assyrians have left Israel, and Judith is celebrated for her part in this.

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<sup>168</sup> Arnold Whittall, *Romantic Music: A Concise History from Schubert to Sibelius* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1987), 131.

<sup>169</sup> Richard Taruskin, 'Opera and Drama in Russia: The Case of Serov's *Judith*', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 32, No. 1 (1979), 74.

<sup>170</sup> Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, *A Norton Critical Editions: The English Bible, King James Version: Vol 2, The New Testament and the Apocrypha* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2012), 695

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 695.

Judith is considered a heroine, and studied in great detail as one of the Bible's most significant female characters, for two main reasons. The first of these is linked to her actions in the story, as it is her plan that drives the plot and makes the enemy Assyrians flee. Bravery and intelligence, two of the heroic attributes most traditionally associated with male protagonists, are what make Judith a formidable foe to her enemies<sup>172</sup>. Even though her own sexuality is her main weapon, instead of the brute force that many male heroes would wield, Judith's manipulation of men using her womanliness is skilful. This creates a parallel with Dalila, showing how feminine wiles can be used in more than one plot scenario, for different reasons and with different outcomes. However, of course, the entrapment of Samson is presented as more shocking and deplorable than that of Holofernes, as the latter is a brutal general who is accountable for the oppression of the Jews.<sup>173</sup> The issue of female sexuality is not one that is explored with any degree of frequency in the Bible, as it is mainly seen as a source of shame and wickedness, exaggerated and distorted by male writers who feared what they could not understand.<sup>174</sup> It is used here, however, under the guidance of God, with intent to save the chosen people from their oppressor, and is therefore a force for good – if a complex and contentious one.

The other characteristic that makes Judith a heroine in the eyes of the Bible (or, at least, the Christian Apocrypha) is her total and complete devotion to God. This devotion is such that even though her husband dies before the events of the book even begin, her beauty is talked of throughout the story, and her vanquishing of the Assyrians places her in a position of high esteem, Judith remains a widow, choosing not to remarry. If the story is an entirely fictional creation, then it is interesting to note that Judith's status is that of a widow, as it shows her to have a life that is purely focussed on pleasing her God. It is the ideal state for the character to inhabit, as it shows that she has presumably lost her virgin purity to her husband in the past, and is old enough to have some semblance of sexuality, and therefore cannot be frowned upon for acting in any way impure towards Holofernes. The fact of Judith's goodness, in the form of her trust and faith in the plan God puts forward for her,

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<sup>172</sup> What also makes Judith the most dangerous kind of woman, perhaps, is her lack of offspring – not having to provide for children means the character has less to lose, in terms of earthly ties.

Therefore, she can put her all into her plan to save her people, no matter how much risk is involved.  
<sup>173</sup> In this opera, the Jewish people are portrayed as the 'good' race, whilst the Assyrians are the enemy force. Conversely, in *Salome*, the Jews are depicted as the 'bad' race, as demonstrated by the acts of Herod, Herodias, and Salome, and it is the Christian man Jochanaan who emerges as relative moral superior. The way in which the librettist of an opera chooses to represent each of the two racial 'sides' contributes to how one interprets the exploits and motives of certain characters. This is part of the reason why Judith is viewed as a heroic seducer, and why Dalila's ensnaring of Samson is an act of evil.

<sup>174</sup> Clare Drury, *Women in Religion* (London: Continuum, 2004), 30.

contrasts with the way in which she achieves her goal of freedom for the Jews. This is what makes her such a complicated, multi-layered protagonist, making her tale extremely applicable to art-forms like painting, literature, and, most relevantly here, opera.

### **Unique in every way**

Judith's musical entrance in the opera, at the beginning of act two, shows just how much of a difference there is between her and the rest of the Bethulians. The opera follows the biblical story in that there is a period of time before Judith is introduced, where the suffering of the townspeople is outlined. The music in these scenes, and in the preceding overture, is as fraught as the characters' lives are – full of woe, violence, and intense prayer. It has been noted that *Judith's* characters are 'at all times motivated by the strongest and most elemental passions', and the opening music does not dispute this idea.<sup>175</sup>

The overture begins with an extremely ominous, deep chord which rumbles with the weight of low stringed and brass instruments. It is in the fourth bar of the overture, however, when the music turns actively dissonant, the bottom G in the bass instruments clashing with the second and seventh of the chord. The unease is heightened with a large amount of dynamic change – for example, the music grows from pianissimo to fortissimo within the first eleven bars, then is immediately quiet in the next bar, the suddenness of the dynamics emphasising the air of agitation. This opening to the opera is tinged with threat, which carries into the first act, as it begins with the same, low timbre, and menacing, semitonal movement, that adds to the sense of foreboding. Also, the music of Act One is almost entirely of a choral nature, apart from some deep-voiced male characters, as the force of the chorus is used to its full effect. This shows how communal the rest of the Hebrew people are, as their voices raise as one, lamenting their collective fate. Moreover, the fact that only named male characters have solo lines in the first part of the work mirrors the biblical book's structure.

The heavy emphasis on the chorus in the opera's first act is contrasted with the beginning of the second, which is imbued with the 'virtually complete domination' of Judith, plus some input from Avra, her female confidante.<sup>176</sup> A simple oboe melody (very beginning of

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<sup>175</sup> Richard Taruskin, 'Opera and Drama in Russia: The Case of Serov's *Judith*', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 32, No. 1 (1979): 97.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

act 2, *andante*), lying above a sparse orchestral texture, follows a half hour of thicker texture and multiple singers. The tone of the opera changes here, as hope is introduced as a musical concept. For the eight bars of oboe solo, the wind section alone is utilised, giving a sense of singularity to the music, confining it to one timbre. This highlights the entrance of Judith the outsider, whose mind-set is very different than those who have sung before her. Therefore, this calm, woodwind interlude perfectly represents her introduction.

