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“Where’s my Fool?”: *Lear* Motifs in *Rigoletto*

BARBARA BARRY

Stories are like searchlights and spotlights; they brighten up parts of the stage while leaving the rest in darkness.... Stories aid the seekers of comprehension by separating the relevant from the irrelevant, actions from their settings, the plot from its background, and the heroes or the villains at the centre of the plot from the hosts of supernumeraries and dummies. It is the mission of stories to select, and it is in their nature to include through exclusion and to illuminate through casting shadows. It is a grave misunderstanding, and injustice, to blame stories for favoring one part of the stage while neglecting another. *Without selection there would be no story.*¹

In a letter to the poet Antonio Somma on 23 April 1853, Giuseppe Verdi described the powerful impact of William Shakespeare’s plays and how he had best realized their dramatic conflict and variety of expression in *Rigoletto*:

Per l’istessa ragione *preferisco Shakespeare a tutti i drammatici*, senza eccettuarne i Greci. A me pare che il miglior soggetto in quanto ad effetto che io m’abbia finora posto in musica (non intendo parlare affatto sul merito letterario e poetico) sia *Rigoletto*. Vi sono posizioni potentissime, varietà, brio, patetico...²

(For the same reason [of variety] *I prefer Shakespeare to all other dramatists*, not excepting the Greeks. It seems to me that the best subjects I have set to music so far, from the point of view of effect (I don’t mean at all to allude to its literary or poetic merit) is *Rigoletto*. It has very powerful situations, variety, verve, pathos ...)

Verdi identified two aspects of Shakespeare’s plays as central to his own dramatic vision: first, Shakespeare’s variety of mood and location, such as between the interior of the castle and the exterior of the heath, telescoped the action and demanded the audience’s active, imaginative participation much more than the classical unities of time, place, and

action. Second, counterpointing strongly drawn characters tightened the plot's web of treachery and retribution and propelled the action to its climax. Through such vivid characterization and powerful plots, Verdi developed new techniques within existing conventions of nineteenth-century Italian opera, integrating arias and duets into larger and more cohesive units.

In the same letter, Verdi proposed to Somma that they should work together on an opera on *King Lear*. Far from the first time Verdi had expressed interest in the subject, this was part of a succession of *Lear* projects that, for a variety of reasons, had either stalled or been allowed to lapse. These forays of engagement and withdrawal from *Lear* territory raise the question, not so much of what attracted him—that much is evident from his letters—but what prevented him from writing an opera on *King Lear*.

Perhaps it is possible to date the beginning of his involvement with *King Lear* to a new translation of Shakespeare, published in Milan in January 1843 by Giulio Carcano, which brought into sharp focus the abrasive confrontation about the abuse of power between Lear and his older daughters and the touching reconciliation with Cordelia near the end of the play before her death. Envisioning the same elements of emotional confrontation and dramatic action that had contributed to the outstanding success of *Nabucco* the previous year, Verdi raised the possibility of a *Lear* opera with Count Mocenigo, director of operatic productions at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, in a letter dated 6 June 1843.

Soon afterwards, though, and even before he had found a librettist and begun work, Verdi started to voice all kinds of concerns, not so much about the plan as about the process. Could he complete the work on time to fulfill his contract to La Fenice? Where would he find suitable singers for the main roles, especially the huge title role, which demanded not only a consummate singer but a powerful actor who could convey the power of kingship and the pathos of Lear's ruined mind? Bringing up potential problems about completion and execution even before he had drawn up a concept sketch of the libretto indicates that behind them lay a far more fundamental concern: whether Verdi could transform Shakespeare's immense, sprawling tragedy into an opera that would satisfy his exacting demands for dramatic concision. Mocenigo sensed Verdi's misgivings that the *Lear* project would take a huge amount of time and effort, and after the flop of *Un giorno di regno* on its first night in 1840, Verdi could not

afford to get involved in a work that would get mired down and so lose the momentum of his success with *Nabucco*. He needed a play with verve, contrast, and direct dramatic action that could be realized in a striking musico-dramatic setting, so when Mocenigo suggested Victor Hugo's play *Hernani*, which had been a huge political as well as dramatic success at its premiere on 25 September 1830, Verdi recognized the dramatic potential of its political insurgency and human passion and, in accepting it, let the *Lear* idea drop.

Hugo's plays were at the forefront of political confrontation with reactionary royalty in the years around the 1830 insurrection, and equally at the forefront of French Romantic theater that used the stage as the voice of protest against injustice and oppression and as the crucible of revolution. Vivid in expression, Hugo's plays were deliberately contentious in their depiction of greedy, licentious monarchs and oppressive governments that misused their power. In November 1832, *Le roi s'amuse* had been banned after its first performance in Paris in an infamous scandal, and censored in Venice, which was then controlled by Austria, one of Europe's most reactionary states, on the grounds that it incited insurgency and threatened public morality.

Given the censors' restrictions on anything inflammatory in the areas of politics, religion, and morality, *Hernani*, with its revolutionary bandit hero and his attack on authority, could well be regarded as the more controversial choice. But central to *King Lear* is something equally if not more dangerous—fatally flawed kingship, involving judgment distorted by rash decisions and myopic mismanagement of power. Lear's older daughters, having flattered their father to obtain extensive parts of the kingdom, then abuse their power by stripping their father of his followers, and in his humiliation and grief, he goes mad. The conflict escalates into war, effectively destroying not only all the main protagonists but, as in *Macbeth*, the whole kingdom. As the subject of an opera, the huge drama had enormous potential but posed equally enormous challenges if it were to be adapted as a workable libretto. Yet perhaps not only practical concerns inhibited Verdi from writing a *Re Lear* in 1843: he may have sensed that at this early point in his career, he was not yet ready to undertake the realization of *Lear's* immense dramatic demands.

The next opportunity to consider a *King Lear* came in April 1846, when Verdi was invited to London by the English impresario Benjamin Lumley to write an opera for Her Majesty's Theater. *King Lear* seemed a particularly enticing topic, and as an additional incentive Lumley proposed that the famous bass Luigi Lablache would sing the title role—after all, what would be more appropriate than an opera based on a play by England's greatest dramatist by Italy's most famous opera composer? Verdi planned to come to London after the first performances of *Attila* in Venice, but in December 1845 and January 1846, he suffered a bout of the debilitating physical and nervous illness that periodically prostrated him. His doctors told him he needed extended rest and would not allow him to travel. On 9 April 1846, he wrote to Lumley from Venice:

You cannot imagine how sorry I am to have to renounce the honour of composing for London. My health is improving very slowly, and I am unable to take up even the slightest amount of work. I have to rest and follow a very strict course of treatment, and later I shall have to go to Recoaro to take the waters there etc.

I hope that by inconveniencing you now, I shall by no means be ending our relationship, and I look forward to receiving a few lines from you.³

Lumley was evidently unconvinced that Verdi was too ill to travel and tried to persuade him to come to London, saying how enthusiastically *I Lombardi* had been received by English audiences;⁴ but Verdi did not, or was not able to, come, and the *Lear* plan was once again shelved.

In 1850, *King Lear* was again considered as a libretto for a Verdi opera and then bypassed for a play by Victor Hugo. The Hugo play on this occasion, *Le roi s'amuse*, depicts the French king Francis I as a heartless libertine, egged on by Triboulet, his deformed and malicious jester. Triboulet, though, lives a double life; while his work is to entertain the dissolute king with slander and incisive jokes, at night he is a loving father to his young daughter Blanche. Determined to protect her from the depravity of the court, he keeps her effectively locked up in the house and secluded from the world. Even if he can do this over the short term, his bifurcated life is impossible to sustain in the long run, just as keeping her immured in the house is repressive and untenable.⁵ In spite of his excessive protectiveness, he cannot prevent the corruption of the court from spilling over into his private life. Blanche is abducted as a vicious joke by the nobility and seduced by the king.