The shape of the woodwind melody that begins Act Two is very simple and compact, as all the notes fall between a G and E flat. The *andante* tempo contributes to its air of enigmatic serenity, as it softly rises then falls using a repeated dotted quaver figure. The choice of the oboe here is interesting, as it conforms to Locke's oriental signifier of using instruments with distinctive or foreign-sounding timbres. This helps to highlight Judith's 'otherness' even further. There is also an acciaccatura before the final two notes of this tune, quick ornamental flourishes being part of Locke's list of signifiers as well, therefore emphasising the exotic nature which the oboe can exude.<sup>177</sup> After this, the melody merely fades into uncertainty, rather than gaining finality with a definite cadence – this accentuates the mystery behind Judith's character, and the as-yet unclear fate of the unlucky Hebrews. Underneath the melody lies an equally modest and uncomplicated harmony, which is merely comprised of relatively undecorated minim chords. The simplicity of the passage echoes the pure, untouched faith that Judith is about to display in her song. It is also a bold choice to begin this act with such a humble eight bars, just as Judith is brave in her choice to fight the Assyrians instead of succumbing with the rest of the Hebrews.

After a flurry of string movement (bar 9 of act 2) and a sudden pause, which is more akin to the music of the first act, the oboe tune is extended and embellished (from bar 11 of act 2). It is doubled by the flute, and accompanied by ascending clarinet triplets, yet still retains its modest dignity. By growing in dynamic and orchestral texture, the melody itself grows in importance, picking up *szforzandos* and accents along the way. However, even though its character changes as more and more dramatic elements are added, the simplicity of the dotted quaver figure remains until the string semiquavers take over and push the act forward. The significance of this uncomplicated tune, serenely sounding before the music begins to describe action rather than feeling, suggests that Judith's presence has been

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<sup>177</sup> Geoffrey Burgess notes that the oboe has been used 'to express the alluring and sensual nature of the exotic' for the past two centuries. Geoffrey Burgess and Bruce Haynes, *The Oboe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 8.



acknowledged in the orchestra. Her introduction is heralded by this passage, and it cannot be long before she makes her plea to God.

*Judith* ends with an exultant chorus (beginning 38 bars before the end of the opera), singing alongside the triumphant but humble main character, and resembling the 'continuous finale' idea that Serov had desired for his opera.<sup>178</sup> The opera's final act is full of revelation, as Judith produces the head of Holofernes after killing him at the end of Act Four (Judith's last entrance begins 71 bars before the final chorus). Act Four is possibly the most musically varied of the work, as much of the action, plus dancing, is found within it. Directly after this takes place, the chorus of Hebrews makes one final, desperate plea to God to save them, before Judith reveals her prize. Therefore, the structure of the final act revolves around Judith's accomplishment, with the chorus bookending the musical narrative.

In the middle of the two choral scenes, Judith shows the head of Holofernes and converses with the characters Achior, Ozias, and the Priest, with interjections from the larger vocal ensemble. This reliance in the final act on the chorus, as a reactionary model and bookend for the entire opera, is interesting from a character point of view. Judith begins the opera as a complete outsider, an unknown to both the Bethulians and to the audience. The music illustrates this fact by using the chorus as quite an isolating feature. It makes quite clear that Judith is not an integrated member of the community, by interspersing the chorus's songs of woe with the conversations of the named male Hebrews. Due to the fact that the first act is comprised entirely of these things, it provides a way of allowing Judith's song in the second act to stand out. Her importance to the opera may be highlighted by the use of chorus, but their closeness in song shows how alone she is in her mission. However, by the end of the opera, Judith sings both to, and with, the chorus, telling of her undertaking and sharing their joy at the prospect of freedom. Her integration into the community is cemented musically with this, as the character's vocal line joins those of the chorus and she is accepted into their midst. Thus, the heroine is recognised by everyone, in light of her brave deeds.

The atmospheric change is also quite apparent halfway through the final act, as Judith's presence on stage determines the music's tone. As the characters onstage at the beginning of the act do not know of Judith's accomplishment, the sombre tone is rather fitting. In the instrumental introduction, there are many woodwind chords which increase tension due to their slow release (very beginning of act 5). This gives the impression of the Hebrew's

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<sup>178</sup> Richard Taruskin, 'Opera and Drama in Russia: The Case of Serov's *Judith*', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 32, No. 1 (1979), 109.

constant waiting for God to save them from their oppression, which is consistently met by one disappointment after another. Also, the translation of the scene's beginning is 'The Chorus of the Starving', due to the utter devastation and hunger of the Hebrews at this point in the opera. Once they begin to sing, they ask whether God has abandoned them. The held, dissonant chords continue through their imploring voices, as the volume rises in their desperation. There is careful use of stretto, with the delayed entrances of each vocal section, and repetition of musical material, adding to the sense of never-ending misery. After the previous act's changeable moods, with the action leading from an orgy of movement, to masculine tales of women, to a duet of seduction between Judith and Holofernes, this long, slow beginning feels even more desolate.

### **The view of men and masculinity in *Judith***

There is no male protagonist in this opera. Certainly, male characters appear who are part of the Jewish community, and are therefore Judith's allies – yet none of these men have a part significant enough to rival Judith's. The two elders of Bethulia and the Jewish High Priest are featured a little throughout the opera, and provide words of wisdom for Judith, but their council is brief. The part of confidante is taken by Avra, Judith's female slave. She is the closest thing to a secondary protagonist in the opera, and takes a lower vocal tessitura, perhaps to signify her lower position.

With Judith undoubtedly independent and headstrong enough to carry out her task on her own, there is no need for a male counterpart to provide romantic tension, which is why the opera lacks this kind of character. The only male-female tension exhibited during the opera is that between Judith and Holofernes. Margaret Jackson's definition of the 'hetero-relational imperative' states that 'a woman without a man was sexually incomplete'.<sup>179</sup> Other writers have been vocal in their belief in women generally being 'lacking', whether in sexual physicality, intelligence, or otherwise. Nietzsche thought women had 'no visible essence', showing his disdain for the opposite sex.<sup>180</sup> Freud explained his version of the female 'lack' through his Oedipus Complex idea, as the concept spread through philosophers and psychologists alike. What Freud and Nietzsche would have made of Judith, whose only noticeable 'lack' in her story is the absence of a man, is not known.

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<sup>179</sup> Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality c1850 – 1950* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1994), 14.

<sup>180</sup> Carolyn Abbate, "Opera: or the Envoicing of Women", in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and sexuality in music scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (London: University of California Press, 1993), 226.

However, one could argue that the reason why Holofernes and the rest of his army aren't more wary of Judith is because she does not pose a threat to them. In the eyes of these men, she is a harmless entity, because she is not in possession of the features that suggest masculinity to them. The story of Judith, told in this opera, is really one that highlights male hubris.

### **The Prima Donna reappears**

As discussed before, the trope of the *prima donna* singer is synonymous with demanding female parts in opera. Although it has been easily equated with the *femme fatale*, one could also find a place for the *prima donna* mind-set in the heroine category. As *Judith* was written in the nineteenth century, when the fashionable cult of the *prima donna* was reaching new heights, it is no wonder that the role would suit a female singer of talent and confidence, which would be needed for the gravity, sincerity, and emotional depth of the role. The cultural phenomenon not only showed how women could possess and cultivate such a gift in a profession, but also allowed them to profit financially from it. Even if women were being controlled in other areas of life, as the patriarchal society still existed in a steadfast way throughout the West, the female singer could not be held back as easily. Women were needed for stage roles, and therefore were able to find liberation in arts such as opera. In other words, 'the *prima donna* provided a powerful – and disturbing – example of women's capabilities beyond the domestic confines'.<sup>181</sup> Powerful because of her position as a potentially self-sufficient beacon of musical talent – disturbing to the patriarchal society because of this power. Opera had created a 'living metaphor for her sex', in that the *prima donna* was equally 'idolised' and 'despised', loved for her talent, and hated by those who feared her celebrity, her independence, and her 'female potency'.<sup>182</sup> However, the idea that the *prima donna* represented her sex could be viewed as inaccurate, because the woman on stage was everything that many women were not: confident, able, self-reliant, and appreciated for qualities other than her beauty or child-bearing capacity. The disturbing nature of the *prima donna* was felt mainly by the men who were in favour of society's patriarchal structure and status quo, into which, of course, the female trope would not fit. Portraying such strong characters must therefore have been a gratifying experience for female singers, whose world still bore the trappings of social inequality.

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<sup>181</sup> Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

### **Role reversal and progressive thinking in *Judith***

There is a lot in *Judith's* plot which points to the conceit of role reversal. Judith, in becoming the hero Bethulia needs, reverses and defies those things expected of her, as a woman, an outsider, and a widow. In a town populated by seemingly cowardly men, some of whose faith is not as strong as it possibly should be, it takes a woman who lives on the outer reaches of society to step forward and help the people. This society, considering its time period, is obviously one of a strict nature.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, the Apocryphal verses, and the opera which takes them as its inspiration, display a patriarchal story, much like those previously mentioned. Judith is the only named female character in her gospel, although this is changed for the opera, whereby her maid is given more of a supporting character role.<sup>184</sup> Apart from the maid, however, no other women make an appearance, supporting the view that men were seen as more important. Yet Judith does not yield to this societal stereotype of the meek, unimportant woman. In fact, one could see Judith as a heroine who not only reverses the gender roles imposed by this ancient Israeli society, but as someone who completely transcends them in her actions.

One of the reasons why the opera might not have been as much of a success as other operas at that time, and therefore fell rapidly out of the canon, may have its roots in its progressive subject matter. As mentioned before, the nineteenth-century outlook of the West, regarding women, was possibly even less enlightened than it had previously been. This outlook unquestionably applied to Russia as well, as a country which was not renowned for its gender progressiveness at the time. Therefore, even though the idea of a biblical opera conjures very traditional, conservative connotations, the notion of a central female character that was possibly too forward-thinking to warrant a canonical biblical book is less benign.

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<sup>183</sup> As Sidnie Ann White notes in her essay on Judith, women in this patriarchal society only gained identity through the male members of their family – they therefore had no independence or status on their own.

Sidnie Ann White, 'In the Steps of Jael and Deborah: Judith as heroine', in *No one spoke ill of her: Essays on Judith*, ed. James C. Vanderkam (USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1992), 7.

<sup>184</sup> She is also the only woman truly recognised by the androcentric community. The generic quality of her name, Amy-Jill Levine suggests, has an easy 'applicability' to it as well, and could be 'extended beyond the individual' – thus Judith could represent a huge amount of things to different people. Amy-Jill Levine, 'Sacrifice and Salvation: Otherness and Domestication in the Book of Judith', *No one spoke ill of her: Essays on Judith*, ed. James C. Vanderkam (USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1992), 18.