Both highly successful and controversial at its premiere on 22 November 1832, *Le roi s'amuse* was banned after one night on grounds of immorality. Furious, Hugo immediately published the play with an extended preface in which he defended both the work and his integrity as an artist. In the short term, Hugo maintained, banning the play was a petty act of bureaucratic interference, but from a larger perspective, it was an intrusion into artistic freedom, violating the principles of intrinsic right of choice and open discourse in a free society. The controversy on the first night, Hugo continued, was no indication of the play's true merit. Subsequent performances would allow for a more balanced assessment. Despite a similar outcry on the first nights of his plays *Marion de Lorme* and *Hernani*, they had run for fifty-three and sixty-one performances respectively, but due to "une violence ministérielle," *Le roi s'amuse* was taken off the boards after one night. Then, in ringing tones, Hugo denounced bureaucratic mean-mindedness and further defended his position:

[o]n verra qu'il ne s'agit pas seulement dans cette affaire d'un drame et d'un poète, mais nous l'avons dit au commencement que la liberté et la propriété sont toutes entières engagés dans la question.⁶

(We'll see that it's not just about this business of a drama and a poet, but we've said at the start that the whole thing is about freedom and propriety).

The play's powerful impact and its Shakespearean overtones were not lost on Verdi. "*Le Roi s'amuse*," he exclaimed in a letter to his librettist Francesco Maria Piave on 8 May 1850, "è il più gran sogetto e forse il più gran dramma dei tempi moderni. *Tribolet* [*sic*] è creazione degna di Shakespeare!"⁷ (*Le roi s'amuse* is the greatest subject and perhaps the greatest drama of modern times. *Tribolet* [*sic*] is a creation worthy of Shakespeare!) With its Shakespearean conflict between love and honor, its central deformed character of a "bitter fool," and the specifically *Lear* theme of a father betrayed by his daughter, *Le roi s'amuse* provided Piave with the characters and dramatic situations he would employ in writing the libretto for *Rigoletto*.

But not yet: because in February 1850, Verdi was again seriously considering *King Lear* as the potential subject for an opera; or, more precisely, he was considering both *Lear* and a number of other subjects, including *Le roi s'amuse*, for a new opera for the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. On 28 February 1850, he writes to Salvatore Cammarano, an experienced

and successful librettist, about how *King Lear* could be worked into an opera. The subject, he says, should be treated in an innovative way, and he encloses a detailed four-act outline.

Dear Cammarano:

King Lear at first sight is so vast and intricate that it seems impossible one could make an opera out of it. However, on examining it closely, it seems to me that the difficulties, though no doubt immense, are not insuperable. You realize that there is no need to make *King Lear* into the usual kind of drama we have had up until now: *rather, we must treat it in a completely new manner, on a large scale, and without regard for mere convenience....* Certain scenes would definitely have to be cut, for instance the one in which Gloucester is blinded, the one in which the two sisters are carried onto the stage etc. etc., and many others which you know better than I do.⁸

Unfortunately, Cammarano died in 1852, and the project devolved onto Verdi's friend Antonio Somma, a lawyer and dramatist, but inexperienced in writing libretti. The surviving documents between Somma and Verdi include a fairly extensive correspondence—twelve extant letters as well as a libretto in Somma's handwriting and a copy in Verdi's.⁹ For more than two years Somma wrestled with trying to incorporate Verdi's many suggestions and criticisms and construct a workable text from an Elizabethan play that Verdi kept fretting would be too long to hold the public's interest. In the end, despite all Somma's tact and willingness to oblige Verdi, including making radical cuts like deleting the parts of Gloucester and Edgar, he seems to have failed to satisfy the composer's demands for clarity of dramatic vision. Gary Schmidgall suggests that in Verdi's constant dissatisfaction, "there may also be a hint here of an unconscious urge to distance himself from the brutal reality of sitting down to compose the tremendous music for *Re Lear*."¹⁰ On the receiving end of Verdi's constant demands for changes in the libretto's structure and versification—demands that may well have been the mechanism for avoiding the task of writing the *Lear* music—Somma, in April 1856, was left with an impasse: a project that Verdi had failed to articulate and to realize.

Or had he? It is evident from these and other letters that Verdi was fascinated by *King Lear* over a number of years, revisiting the project several times and seeing the potential for a striking operatic setting in

the conflict between Lear and his older daughters and in the touching relationship between Lear and his Fool. Such a huge play demanded novelty of treatment, variety, and brevity, focusing on the essential parts of the drama that could translate into powerful operatic realization, such as filial ingratitude, the storm, and the moving scenes between Lear and Cordelia at the end of the play. The titanic enterprise seems to have fueled his creative impulse and yet, on some level, inhibited its realization.

The opposite dynamics of attraction and the concomitant fear of actualization are explained in psychoanalytic theory as mechanisms of inhibition and deflection. If a person is faced with a task or experience that is too threatening or overwhelming to cope with, then he or she may simply be unable to face it in everyday reality and so finds ways to avoid dealing with it. But if its components can be reconfigured in a different arrangement that does not cause such stress or tension, then the individual may be able to come to terms with the issue. Reconfiguring the components means that its elements are reworked at deep-seated levels of the mind as part of a reinterpreted narrative: he or she metaphorically "retells the story." Psychoanalyst Roy Schafer describes such elements as "[s]ymbols, metaphors, similes, *images, themes, or dramatic scenes*, or some combination."¹¹ The elements are realigned in a new framework, in which the previously threatening or inhibiting elements are reworked in new guises so that they no longer cause the high level of stress as in the original context.

Stress often results in delaying tactics to avoid confronting the issue, such as procrastination, irritability, and excessive criticism or fault-finding with a partner's ideas. It is an apparent paradox that while at some level the individual often shows interest in the project, he or she is nevertheless unable to undertake it in its present form. If the stress-producing elements are reconfigured, however, the person can deal with the new "retelling" because it has become somewhat distanced from the original source.¹² Freud called such displacement "transference,"¹³ and it was one of his most important ideas that components from anxiety-producing phenomena at the surface of the mind can be reworked in new structural configurations.¹⁴

Transference provides an intriguing perspective on *Rigoletto* in that it allows us to consider how literary and structural motifs in *King Lear*

may be seen as the narrative background against which *Rigoletto* is the reconfigured foreground.¹⁵ The complex dialectics of transference—attraction/inhibition, reworking/transformation—reveal insight into Verdi's extended preoccupation with *King Lear*, which, despite several attempts, he was unable to write. But perhaps the idea of reworked “images, themes, or dramatic scenes” cited by Schafer also provides vital clues to interpreting the multileveled similarities and reworking between *King Lear* and *Rigoletto* via Hugo's play *Le roi s'amuse*. In his important study of the Verdi operas, Julian Budden writes, “*Rigoletto* I suspect is one of the *King Lear*s that might have been.”¹⁶ The present discussion pursues this suggestion, that strategic elements from *King Lear* are reworked and transformed in *Rigoletto*.