There are many views on why the Book of Judith is not a part of the Bible for many Judeo-Christian denominations, yet such women as Ruth boast a canonical status. For example, it is thought that the fictional qualities of Judith's gospel are too pronounced for the story to have any historical worth, other than that which is purely metaphorical.<sup>185</sup> However, it could also be that the heroine of this story is simply too progressive in her blatant disregard for the boundaries of her ancient society, in which widows were meant to mourn for their husbands and then find a replacement partner. Indeed, even without Judith's heroic acts in the later chapters of her book, her constant mourning of Menasses is cause for some concern to those around her. The fact that she wears her widow's garb and lives a fairly solitary existence away from the other members of the community marks her out as a unique force in Bethulia. An air of mystery is given to the character, as none of the Bethulians appear to have much of a relationship with her. Add to this her deeds in the latter verses of the book, and Judith shines as a heroine of frightening magnitude. Perhaps her solitary attitudes, intelligence, and independent mind (if one puts aside her connection to God), were too advanced for audiences in the nineteenth century.

There is an interesting take on the idea of the male gaze in the story of Judith. As the character is introduced in chapter eight, she is the afore-described outsider figure, in the plain, unadorned clothing of a widow. However, once she decides to put her plan into action, she dresses in a more alluring way, donning jewellery and fine clothes to entice Holofernes.<sup>186</sup> By doing this, she also attracts the attention of many Israelite men, who see her full beauty for the first time since her husband died in the harvest. Therefore, one could argue that Judith chooses to adhere to gender convention, and therefore becomes the perfect subject of the male gaze. In this case, the woman objectifies herself – but only as a means of achieving her own goal, much like in *Salome*. Instead of a dance here, Judith dresses and acts like a woman who invites the male gaze, and is accepted into the enemy camp because of these things.

On the other hand, at the end of the debacle, when she has won her prize and shows the head of Holofernes to the townspeople, the subject of the gaze is reversed, as noted in the

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<sup>185</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (Great Britain: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 115.

<sup>186</sup> Gerald Hammond and Austin Busch, *A Norton Critical Edition: The English Bible, King James Version: Vol 2, The New Testament and The Apocrypha* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2012), 706.

This part of the story is found in chapter 10, verse 4 of The Book of Judith: she '...decked herself bravely, to allure the eyes of all men that should see her'.

Norton Critical Edition of the Apocrypha.<sup>187</sup> Judith, in killing the general, has become 'the warrior', whereas Holofernes is the subject of the townspeople's vision. This shows how both the Bethulians who noticed Judith's transformation, and the general who was enchanted by her looks, have switched places with the heroine, in terms of gaze. She has defied them both to become not only the instigator of the switch, but also the person who determines the object, rather than the object itself. In this way, Judith echoes Salome, who also defies convention by using the idea of the male gaze to her advantage, and gazes upon others herself. Moreover, Judith relies upon her beauty to form part of her plan, and plays up to her welcoming, feminine attitude to entice an unwitting man, much like Dalila. It is interesting how these three women use their 'Otherness' in much the same way. However, in this opera, unlike the others, the heroine is buoyed by her Christian faith, making her both determinedly righteous and, arguably, a likeable character. Therefore, her fearless management of the male gaze is a thing to be admired, rather than criticised.

Role reversal is further explored in the Book of Judith, by Judith inheriting Holofernes's things, after the Israelites take over the army camp. With this inheritance, Judith quite literally takes Holofernes's place in the story, by taking possession of his tent and belongings. Her goodness is highlighted again by her willingness to share these things with the Israelites, who have spent so long with nothing. With Holofernes's possessions, Judith is able to assume his level of power and take control of said power, much like a man might. However, in her position of higher wealth and status, she chooses to share the goods with which she has been furnished, instead of keeping them for herself. Her connection to God is all the possessions she needs in life, and greed is not something which plagues her. This personality feature, of course, sets her apart from Salome, whose greed may not be of a monetary nature, but who suffers from a lustful avarice.

However, Dalila is brought closer to Judith because of their shared need for personal justice and satisfaction, rather than for riches. Even if Dalila is seeking her desired outcome out of a hatred that is dramatically wicked, as the opera's hero is on the side of God, she still refuses a reward. Achieving her goal of ruining this man is reward enough, just as Judith merely seeks the destruction of Holofernes. Dalila and Judith see themselves as fighting for the good of their people, whom they want to save. Yet Dalila is not driven by God, or at least, she never mentions his influence in her opera. Ultimately, it is significant that Judith is a God-fearing heroine, as, even though one could argue this implies simply another patriarchal scheme, it is one which inspires the qualities like faith, selflessness, and bravery

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<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 696.

in her character. Judith's God motivates her to break with gender conventions and use her emotional and physical strength to achieve the freedom of her people. Both Judith and Dalila therefore conform to patriarchal systems, yet the outcomes of their respective stories show how these systems differ.

### **Heroine-ism and some deciding factors**

This next point may be slightly controversial in the making, as it blurs the boundaries between character types. A decidedly different interpretation of Judith in art would be found in Klimt's paintings featuring the character. His Judith, who has been described as a 'sexually provocative *femme fatale* in a state of erotic excitement', is far from the God-fearing woman one mentally pictures from the Bible<sup>188</sup>. We see Judith as a heroine, even though she seduced and murdered without remorse, because from a biblical point of view, she chose the correct victim. Holofernes was an enemy to Judith's people, who were on the side of God – his death was an event which furthered their survival, and was therefore a 'good thing'. However, when Dalila seduced Samson, in the same manner, with shameless disregard towards the feelings of the man, she was reviled as a wicked *femme fatale*. This is because Dalila was simply not on the side of God. Her people, the Philistines, were enemies of the Hebrew people, and she was loyal to their cause. Consequently, Dalila's actions are remembered as being of an evil nature, even though they mirror those of the great heroine, Judith. For example, one of the many books on the heroism of Judith names her as 'deliverer of the chosen', while Dalila upholds 'the duplicitous character of womankind', as she 'betrayed Samson to slavery'.<sup>189</sup> This disparity in description demonstrates how Dalila was inevitably painted as the villain of the opera she occupies, while Judith is portrayed as a heroic figure. Dalila acts on her feelings, as well, rather than acting purely on orders, or out of greed. In fact, her refusal of payment for her services to the Dagonites shows her complete lack of avarice. This, again, is like Judith's selfless wish to eliminate her opponent, without the need for material reward. However, in Judith's case, this is viewed as valour and humility, whereas Dalila is shown to be vengeful. Ultimately, the main reason that Dalila is not viewed as a heroine is because of her allegiance to the Philistines.

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<sup>188</sup> Paul Banks also makes a connection with Strauss's creation in his essay here, as the sexual Klimt portrait was often mistaken for a painting of Salome by the public, showing how these two characters were brought closer together by their transformations into the subjects of art-form. Paul Banks, *Salome/Elektra: Richard Strauss Opera Guides* (Surrey: Oneworld, 1988), 8.

<sup>189</sup> Margarita Stocker, *Judith, Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (Bath: Bath Press, 1998), 4.

Another viewpoint on this situation concerns how these two women act following the completion of their task. In the Bible, much is made of the fact that Judith is in constant conversation with God. In fact, it is true that 'words addressed to God appear on Judith's lips at literally every turn in the narrative' – post-murder of Holofernes is no exception.<sup>190</sup> Judith sees her victory as belonging to God in an absolute way, and does not celebrate her part in the deed. Even if God did not help her in any physical way with bringing down the enemy army, Judith credits him with this positive upheaval, as he guided her from above and gave her the idea in the beginning. Due to this grateful, humble attitude, Judith acts in a completely selfless way, as one might expect of a courageous heroine, even though she has saved her people by using her wits and bravery. On the other hand, Dalila credits no such idol with her success, preferring instead to laugh at Samson's foolishness and misfortune.

Judith also follows God's word instead of the orders of one of her people, whose courage has been lost from days of defeat and hunger, whereas Dalila's plan is created by the Dagonites. Therefore, even if Dalila's actions had been 'good', in the sense that Judith's actions were, her attitude towards their outcome means that she could not fit the description of a conventional heroine, and has therefore not been received as such. Conversely, Judith's gratitude and faith show respect for her God – truly it can be said that 'trust, not manipulative deeds, marks her faith'.<sup>191</sup> This genuineness of spirit also comes across in her music, whereas Dalila's lyrics are always at odds with the sweetness of her music, as described before in the disparities between the honeyed words of 'Printemps qui commence' and her true feelings of revenge.

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<sup>190</sup> Toni Craven, "Tradition and Convention in the Book of Judith" in *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1990), 36.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.



## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the issues of inequality and essentialism that concern female characters in opera, and in the Bible, through the identification and interrogation of opposite stereotypes. Using four case studies from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the extent of female categorisation in biblical opera and the portrayal of three specific types in this art-form have been highlighted and investigated, with reference to significant existing feminist and musicological work.

The traditions of Christian writings and opera are, in many ways, similar. In particular, their approaches to the portrayal of women highlight the same tropes, showing how important these constructs are to the narrative work of the male creators. More than anything, they prove how the general view of women, especially in a dramatic sense, has been slow to change. The four case studies explored in the preceding chapters have demonstrated that the convergence between biblical women and female opera characters highlights and emphasises the presence of female type within both the Judeo-Christian religion, and opera of the late Romantic and early Modern eras.

Even though the Bible's primary purpose is to act as a record of the history and teachings of the Christian religion, it contains many stories and events which lend themselves to theatricality. The operas studied in this thesis may not focus on the more exhilarating religious tales, however, they do show that opera is an interesting, complex, and illuminating medium used to portray the lives of important female characters. Yet the underlying messages concealed usually reveal the presence of a female type used to shape a particular character.

A point could be made for other art-forms having the same connections with complex biblical women, in that artists have also imbued these characters with elements of type in their work. There are countless paintings depicting the lascivious sensuality of Salome, for example, including works by such distinguished artists as Caravaggio and Henri Regnault. Caravaggio also portrayed Judith's beheading of Holofernes, showing a fondness for the *femme fatale* in his art. Moreover, there have been works written for the stage without music that tell the tales of these women. *Salome* the opera, of course, would not have been created had it not been for the Wilde play of the same name, from which many of Salome's deplorable *femme fatale* traits and her horrific death originated. Judith has been the focus of plays by other playwrights, like Christian Hebbel and Jean Giraudoux, who emphasised different parts of her character in their plays. Therefore one cannot say that opera

monopolizes the depiction of the stereotyped biblical female. However, as Carolyn Abbate perceptively notes in her seminal essay, 'Opera or the envoicing of women', it is noticeable that the 'composer's dependence on *women* is unique to opera'.<sup>192</sup>

Although the female characters in the operas mentioned are so often victimised or vilified, it is remarkable how important they are to the composer. Their presence is inescapable, no matter what the outcome of their particular story may be. Whilst many male operatic figures are certainly interesting, there is an undeniable fascination with the female, the heroine, the *femme fatale* – the 'Other'. Therefore opera's reliance on memorable female protagonists becomes evident.