Similarities between the two works can be identified in two ways. One entails similarities of *structural themes* in the plot and characters, including a father's control over his daughter, the relationship of a nobleman and his fool, and the use and abuse of power. The other method involves *techniques of construction* that provide striking parallels between *King Lear* and *Rigoletto* but do not play any significant role in *Le roi s'amuse*, on which the libretto was based. Verdi's musical techniques of referentiality, which bind the dramatic action and provide long-range coherence, are striking equivalents to the literary motifs that resonate throughout *King Lear*. The cumulative repetition of the words “nothing,” “mad,” and “weep” echo through the play like ominous leitmotifs:

Lear [to Cordelia]: Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.¹⁷

Kent: This is nothing, fool.

Fool: Then 'tis like the breath of an unfeed lawyer, you gave me nothing for't.

(1.4.119–21)

Fool: I had rather be any kind o' thing than a Fool, and yet I would not be thee, nunce. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing i' the middle. Here comes one o' the parings.

(1.4.168–70)

Lear [half mad, to Edgar, almost naked and disguised as “mad Tom”]:

What, have his daughters brought him to this pass?

Couldst thou save nothing?

(3.4.59–60)

Lear: O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven.
 Keep me in temper. I would not be mad!
 (1.5.38–39)

Lear [to the blinded Gloucester]: What, art mad? A man may see how
 this world goes with no eyes.
 (4.6.148–49)

Lear: Old fond eyes,
 Beweep this cause again, I'll pluck ye out.
 (1.4.279–80)

Lear: You think I'll weep,
 No, I'll not weep:
 I have full cause of weeping. But this heart
 Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
 Or ere I'll weep. O Fool, I shall go mad!
 (2.4.278–82)

Lear [to Cordelia]: Be your tears wet? Yes, 'faith. I pray, weep not.
 (4.7.66)

Weeping is a motif central to both this opera and play about abduction and betrayal, but *Rigoletto*'s most pervasive equivalent to the resonance of *Lear*'s literary refrains is the curse motif that opens the opera, with its ominous, dotted rhythm and clotted, repeated C's over a diminished seventh that resolves onto C minor. Its terse character foreshadows the drama, and like the repetitions of "nothing" in *King Lear* builds its ominous meaning through cumulative refrains. The curse motif is associated with retribution and occurs at three strategic places in the dramatic structure: near the beginning, Rigoletto's malice against Monterone, the father of a girl seduced by the Duke, provokes Monterone to curse him; in the middle of the opera, after his own daughter Gilda has similarly been seduced by the Duke, Rigoletto assumes the role of vengeance, both for Monterone and for himself; and at the end, when Gilda dies in the Duke's place, retribution acquires an ironic as well as tragic dimension.

In addition to its dramatic function of retribution, the curse motif also provides important reference points in the musical structure at the matching ends of act 1 and act 3, where Gilda is taken away from Rigoletto in two different senses, the first by abduction, the other by death. The curse motif literally haunts the work, whose oppressive character is the counterpart to the brittle brilliance of the court, where the all-male chorus of courtiers, as a composite persona of malice, makes the blindfolded Rigoletto hold the ladder during the abduction of his own daughter. The curse motif is accordingly located within the work's multiple layers of irony. When Monterone curses the Duke, the curse does not affect him because he has only the shallowest feelings and, in any case, he is immune from accepting responsibility for his actions because of his wealth and power; but Rigoletto becomes obsessed with the curse. It hits its target, like a bullet, at the subterranean level of Rigoletto's hidden life. Brooding on it before he is approached by the assassin Sparafucile in act 1, it continues to haunt him throughout the work (Figs. 1–2).¹⁸

The perspective of *King Lear* as a background transformed in *Rigoletto* is underscored by the sheer density of thematic connections between the two works, some realized as direct connections, others inverted. The first of those connections is the interplay between a nobleman and his fool, but the relationship is inverted between the two works: in the one, it is a relationship of compassion, in the other, of contempt. The fool or jester, in entertaining his noble master, was allowed to speak truth to power; and through his songs and riddles, Lear's Fool tells the king truths about his "pelican daughters" that no one else dares to utter (3.4.70). But the word *fool* also has a double sense of one who plays the fool (that is, who disguises his real character in his role) and one who acts the fool (the person who acts foolishly). In *King Lear*, the Fool uses both of these meanings to warn the king (who has acted the fool in giving away his power) and to distract him after he has been humiliated by Goneril, saying to him, half playfully, half sadly, "Thou wouldst make a good Fool" (1.5.32). He also plays on his own name as well as the king's actions in the opposite sides of "a sweet and a bitter fool" (1.4.125–36).

RIGOLETTO
di
G. Verdi
ATTO PRIMO
Nº 1. Preludio

Andante sostenuto $\text{♩} = 66$

Andante sostenuto $\text{♩} = 66$

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Fig. 1. Overture, curse motif, act 1.

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№ 3. Duetto
Rigoletto e Sparafucile
 L'estremità più deserta d'una via cieca.

A sinistra una casa di discreta apparenza con una piccola corte circondata da muro. Nella corte un grosso ed alto albero ed un sedile di marmo; nel muro una porta che mette alla strada; sopra il muro un terrazzo praticabile, sostenuto da arcate. La porta del primo piano dà sul detto terrazzo, a cui si ascende per una scala di fronte. A destra della via è il muro altissimo del giardino, e un fianco del palazzo di Ceprano. È notte.

Andante mosso (♩ = 66)

Clarinetto I. in Sib
 Clarinetto II. in Sib
 Fagotto I.
 Fagotto II.
 Violine 1.
 Violine 2.
 Un Violoncello
 Violoncelli
 Contrabassi

Andante mosso (♩ = 66)

Clarinetto I. in Sib
 Clarinetto II. in Sib
 Fagotto I.
 Fagotto II.
 Rigoletto (chiudesi suo mantello)
 (Quel vecchio ma - le -)

Violine 1.
 Violine 2.
 Violoncelli
 Contrabassi

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Fig. 2. Curse motif, the approach of the assassin Sparafucile, act 1.

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The musical score is arranged in systems. The top system includes Clarinet in Sib (I and II), Bassoon (I and II), and Contrabass (Gr. C.). The second system features the Bass (B.). The third system is for the Voice (Vc.), with lyrics: "Sparafucile (lo segue da lontano, portando sotto il mantello una lunga spada) (gli si avvicina)". The fourth system includes Violins (V.le I and II), Violoncello (1), Contrabasso (1), and Viola (Vc.). The bottom system includes Violoncello (1), Viola (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). Dynamic markings such as *morendo*, *staccato*, *ppp*, and *pizz.* are used throughout the score.

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Fig. 2, continued.

Rigoletto is not a sweet fool but a bitter fool, both in his malicious jokes in the court and in the bitterness about his deformity that forces him to be a fool (in the sense of jester/buffone). Rather than serving as a buffer between the power broker and the power seekers, he incites the Duke in the pursuit of his reckless life of pleasure; and in the depraved atmosphere of the court, in front of the callous courtiers, he mocks Monterone, a father whose daughter has been seduced by the Duke. Later, alone, after he has left the court for the night and while brooding about the old man's curse, he blames his master and the corrupt courtiers for his malicious behavior. Sarcastically listing his master's characteristics—his youth, gaiety, power—in brusque, almost decapitated phrases punctuated by staccato clarinet in B-flat and pizzicato, lower strings, he spits out his contempt: "Questo padrone mio, giovin, giocondo, si possente, bello, sonnechiando mi dice; fa ch'io rida, buffone ... Forzarmi deggio e farlo!" then bursting out, with full orchestra, *ff*, "Oh, dannazione!" A deformed jester in the title role was highly unusual in mid-nineteenth-century Italian opera, especially a character as antipathetic as Rigoletto, but equally innovative is the varied, complex depiction of moods. Using the flexible pacing of arioso rather than a set piece aria, Verdi's portrayal of Rigoletto's swiftly changing feelings has an intense dramatic impact that conceivably was not equaled until *Otello* (Fig. 3, p. 72).