Whilst 'the Other' is frequently used to refer to a female presence in a work, conjuring a sense of difference and mystique, it does not mean that the term is restricted to describing this presence. Again, it is McClary's writing I quote, in that her idea that 'the Other need not always be interpreted strictly as female' but can designate any difficulty or threat, is interesting in the context of this thesis.<sup>193</sup> For example, she cites chromaticism as a representation of 'Other', as it presents a threat to the general harmony of music, and must be resolved in order to give the narrative a satisfying conclusion.<sup>194</sup> However, McClary goes on to equate the concept of chromaticism with femininity, showing that in her mind, 'Otherness' and femininity are undeniably linked. Due to the time period in which they were created, all four of these operas use chromaticism, to varying degrees, to enhance their musical narrative. In fact, the thirty-year gap between the composition of *Samson and Dalila* and *Salome* is most apparent in the latter's abundance of chromatic colour. In the same way, one sees the impact of the fifty years between *Judith* and *Hagith* in their uses of key and chromaticism.

There is a modern way of thinking about opera that focuses on two opposing categories: the siren and the songbird. They are extremely distinct categories, and prove to be quite applicable to many operatic female characters: for example, earlier in this thesis, Dalila was identified as a siren figure. These distinct versions of female characters have been written about by academics such as Mary Ann Smart and Susan Rutherford, who have developed the arguments outlining the existence of such tropes. In fact, Rutherford maintains that 'the

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<sup>192</sup> Carolyn Abbate, "Opera: or the Envoicing of Women", in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (London: University of California Press, 1993), 255.

<sup>193</sup> Susan McClary, *Reading Music: Selected Essays* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 126.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

categories of siren and songbird [have] remained integral to the discourses concerning the female singer throughout the period', referring to the years between 1815 and 1930.<sup>195</sup>

One can consider the relationship between the female characters of this thesis and the siren-songbird dichotomy, as a possible alternative to the tropes already discussed. For instance, it is easy to apply the 'siren' label to Dalila, as the beauty of her song is so instrumental in orchestrating Samson's downfall. Her music is like a siren's call to the hapless hero, as it promises wonder and love, yet delivers neither. It is less easy, perhaps, to call Salome a siren, as she is so young and conceivably mentally unstable that the trope feels unsuitable. She is also quite clearly not a songbird, which means that Salome appears not to fall into either category. It would be difficult, too, to make the distinction for Hagith. She is not devious or dishonest enough to be called a siren, but her headstrong character and unflinching demeanour mean that she falls short of the songbird type. Judith's capability and sexual power contrast with the pure, sweet aspects of the songbird, yet she also cannot adhere to the siren type, as it conjures too many negative connotations for this brave heroine.

Therefore, one can argue that the siren/songbird discourse is not as relevant here as the tropes presented by this thesis. This is why the types of victim, *femme fatale*, and heroine were chosen rather than other female types – although the majority of the characters are mentioned in more than one chapter, they adhere to at least one of the types discussed. Furthermore, sirens and songbirds are, arguably, tied to the medium of opera, due to their emphasis on sound and vocality. Nevertheless, one must remember that operatic women are not all easily categorized, especially in modern works.

Yet the issue of stereotyping becomes clearest when studying biblical opera. The four operas analysed in this thesis were chosen for reasons already stated – however, the other biblical operas briefly mentioned earlier could also support the argument that the union of the Judeo-Christian religion and opera leads to defined cases of categorisation. For example, Verdi's *Nabucco* could be described as containing two of the tropes detailed in this thesis (the heroine, and the *femme fatale*), in the form of heroic Fenena, who stands up for her religious beliefs and for love, and the vengeful Abigaille who lusts after power. Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*, a modern retelling of an Apocryphal story, features a young girl victimised (though not killed) by her community. *Esther*, a contemporary work by Hugo Weisgall, is based on a Jewish queen who saves her people from death, and Massenet's

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<sup>195</sup> Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57.

*Hérodiade* follows a very different version of Salome's story, yet ends with her demise. Therefore, there are other works which provide evidence for the classification of women in biblical opera, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

One can also consider the amount of contradiction present in biblical and operatic messages, as a link that ties them together. For example, opera appears to need its female characters, to accentuate a work's emotional core and provide it with a sense of gender balance and variation. On occasion, it even chooses a female subject to be a heroic figure. However, as demonstrated by this thesis, opera often ascribes to women negative characteristics, such as weakness or lustfulness; opera needs its 'wicked women' as well. Its need for strong, interesting women who create drama and intrigue is tempered by how it often ends up treating these characters.

The Bible also carries a sense of inconsistency in the way it portrays gender relations. Many theologians argue that the Judeo-Christian God created man and woman to be spiritually equal, in that their mission was to spread the word and knowledge of God on earth through being made in His image. Michael Lewis, for one, argues in his work on biblical gender roles that 'scripture provides no support for a man who thinks he is in any way superior or who thinks that his role is to study the Word while the women deals with domestic chores'.<sup>196</sup> However, one wonders how this can be so if women are also meant to completely obey men, as decreed by God in Genesis. As part of Eve's punishment, also referred to as 'the Curse', God declared that she should answer to her husband, with the words, 'thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee'. With this, God restored Adam's authority over Eve, which had been breached when she persuaded him to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

This theme of contradiction could also apply to the relationship between words and music in opera. Carolyn Abbate has written of Wotan's monologue, a seminal part of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, in her book *Unsung Voices*, pointing out how the music almost seems to be as important in communicating Wotan's message as his words. Sometimes, part of an opera will 'ask us to distrust music's voice', as music can exude as much falsity and trickery as words can, proving a suspect element in the right context.<sup>197</sup> In the operas covered by this thesis, there are times when the music is actually at odds with what the characters are endeavouring or pretending to convey. For instance, Dalila's false words of love contrast with the actual beauty of her music, and Salome's own monologue detailing her blood-

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<sup>196</sup> Michael Lewis, *Man and Woman – A Study of Biblical Roles* (Norwich: The Testimony, 1992), 14.

<sup>197</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991), 204.

thirsty victory is underscored as a musical moment of rapture. However, the music rarely goes further than this, stopping short of adding any extra or contrasting dimensions to each character. Ergo, Judith's music is pious, Salome's is largely dissonant, and so on – the character types are, usually, preserved by each component of the opera, undeniably including the music. The text and music can seem so aligned, it could be argued that the characters and choices of the women are even further reduced. Therefore, one can see that the music of these works is as responsible for stereotyping women as the plots themselves. Although the medium of opera is a moving, intelligent one, with the potential to create complex characters, even it cannot escape stereotyping women – an especially unavoidable occurrence when the stories of biblical women are being adapted for the stage.

As this thesis has detailed the existence of types which govern women in biblical opera, it would be pertinent to state whether male character types also appear. The four operas studied contain male characters that could potentially fit certain stereotypes. For example, Holofernes is, arguably, a rather classic personification of the villain type (which would correspond, in many ways, to the *femme fatale*). Samson is technically a hero, though his heroism is not directly featured in *Samson and Dalila* until the work's end, when he regains his famous strength and obliterates the Dagonites. However, the categorisation of men in these operas is less clear-cut than of the opposite sex. There is more variation in their parts, more deviation from a definite type. The Young King in *Hagith* fits the description of a hero, as he appears both likeable and valiant. Yet he does not get his chance to realise that heroism, regarding the damsel in distress, thereby emerging as a rather tragic and ultimately unfulfilled version of hero. Samson is a heroic figure, yet he quickly falls victim to his lust, choosing to follow an unknown woman rather than of his own people. Finally, Jochanaan is almost too angry, too mysterious, to conform successfully to the hero type, instead blurring its conventions and casting doubt as to whether he can truly be stereotyped.

Therefore, the issue of male type does seem to exist in biblical opera, but not to the same extent as that of female type, as there appears to be more departure from standard, pigeonholed categories. The male characters in these operas display some elements that relate to certain stereotypes, such as the hero, but often they diverge from these types rather more noticeably and more often than the female characters. However, the music itself still seems to suggest type. The joy in the chorus's introduction to the Young King, and his passionate music, seem to evoke the type of the hero. Moreover, Jochanaan's music, due to his relationship with the key of C, stands out as being the most consonant in *Salome*,

meaning his position as a kind of hero is somewhat aurally enhanced. In these cases, it is a faint suggestion of a stereotype, but a suggestion nonetheless. Consequently, one can see how the music, as with the female categorisation, can add to the notion of stereotyping.

Thus, one can conclude that, even though one of the tropes covered by this thesis denotes a positive view of women, the existence of all three tropes is a matter of inevitability. They can surely be found, sometimes not alone, within female characters, ultimately providing them with a pre-destined motivation. With the characters covered in this thesis, one can break down even the most shocking, brave, or complicated of actions, into a result of a given trope or tropes. Clearly, this thesis has not created these tropes; however, it has attempted to define and explore their existence and assess their connection. It has also given possible motives for why they were created and perpetuated, the main example of these being the issue of male control. This issue is neatly summed up by Mary Simonson's 2007 article on *Salome*, in which she argues that the reason why the character's narrative has proven so popular is because it describes 'a desire to legitimize male control of female bodies and behaviour', demonstrating the influence of male hegemony and power on culture and art.<sup>198</sup>

This need for men to categorise and label women, in order to control them, dates back to the Christian Bible, and most likely beyond. Dividing women into stereotypes also simplifies them into a manageable, recognisable entity, especially within art where an essence of familiarity can seem like a favourable thing. From these ancient times, to the breaking waves of feminism that began to enlighten the masses in the 1960s, women have been viewed as lesser, as inferior, even as dangerous. Their position as other, as 'second', even, has provided countless disadvantages, as the Bible puts so much positive emphasis on being 'first'.<sup>199</sup> Men's desire to dominate with an ever present hegemony is clearly chronicled in the Bible's androcentrism, as it is written by men, of men, and, mostly, for men. The women who do feature, and who have been chosen as the subjects of various operas, must fit the purpose of their male creators: namely, they must show the different kinds of woman that can be easily recognised. Their respective fables outline fates that befit each woman's situation – every 'wicked woman' pays her due. The victim is easily vanquished; the *femme fatale* succeeds in a sexual way but is punished accordingly later; and the heroine proves her worth by doing her duty for others, like her people, and her

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<sup>198</sup> Simonson, Mary. "'The Call of Salome': American Adaptations and Re-creations of the Female Body in the Early Twentieth Century' in *Women and Music Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2007), 2.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

God. Here are the bare bones of three stories that have been repeated, time and again, since their early Christian incarnations, in the form of concrete characters as Dalila and Judith. The specifics of the tales may change, as may the medium, but the fact remains that the portrayal of women relies heavily on type, and, over the course of this thesis, the opinion that both the Bible and opera may well have hindered women's development due to unmoveable androcentrism is the one that prevails.

## Appendices

A.1

Oper in einem Aufzug  
von **Felix Dörmann**.

Opera w jednym akcie  
Tekst **Feliksa Dörmanna**.  
*Tłumaczenie polskie Stan. Barączka.*

Aufführungsrecht vorbehalten.  
*Droits d'exécution réservés.*

Karol Szymanowski, Op. 25.

**Lento assai. (Mesto) (M. ♩ = 76.)**

Celli (con sord.)  
Bassi (con sord.)  
Viol. II. Cl.  
Viol. I.  
Fag.  
Ob.  
Corni.  
Fl.