Victor Hugo provides insight into the character of the jester as a "bitter fool" not only in Triboulet's line "Mon âme qui sanglote et pleure amèrement"¹⁹ (my soul which sobs and weeps bitterly) but, more extensively, in the preface to *Le roi s'amuse*, where he describes both Triboulet's hatred and self-hatred, how the jester encourages the king's most lascivious and corrupt behavior and whips up the brutal reactions of the courtiers. Hugo describes Triboulet's malicious character as a product of his physical deformity and his deep-seated hatred of the king, who enjoys all the benefits of youth, looks, and power. Unlike Lear's fool, who is a "sweet fool," who can warn against but cannot prevent the king's rash actions, Triboulet is a "bitter fool" who instigates the king's malicious behavior. Later in the play, though, he is also a tragic character, and, like Lear's Fool, ultimately a victim. Hugo describes the nature of the character in his preface to the play:

Triboulet est diforme, Triboulet est malade, Triboulet est bouffon de cour; triple misère qui le rend méchant. Triboulet hait le roi parce qu'il est le roi, les seigneurs parce qu'ils sont les seigneurs, les hommes parce qu'ils n'ont pas tous une bosse sur le dos. Son seul passe-temps est d'entrer-heurter sans relâche les seigneurs contre le roi, brisant le plus faible au plus fort. Il déprave le roi, il le corrompt, il l'abrutit; il le pousse à la tyrannie, à l'ignorance, au vice.... Le roi dans les mains de Triboulet *n'est qu'un pantin tout-puissant* qui brise toutes les existences au milieu desquelles le bouffon le fait jouer.²⁰

(Triboulet is deformed, Triboulet is sick, Triboulet is a court jester, a triple misfortune which makes him evil. Triboulet hates the king because he is a king, the nobles because they are nobles, his fellow men because they don't have humps on their backs. His only pastime is to set the nobles against the king without letting up, letting the weakest go to the wall. He depraves the king, corrupts him, brutalizes him; he pushes him to tyranny, to vice and ignorance.... In Triboulet's hands *the king is nothing but an all-powerful puppet* who destroys the lives of all among whom his jester sets him.)

By contrast, in the compassionate relationship between the Fool and Lear, the Fool tries to warn the king about the disastrous results of giving away his crown. Apart from the disguised Kent, the Fool is the only one loyal to the king when he is humiliated by Regan and rushes out into the storm. Even in his mental anguish, drenched and buffeted by the wind, Lear can still spare a thought for the Fool:

Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
I am cold myself....
Poor fool, and knave, I have one part in my heart
That's sorry yet for thee.
(3.2.65–66, 69–70)

On the other hand, Rigoletto despises the Duke and is at the same time the instigator of malicious gossip and character assassination. The whole first scene is a continuous dramatic entity, held together by the various tunes, tempi, and time signatures changes of the A-flat major orchestral banda music. The banda music, with its crude vitality and incessant two-bar phrases, provides the foreground entertainment music for plots and assignments hatched in the background as brusque asides in recitatives. In his hatred of the Duke and the courtiers, the "bitter fool," maliciously delighting in humiliating others, creates two enemies whose vengeance will unfold in truly Shakespearean fashion and attack the one vulnerable

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Moderato

Clar. in Si

R.

Viol.

V-le

Vo.

Cb.

Moderato

Clar. I. in Sib

R.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

Clar. I. in Si

R.

Viol. II.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

1.

p

Questo pa-dro-ne

piu.

piu.

Moderato

mi - o, gio-vin, gio-con-do, si pos-sen-te, bel-lo, son-ne-chian-do mi

tutta forza

di - ce: fa ch'lo ri - da, buf - fo-na... For-zar-mi deg-gio e far-15! Oh, dan-na -

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Fig. 3. Rigoletto's sardonic description of the duke, act 1.

Allegro $\text{♩} = 120$

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Fl. *ff*

Obl. *ff*

Ob. *ff*

Clar. in Si *ff*

Fag. *ff*

In Fa *ff*

Corni in Do *ff*

Trbe in Do *ff*

Trbpt *ff*

Cimb. *ff*

R. *con forza*
- zio - - - nel O - dio a - vo - i, cor - ti - gia - ni scher - ni

Viol. *ff*

V-le arco *ff*

Vc. arco *ff*

Cb. arco *ff*

Allegro $\text{♩} = 120$

113960

Fig. 3, continued.

place in his armor: his daughter. First, when the Duke asks how he can get rid of Ceprano to take his wife as a lover, Rigoletto goes too far by telling the Duke to cut off his head. Gossip travels: the courtiers, as malicious in their retaliation as he is to them, will wreak their revenge by involving him in a plan which they tell him is to kidnap Countess Ceprano—

Marullo: Torre a Ceprano vogliam la sposa.

Rigoletto: (Ahimè, respiro! ...) ²¹

when in fact, they are abducting the woman they think is his mistress. Even more devastating, when the banda music stops for the first time in the scene, Monterone, the father of a girl seduced by the Duke, interrupts the brittle amusements, and on the distinctive repeated note, the dotted rhythm of the curse motif, demands retribution.²² Rigoletto viciously mocks him with squirmy trills for the loss of his daughter's honor. It is the most despicable moment in the opera but nevertheless dramatically necessary to elicit Monterone's curse. At the same time, it is almost inexplicable that Rigoletto, a father, would have mocked Monterone for cheap laughs in the court. In Hugo's play, Triboulet has a slightly better reason than just depraved humor because Saint-Vallier's daughter, Diane de Poitiers, is the king's mistress, and Triboulet's jokes are conceivably a way of deflecting attention away from the king by humiliating the father; but there is no such motivation with the libertine Duke of Mantua. Perhaps the subtext is that Rigoletto is blind to the rising animosity of the courtiers, as is evident in their words "Vendetta del pazzo!" and, in another kind of blindness, that he is the "all-licensed fool" whom the Duke will protect in every situation. Perhaps, as well, he just gets carried away playing his own role of the fool and does not bargain for the abrasive comeback. In a hammering F-minor response, alternating between forceful rising scales with accents on every sixteenth note, *ff*, for the full orchestra with *ppp* repeated notes in the inner strings, Monterone curses the Duke and Rigoletto, "E tu serpente, tu che d'un padre ridi al dolore" (And you, serpent, who laughs at a father's pain). The realization of this curse, like the "plaited cunning" that Cordelia says to her sisters hides in the folds of time (1.1.282), will emerge in two stages through the agency of assassination:

first, the black humor duet with Sparafucile, where Rigoletto negotiates the terms of a contract for goods and services rendered; and second, the same deal, struck by Rigoletto with Sparafucile to murder the Duke, which is subverted by Gilda, who offers herself instead as the victim.

Much of the essential action in both *King Lear* and *Rigoletto* takes place in hermetically sealed, claustrophobic spaces. Not just one kind of claustrophobic space, but contrasted kinds, high and low, court and hovel: the closed room in Gloucester's castle where Regan and Cornwall brutally interrogate and blind him; Rigoletto's locked and shuttered house where he keeps Gilda immured from the outside world; and, ultimately, the sack for her dying body. In the delineation of high enclosed spaces, the court in both works is a place of precarious power, where favor depends on the whim of a lord whose temper and actions are highly changeable and unpredictable. Lear's intention to distribute his power among his daughters is oiled by a public display of obsequious fawning—"Which of you shall we say doth love us most[?]" (1.1.52)—while the Mantuan court shows a different kind of jockeying for personal advancement against the background of frenetic entertainment. It is not surprising that, given such unpredictable changes of mood, everyone clawing for position and power has a "forked tongue." The two characters in the opening scene of *King Lear* who try to speak plainly and honestly, Cordelia and Kent, are both banished; and in *Rigoletto*, Monterone, who tries to call the Duke to account, is sent to his execution. In the same powerful F-minor orchestral writing with repeated dotted C's as at his first entry, Monterone again curses those who stand by without protesting against dishonor and especially targets the Duke, its perpetrator. As he is about to be led out, however, Rigoletto picks up the repeated C's and dotted rhythm that also characterized Monterone's denunciation, "Ch'io gli parli," and pledges that Monterone will be avenged in one of the striking phrases that Verdi was to describe as "parole sceniche" (theatrical words)—a phrase that both encapsulates the preceding dramatic discourse and leads to its outcome: "No, vecchio, t'inganni. Un vindice avrai" (No, old man, you are wrong. You will have an avenger) (Figs. 4–5).²³

44

Fag.

Corn. in Mit.

Corn. in Lab.

Cimb.

Timp.

D.

B.

R.

M.

C.

Mon.

Coro

Viol.

V.le

Ve.

Cb.

No!

Mon-te-ro-ne!

Mon-te-ro-ne!

Mon-te-ro-ne!

Mon-te-ro-ne!

(presentandosi) Mon-te-ro-ne!

(fissando il Duca con nobile orgoglio)

Il vo-glio. Si, Mon-te-ron,... la vo-ce ma qual tuo no viscu-te.

Mon-te-ro-ne!

Mon-te-ro-ne!

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Fig. 4, continued.

294

Fl.

Ob.

Clar. in Sib

Fag.

Corn. in F

Corn. in C

Trombe in F

Trombe in C

Tromb.

Cimb.

Timp.

Rigoletto

No, vecchio, in-ganni... un vindice a-vrai!

(ecco fra le guardie dal mezzo)

Mon.

- li - ce pur an-co, o Du-ca, vi-vrai...

Viol.

Vle

Vo.

Cb.

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Fig. 5. Rigoletto promises vengeance, act 2.

The dramatic context of this promise adds extra weight to the curse refrain as part of the structural parallels of the work. Rigoletto has just discovered that his daughter, like Monterone's daughter, has been seduced by the Duke. As callously as he had mocked Monterone, so the courtiers, indifferent to his anguish, now turn their backs on his pleas. When he understands that she is with the Duke, he bursts out, "Io vo' mia figlia!" (Fig. 6).

This climactic moment is central to the work's dramatic structure because it breaches the hermetically sealed boundaries between Rigoletto's public and private lives. Reinforcing the shock revelation, the scene's tonal design swerves abruptly from its opening E-minor "La rà / Oh buon giorno Rigoletto" to the flat side for a series of critical exchanges that center on Rigoletto and will lead in turn to Monterone's denouncement. Constructed as a dramatic entity, the scene is impelled by a powerful sense of continuity as it moves through increasingly flat keys—C minor, F minor, and then D-flat major, the "angelic" key that will return at the end of the opera for Gilda's view of heaven as she is dying.²⁴ The hermetically sealed spaces of the court and his locked house can be seen as physical representations of Rigoletto's own dysfunctional life. By rigidly maintaining these separate arenas of action, he thought he could maintain control over Gilda and prevent her from being drawn into his other world. Now that the separation between the public and private domains of his life has been irrevocably shattered, all that remains to be salvaged from dishonor is revenge. In the musico-dramatic representation of seduction and retribution, the complementary side of Monterone's curse is accordingly vengeance—and this will be realized in the low kinds of claustrophobic spaces.

In the sleazy hovels of both works some of the most important revelations unfold. Lear encounters his alter ego in terms of human suffering, the beggar Tom, who is Gloucester's son, Edgar, forced to take on this meanest of existences in order to evade capture. Seeing Tom naked and shivering, for the first time in the play Lear recognizes the suffering of others, especially those who lack even the most basic needs. So preoccupied with his own suffering, the king had not even been aware of their miserable lives: "O I have ta'en / Too little care of this!" (3.4.32–33).

251

Fl.

Ott.

Ob.

Clar.
in Do

Fag.

in Sol
Corni

in Do

Tre
in Do

Trombi

Cimb.

Timp.

Gr. C.

B.

-tro-ve.
(con accento terribile) *ff* La sua fi - glia!..

R.

io ve' mia fi - glia!

M.

-tro-ve. *ff* La sua fi - glia!..

C.

-tro-ve. *ff* La sua fi - glia!..

Coro

-tro-ve. *ff* La sua fi - glia!..

-tro-ve. *ff* La sua fi - glia!..

Viol.

ff tutta forza

V. le

pp

Ve.

pp

Cb.

pp

ff tutta forza *pp*

118960

Fig. 6. Rigoletto demands the return of his daughter, act 2.

His suffering, though, has taken a terrible toll, and as he interrogates Tom, Lear starts to lose his mind. The hovel is witness to a bizarre quartet of characters, two of whom are disguised (Edgar and Kent), two of whom are either on the brink of madness (Lear) or pretending to be mad (Edgar), and the Fool. In a telling aside, the Fool connects the devastation of the storm outside the hovel to the internal storm that unsettles Lear's mind: "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (3.4.73).

As Lear loses his wits, he thinks that Tom, almost naked and destitute, must also have been robbed of everything by his daughters; and when Kent says that he has no daughters, Lear flares up at him that only his daughters could have brought him to such a desperate state. The hovel, as a temporary refuge from the physical storm, also provides the setting for the internal dislocation within Lear's mind. The quartet, with its commentaries by Kent and the Fool, counterpoints Lear's real madness and Edgar's feigned madness in distorted reflections of appearance and reality. In both works, the scenes in the hovel are turning points in the action: Lear loses his mind, and Gilda, hearing the Duke use the same words and the same kind of approach to Sparafucile's sister, Maddalena, that he had with her, loses the will to live.

The third act of *Rigoletto* is a reworking and partial modification of the motifs of the hovel and the quartet. Here the hovel is a low tavern, and rather than all four characters being inside it, the Duke and Maddalena are inside, Rigoletto and Gilda are outside watching the Duke entice Maddalena. While the four lines in the operatic quartet are simultaneous rather than successive, the layout is nevertheless similar to the play: two participatory characters—Lear/Tom, Duke/Maddalena—and two commentary characters—Fool/Kent, Gilda/Rigoletto. Out of those strands of the quartet, the Duke's line is confident and assertive at the beginning, and more mellifluous and persuasive in the central Andante in D-flat major, "Bella figlia dell'amore," both parts using two-bar units that repeat the melodic material of the first phrase (Figs. 7–8).

These complementary sections of the quartet reveal the two sides of the Duke's techniques of seduction, and within each type there are family resemblances in the Duke's material throughout the opera—the one assertive, as in "Questa o quella per me pari sono," in act 1, scene 1, the other persuasive and appealing, as seen in his ploy to Gilda in act 1, scene 5, "È il sol dell'anima" (Figs. 9–10).

N° 12. Quartetto
Gilda, Maddalena, Duca e Rigoletto.

Allegro $\text{♩} = 120$
(Gilda e Rigoletto sulla via, il Duca e Maddalena nel piano terreno.)