*ppp possibile*  
*p*  
*cresc.*  
*mp*  
*poco affrettando*  
*riten.*  
*sf*  
*ff*  
*sf*  
*mf*  
*p*  
*(pizz.)*

Piano.

Hagith

Beginning of opera



A.2

36 der junge König auf der Höhe der Terrasse und schreitet in den Saal herab.)  
*góry tarasu i wchodzi do sali.)*

Molto passionato.  
Viel langsamer.

(Hinter ihm schließt sich der Vorhang.)  
(Za nim zasława się zasłona.)

37 Meno mosso (*allargando*).

dim. molto    mf rall. dolce espress.    dimin.    Corno. Viol.

Hagith

Entrance of the Old King

A.3

3 **Der alte König** (erhebt sich auf dem Lager und starrt mit leeren Augen vor sich hin.)  
Stary Król (podnosi się na tożu i patrzy pustym wzrokiem przed siebie.)

*Più mosso. (quasi doppio movimento) (♩=84.)*

Oh! Der Frost ist wie-der da,  
O! znoć wkoś - ciach czu-ję mróz!

*ppp*

*Hagith*

The entrance of the Young King

A.4

59 *Etwas langsamer.* ( $\text{♩} = 42.$ )

*Hagith.* *pp*

Ha - - - gith bin ich ge -  
Ha - - - gith lu - - - dzie mię

*Fl. Celesta.*  
*p dolcissimo* *cresc.*

*Hagith*

The entrance of Hagith

A.5

30 poco accelerando (senza crescendo)

3 gr. Fl.  
1. Hob.  
engl. Horn.  
1.  
2 A-Clar.  
2.  
1.2. Fag.  
1. Harfe.  
Salome.

kühl und keusch. Ja, wie die Schön - heit ei - ner Jungfrau, die rein ge - ble - ben

Salome

'...cold and chaste, I am quite sure she is a virgin...

A.6

Salome.

Narraboth.

Er sagt schreckliche Din - ge u-ber meine

dass ich Eu-re Säufte ho - - len las-se, Prinzessin? Die Nacht ist schön im Gar-ten....

*Salome*

Example of Salome interrupting Narraboth

A.7

Salome.  *ist....* Wer  
**Stimme des Jochanaan.**  
Sie - he, der Herr ist ge - kommen, des Menschen Sohn ist na - he.

Salome.  war das, der hier ge - rufen hat? Ach, der Prophet. Der, vor dem der Te - trarch Angst  
*Salome*

The call of Jochanaan and the answer of Salome

The image shows a page of a musical score for the opera *Samson et Dalila*. The score is arranged in a grand staff format, featuring a vocal line at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The piano part includes staves for the right and left hands, a harpsichord (C.B.), and a basso continuo (C.B.). The tempo and mood are indicated by the marking "Di più in più animato" in a bold font. The dynamics are marked "sempre ff" (sempre fortissimo) throughout the piece. The music is characterized by a repeated semiquaver rhythm and an exotic melody, typical of the Bacchanale section.

*Samson et Dalila*

Examples of the repeated semiquaver rhythm and exotic melody in the Bacchanale

154 **Andante** (84 = ♩)

Fl.

Cl.

Corn. en MI

Harp. *pp*

**Andante** (84 = ♩)

*dolcissimo*

**DALILA** *dol.* *dolcissimo*

Prin. temps qui com.mence, Por tant l'espé . ran . ce Aux coeurs amou.  
 tie Sou . ne vie lachte, der Früh . ling er . wach . te C'est küs . ste die

*vll.*

*dolcissimo*

C.B.

## Samson et Dalila

Beginning of 'Printemps qui commence'



- chet — de douce o — deur,  
 Held meiner Au — gen Licht,  
 Dont la senteur est en — ivra — to!  
 Ru — he auch in meinen Ir — ren!  
 Ah! pi — tié, Sei — gneur, pour — celui — qui — s'im — plo — re!  
 Ich raff' dir, o Herr! sich mei — nen Kampf, Hörst mich Flr — — hen!  
 lar — — mes Pour désar — mer lu colé — — re du ciel!  
 — der — — ben, Ful — le nicht ab ton dem Herrn, Du mein Gott!  
 cresc. pff cresc. cresc. cresc. cresc. cresc. cresc.

*Samson et Dalila*

Example of trio between Samson, Dalila, and the Old Hebrew

A.11

**Largo assai.**

**PIANO.**

The image shows two systems of musical notation for piano. The first system is marked "Largo assai." and "PIANO." and contains dynamics "pp" and "p". The second system contains dynamics "mg.", "ff", and "p". The music is in 2/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

*Judith*

Very beginning of the overture

A.12

The image shows a musical score for Act One of the opera *Judith*. It consists of four staves. The top two staves are vocal lines, and the bottom two are piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are in Russian: "Наши муки, наши скорби Часъ отъ часу злѣе!" (Our sorrows, our sorrows, the hour grows more evil from hour to hour!). The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *ff* (fortissimo). The piano part features a prominent bass line with chords and a melodic line in the right hand.

*Judith*

Example of the mostly choral texture in Act One

A.13

**Audante.**

**PIANO.**

ob.  
*p*

Clar.

*Judith*

Beginning of act 2, oboe melody

A.14

The image shows a musical score for the end of the opera 'Judith'. It consists of five staves. The top four staves are vocal parts, each with the lyrics 'ро - да сво - е - го!' written below. The first staff is marked *fff*. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment, also marked *fff*. The score concludes with the text 'КОНЕЦЪ ОПЕРЫ.' (End of the Opera).

*Judith*

Very end of the opera – triumphant chorus

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