DUCA
Un di, se ben ram-men - to-mi, o bel - la, t'in - con -

Violini
pp

Viola
pp

Violoncelli
pizz
pp

Contrabassi
pp

Allegro $\text{♩} = 120$

Fl.
p

Ott.
p

Ob.
I. =
p

Clar.
in Do
I. =
p

D.
- tra - - - i... mi piac - - - que di te chie - - - de - re, e in -

Viol.
pp

V-la
pp

Vc.
pp

Cb.
pp

113960

Fig. 7. The Duke's confident approach to Maddalena; quartet, act 3.

386

The image shows a page of a musical score, page 386. It features a full orchestral arrangement with vocal parts. The instruments listed on the left are Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ott.), Clarinet in D (Clar. in Do), Bassoon (Fag.), Horn in E-flat (Corni in Mi), Trumpet in E-flat (Trbpe in Mi), Trombone in E-flat (Trbni in Mi), Cymbal (Cimb.), Gong (G.), Mellophone (M.), Drum (D.), Bass Drum (R.), Violin (Viol.), Viola (V-le), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The vocal parts are for Soprano (S.), Mezzo-soprano (M.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The lyrics are in Italian. The score is in 4/4 time and has a key signature of one sharp (F#). The vocal parts have the following lyrics: Soprano: "- tor!"; Mezzo-soprano: "- ro - la, ne vo - gio la pa - ro - la, ne vo - gio la pa - ro - la!"; Tenor: "a - ma - bi - le fi - gliuola! a - ma - bi - le fi - gliuola! Bel - la"; Bass: "e non ti basta an - cor? e non ti basta an - cor?". The score is numbered 118960 at the bottom.

Fig. 8. The Duke's persuasive approach; quartet, act 3.

337

Andante $\text{♩} = 66$

Fl. *pp*

Ob. *pp*

Fag. *pp*

D. *pp*
 fi-glia dell'a-mo-re, schiavo son de' vezzi tuo-i, con un

Viol. *pizz.*
p

Vie. *pizz.*
p

Vc. *pizz.*
p

Cb. *pizz.*
p

Andante $\text{♩} = 66$

Fl.

Ob.

Clar. in Do *pp*

Fag. *pp*

D. *pp dolce*
 del-to, un detto sol tu guo-i le mie pene, te mie pe-ne conso-lar. Vie-ni,e

Viol.

Vie.

Vc.

Cb.

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Fig. 8, continued.

10 **BALLATA-Duca**
Allegretto $\text{♩} = 80$

The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows the instrumental introduction with parts for Flute (Fag.), Trumpet (D.), Violin (Viol.), Viola (V.le), Violoncello (Ve.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' with a quarter note equal to 80 beats. The second system begins with the vocal line (D.) marked 'con eleganza' and includes the lyrics: 'Questa o quel - la per me pa - ri so - no a quan - tal - tre d'in -'. The third system continues the vocal line with the lyrics: '- tor - no, d'in - tor - no mi ve - do, del mio co - re'. The instrumental parts continue to provide accompaniment throughout.

118960

Fig. 9. The Duke's confident approach to women, act 1.

133

Andantino. ♩ = 92

cantabile

D. Di - o stringeva, o ver - gi - ne, tuo fa - to al mi - o! È il sol del - l'a - ni - ma,

Viol. *stacc.*
pp

V. - le *stacc.*
pp

Vc. *pp*

Cb. *pp*

Andantino. ♩ = 92

Clar. In Sib. *p*

Fag. *p*

D. la vi - ta è a - mo - re, sua vo - ce è il pal - pi - to del no - stro co - re... e fa - ma *

Viol. *ppp*

V. - le *ppp*

Vc. *ppp*

Cb. *ppp*

113960

Fig. 10. The Duke's persuasive approach to Gilda, act 1.

The similar material in each group shows how consistent the Duke is, or, alternatively, how limited he is. His character, exempted from responsibility by wealth and unchecked in his selfish sensuality, is essentially unchanged throughout the work because nothing touches him (in act 2, he is angry that Gilda has been taken from him, but only briefly when he learns she is in the court). The highly memorable “La donna è mobile,” which the Duke sings in Sparafucile’s tavern in act 3 and which Rigoletto rehears like a bad dream after Sparafucile has ostensibly stabbed him to death, is only the most well-known of its melodic type and relates in phrase structure and melodic contour to his first ballata, “Questa o quella.” The subject is also effectively the same—that one woman is much like another, changeable in nature as well as changeable objects of the Duke’s pleasure. This uniformity of character provides a foil for Rigoletto’s far more richly textured depiction, realized through arioso, duets, and ensembles in a complex array of mockery, hatred, love, and self-pity. Even the conservative Jesuit journal *Civiltà Cattolica*, which voiced its opposition to dangerous trends in opera, recognized the extraordinary range of Rigoletto’s character: “Dove [trovare] un umore sì festoso, sì crudele, sì amoroso e sì scellerato come è dipinto Rigoletto che fu poi ribattezzato su qualche scena per Viscardello?”²⁵ (Where do we find a humor so festive, so cruel, so loving and so wicked as in the depiction of Rigoletto, called Viscardello on some stages?).

The development of Rigoletto’s character from vicious fool to tragic victim of the fate he has tried to manipulate is similar to Shakespeare’s characterizations of leading male roles. These can effectively be divided into two main types: those in high positions of service, like Macbeth and Othello, who, essentially honorable at the beginning of the play, allow themselves to be misled and subsequently corrupted into committing shameful acts of murder that destroy others and ultimately themselves; and those in positions of power and kingship, like Julius Caesar, Richard II, and Lear, who initially arouse antipathy by their arrogance, but through suffering increasingly engage the audience’s sympathy. Rigoletto, though, is neither a general nor a king, but a servant, and a fool to boot, and this radically changes the dynamics as well as the terms of engagement: he cannot direct events at court, but only facilitate them from a precarious place between protexia and subservience. The exception occurs when he

takes charge after Gilda has been seduced by the Duke and orders the courtiers out. This behavior is so abnormal that they obey him as they would a madman who might otherwise become violent. In the quartet in act 3, he similarly stage-manages events so that Gilda will be able to see for herself the truth of the Duke's indiscriminate licentiousness. Rigoletto is more successful than he knows: the revelation of this betrayal breaks her will to live. Overhearing the plot to murder the Duke, she sacrifices herself to die in his place. Her dying body is bundled into a sack, the smallest and most pathetic of the enclosed spaces.

The claustrophobic courts in turn provide the context for the theme of power and powerlessness, and the realization of powerlessness brings with it weeping and humiliation. Just like the fools, one sweet, the other bitter, who are like the opposite masks of comedy and tragedy, so power is brokered in the two works by opposite methods that nevertheless share an unreasonable demand: that force of will can maintain certain kinds of obedience when power is no longer held. Lear holds onto the externals of authority—the name of king, a hundred knights, both insignias of power—but gives away power itself when he says to his sons-in-law, Albany and Cornwall:

[O]nly we shall retain
 The name, and all th' addition to a king.
 The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,
 Belovèd sons be yours, which to confirm, [*giving the crown*]
 This coronet part betwixt you.
 (1.1.137–41)

Having relinquished his wealth, land, and authority to his ruthless daughters, Goneril and Regan, he is now without recourse when they use that power against him. He suffers indifference from Goneril's servant, Oswald, who demeans him by calling him only "[m]y lady's father" and not the king (1.4.74), and his daughters refuse to host his knights, so depriving him of the respect to which he feels entitled as the king as well as their father. Retribution for having had to flatter their father comes swiftly: as Goneril and Regan barter down the numbers of knights they will accommodate, Lear says to Regan, "I gave you all—." She snaps back, "And in good time you gave it" (2.4.245–46).

With his rapacious daughters aligned against him in their refusal to host even one knight to accompany him, the play shows the inversional symmetry between his treatment of Cordelia and his other daughters' treatment of him, both predicated on the abuse of power. Parallel to his public humiliation of Cordelia in front of the court, his own humiliation is meted out by Goneril and Regan. In one of the great speeches of the play about the pain of his daughters' duplicity, Lear threatens a vengeance that he does not have the power to execute or even the ability to articulate; and refusing to give in to the tears that rise up from his heart—the central motif of weeping as “parole sceniche”—he rushes out into the storm, accompanied only by the Fool and the disguised Kent:

No, you unnatural hags,
I will have such revenges on you both,
That all the world shall—I will do such things—
What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be
The terrors of the earth! You think I'll weep,
No, I'll not weep.
I have full cause of weeping. But this heart
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
Or ere I'll weep. O Fool, I shall go mad!
(2.4.274–82)

One of the central connections between *King Lear* and *Rigoletto* is the father weeping on account of his daughter or daughters—tears of humiliation and tears of grief. In *Rigoletto*, weeping is predicated on the same kind of inversional symmetry as in *King Lear*, where Lear's heartless rejection of Cordelia is paid back measure for measure by the humiliation meted out by Goneril and Regan. Similarly, Rigoletto, who had heartlessly mocked Monterone's pain at his daughter's dishonor, is now paid back in full measure when the courtiers are unmoved by his weeping and deaf to his pleas to return his daughter. The scene, delineated in three distinct stages, provides the essential context for the motif of weeping and its musical realization within the work's large-scale tonal plan. As noted previously, it opens in E minor, with a top-heavy, dotted rhythm like Rigoletto's humpbacked walk; but as well as depicting his lopsided gait, the figure also serves to convey the dislocated physical space in which Rigoletto desperately searches for Gilda under the malicious eyes of the courtiers who

relish his discomfort. Like the banda music at the beginning, this scene reconfigures the relationship between background and foreground, so that the dislocated foreground rhythm is counterpointed in the background by the courtiers' malicious dissembling. When a page comes in to say that the Duchess wants to speak to her husband and is hustled off by the courtiers, this configuration, with its suppressed intentions and duplicity in the background, abruptly reverses. Rigoletto's demand for his daughter explodes into the foreground, catapulting the tonal direction onto the flat side. The C-minor denunciation of the courtiers as a vile pack of jackals, "Cortigiani, vil razza," reinforced by compressed string sixteenth-note triplets, is the counterpart to Monterone's denunciation, but instead of execution, he is brought to tears. Pleading in vain with Marullo and the other pitiless courtiers in "Ebben, piango" in F minor, the vocal line is punctuated by isolated, melancholy quarter notes in the cor anglais and bassoon on the weak beats of the bar as he breaks down, weeping, and pleads with them to return her. Unable to elicit any pity from Marullo and seeing the courtiers silent and unresponsive, he begs their forgiveness in the third section in D-flat major, "Miei signori, perdono, pietate."

When Verdi wrote that "Tribolet is a character worthy of Shakespeare," he saw him as a powerful character who elicits both antipathy for his arrogance and empathy for his suffering. It is in the D-flat major final section, in which the deformed jester begs forgiveness from the implacable courtiers, that this connection is most evident. The D-flat section's three main elements—the rippling cello figuration, Rigoletto's sustained vocal writing, and the heartfelt plea, "Pietà, signore, pietà," expressing that she is the entire world to him—also have an important structural function in the opera. They will be replayed in the final scene, "Lassù in cielo / Non morir, mio tesoro, pietade," where Rigoletto, opening the sack and finding Gilda mortally stabbed, begs her not to leave him. There is another parallel, that in both scenes she eludes him by different kinds of absence, the one by abduction, the other by death. It is also ironic that only as Gilda is about to die does she have her first fully articulated melody in the opera, a melody that neither shadows her father's line as in their first duet, "Deh non parla al misero," nor elaborates fioritura gestures around the Duke's fictitious name in her aria "Caro nome." But the melody, as a leave-taking of this world and a preview of heaven, also connects back to Rigoletto's description of her mother in their first duet. Like the motifs

of powerlessness and tears that resonate at strategic points throughout *King Lear*, the opera's noncontiguous techniques of recollection provide similar means of tonal, melodic, and orchestral referentiality.

In addition to the interplay between the nobleman and his fool, both works center on the relationship between a father and daughter. Just as the nobleman/fool dyad is played out as inverse *character* between the two works—as compassion between the king and the Fool in *Lear* and contempt in *Rigoletto*—so the father/daughter dyad traces an inverse *trajectory of action* between the beginning and end. *King Lear* starts with the dissonant fracturing of family relationships: the distribution of land conferred on his daughters is a reward contingent on hyperbolic declarations of love. Cordelia, his youngest and until then his favorite daughter, refuses to buy into the public display of hypocritical fawning in order to win “[a] third more opulent than [her] sisters” (1.1.88). Lear, deaf to Kent’s attempt to tell truth to power, banishes Kent for trying to persuade him to reconsider his rash decision and cruelly disinherits Cordelia, severing his relationship with her in a series of short, wounding phrases:

Thou hast her France, let her be thine, for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again. Therefore be gone,
Without our grace, our love, our benison.
(1.1.264–67)

The complementary side of dissociation is the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia near the end of the play, but it is a path hard won through Lear’s humiliation by his other daughters, by suffering and madness. He has to lose all his possessions and his mind in order to find himself and the humanity he has cast away. As part of that arduous journey, accompanied by the Fool, Lear experiences two harrowing encounters that, in part, take him out of his preoccupation with his sense of grievance and make him aware that his own injustice was ultimately the cause of the injustice inflicted upon him. The first of these encounters, as has been seen, is the dysfunctional conversation in the hovel with poor Tom, Edgar, Gloucester’s son, who had been forced to become a Bedlam beggar in order to avoid capture. Far from being alone in his suffering, Lear realizes that there are those, like Tom, without even the basic essentials of food and clothes, the poorest and most downtrodden who especially

need the king's compassion: "Thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here," he says as he tears off his clothes (3.4.97–100).

The other encounter is with the blinded Gloucester, a father betrayed by his son Edmund, just as Lear has been betrayed by the daughters he trusted, and who is now led by his other son, Edgar, disguised as poor Tom. In a bitter irony, Gloucester was blinded by Regan and her husband, Cornwall, as punishment for trying to help her own father. Although Lear's wits have gone, in a lucid moment he recognizes Gloucester and, in doing so, links the themes of weeping, recognition, and the fellow-feeling of suffering through the image of the world as a stage:

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.
I know thee well enough, thy name is Gloucester.
(4.6.174–75)

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools.
(4.6.180–81)

These parallels of betrayal/madness and recognition/weeping pave the way for Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia because it is through the mirrors of others' suffering, as well as his own, that he can recover his battered humanity. As he hesitatingly recognizes Cordelia and sees her tears, he acknowledges his injustice toward her and asks for her forgiveness—and in this moment of recognizing Cordelia, another kind of recognition takes place. He is finally able to see that his suffering and humiliation are the outcome of his own actions. The leitmotif of "nothing," closed, final, and empty, is now transformed into "no cause":

Lear: If you have poison for me, I will drink it.
I know you do not love me, for your sisters
Have (as I do remember) done me wrong.
You have some cause, they have not.
Cordelia: No cause, no cause.
(4.7.67–70)

By contrast with this trajectory from disassociation to reconciliation, in *Rigoletto* the relationship between father and daughter starts with concord, in the touching reunion after he returns home. In the following duet in A-flat major, Andante, "Deh non parlare al misero," which is a glimpse through the interstices of the past, he describes her mother's tender compassion for his poverty and deformity. Like Cordelia, Gilda is motherless: there are no mothers in these works, only overbearing fathers. Gilda is younger, more impressionable, more vulnerable, and her broken phrases in A-flat minor, "Oh quanto dolor," are a response to the story of her mother's love for him. Now that she is dead, Gilda is all that remains to him in his wretched life: "Tu sola resti as misero." The duet shows Gilda in an emotionally dependent relationship with Rigoletto, and it is this moral sense of betrayal to him as much as being abducted and physically violated by the Duke that causes her profound sense of shame.²⁶ Just as she betrays her father by her initial romantic association with the disguised Duke, "Gualtier Maldè," so the Duke will in turn betray her. But in the end, it is her father she betrays again and at the cost of her life, in place of her faithless lover who has moved on to new pleasures without a backward glance, using his tried and true repertory of seduction.

The motif of betrayal, and especially her betrayal by the Duke, is central to the work, showing Gilda as the victim of her youth, inexperience, and protected background. Dreamy and impressionable, she is much like the young Emma in *Madame Bovary*, seduced by the romantic image of a poor, handsome student, which is only the prelude to her physical seduction. This leads in turn to her betrayal of Rigoletto at the end of the work; having witnessed the Duke's faithlessness, she gives up her life because she no longer has the will to live. These interrelated levels of betrayal are articulated by parallels in the structure: in act 1, she disobeys her father by falling in love with the handsome, disguised Duke (or the image that he projects) and becomes a victim of deception and dishonor; in act 3, still in love with him but betrayed by his enticement of Maddalena, she offers herself as the victim in his stead.

It is evident that the father/daughter dyad in each case expands into a triadic relationship in which one of the characters in the dyad is caught between two strong characters who wield power. In *King Lear*, having relinquished his power, Lear is now caught between his predatory daughters who dishonor him by taking away his followers, and, shamed and

humiliated, he flees from them into the storm. Similarly, Gilda is caught in a triangular relationship between two dominating men whom she loves in different ways—the disguised Duke she loves and who betrays her, and her father whom she deceives and ultimately forsakes. She is presented primarily in relationship to these two men, each of whom wants to exert control over her, so she is pulled between conflicting loyalties. Although her father tells her to return to the house and get ready to leave, she only pretends to go and returns, overhearing the plot to kill the Duke, against a storm as graphic in its dramatic parallel to her internal conflict and despair as the storm in *Lear*. With nowhere to flee and no reason to live, she knocks on the door, knowing that she will die.

The closing of the dyad in *King Lear* is essentially articulated in two stages: the reconciliation of Lear and Cordelia after they have been captured by Edmund's forces and taken to prison, and the harrowing finale in which Cordelia has been hanged on Edmund's orders and Lear brings out her dead body, asking her in vain to "stay a little" (5.3.246). The closing part of the father/daughter trajectory of *Rigoletto* combines these two elements of reconciliation and death in one scene; he begs her not to die in the duet in D-flat, "Lassù in cielo / non morir," which is the transformed reworking of their duet in act 1. As he holds her dead body in his arms, the opera ends with the curse "La maledizione!"—the final, climactic refrain of the initial, somber motif with which the opera began. The curse motif, though, is the outcome in another sense: as well as defining the overall musical trajectory, it knits together the dialectics of conflict, the work's obverse dramatic themes of betrayal and retribution.

As a description of the psychoanalytical mechanisms of deconstruction and reconfiguration, transference helps provide insight into the reworking of the themes of father/daughter and nobleman/fool from *King Lear* to *Rigoletto*. The opera, as a transformational foreground, can be seen as recasting the play's essential literary and structural motifs, creating striking parallels between the two works. If *Rigoletto* is the "Lear that might have been," its projection of conflict and human suffering shows a profound understanding of Shakespeare's dramatic action and breaks new ground in Verdi's operatic language. Far from the older, more conservative style of *Macbeth*, *Rigoletto*, as Verdi wrote to Piave, was written "in a completely new manner ... without regard for mere convenience."

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NOTES

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 17. Emphasis added.

² Giuseppe Verdi, *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma*, ed. Alessandro Pascolato (Castello: S. Lapi, 1902), 46. Emphasis added. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

³ Giuseppe Verdi, *Letters of Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. and trans. Charles Osborne (London: Gollancz, 1971), 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵ Psychologist Richard Kradin discusses the disastrous effects of a father maintaining oppressive authority over his adult child in "The Family Myth: Its Deconstruction and Replacement with a Balanced Humanized Narrative," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 54 (2009): 217–32: "Kant suggested that paternalism was the worst form of despotism as it abrogates individual autonomy. The idea that 'father knows best' may function well for a time-appropriate part of childhood but is an intolerable recipe for a lifetime" (223).

⁶ Victor Hugo, *Théâtre Complet*, ed. J. J. Thierry and Josette Méléze, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 1:1332.

⁷ Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi*, 4 vols. (Milan: Ricordi, 1959), 2:62.

⁸ Verdi, *Letters*, 70. Emphasis added.

⁹ Leo Karl Gerhartz, *Die Auseinandersetzungen des jungen Giuseppe Verdi mit dem literarischen Drama. Ein Beitrag zur Strukturbestimmung der Oper* (Berlin: Merseburger, 1968). Facsimiles of the *Re Lear* materials found in Verdi's villa at Sant'Agata have been published by the Institute of Verdi Studies in Gabriella Carrara Verdi, ed., *Per il "Re Lear": Giuseppe Verdi, Antonio Somma* (Parma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 2002).

¹⁰ Gary Schmidgall, "Verdi's *King Lear* Project," *19th-Century Music* 9 (1985): 83–101 (88).

¹¹ Roy Schafer, *Retelling a Life: Narration and Dialogue in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 29. Emphasis added.

¹² *Ibid.*, 156. See also Lester Luborsky, "Measuring a Pervasive Psychic Structure in Psychotherapy: The Core Conflictual Relationship Theme," in *Communicative Structures and Psychic Structures: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Communication*, ed. Norbert Freedman and Stanley Grand (New York: Plenum, 1977), 367–95.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," in *Collected Papers*, ed. Joan Riviere and James Strachey, 5 vols. (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 2:312–32; Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Modern Library, 1938), 468–552.

¹⁴ Peter Homans, "Transference and Transcendence: Freud and Tillich on the Nature of Personal Relatedness," *Journal of Religion* 46 (1966): 148–64 (150).

¹⁵ Roy Schafer, "Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980): 29–53, interprets Freud's view of internal conflict between the individual's desires and civilization's demands as having a narrative structure. Drama, whether verbal or musical, externalizes this narrative through the genre's conventions, which are reinterpreted by the author.

¹⁶ Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1:484.

¹⁷ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Burton Raffel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1.1.92. Subsequent quotations from this edition are cited parenthetically in the text. Bracketed passages represent my own interpolations.

¹⁸ Musical examples from Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto* (Wien: Wiener Philharmonischer Verlag, 1914) are taken from the online International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP). The full score is available at <[http://imslp.org/wiki/Rigoletto_\(Verdi,_Giuseppe\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Rigoletto_(Verdi,_Giuseppe))>.

¹⁹ Hugo, *Le roi s'amuse*, in *Théâtre Complet*, act 2, scene 2, p. 1380.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1326. Emphasis added.

²¹ Verdi, *Rigoletto*, act 1, p. 168.

²² William Weaver, "Aspects of Verdi's Dramaturgy," in *The Verdi Companion*, ed. William Weaver and Martin Chusid (New York: Norton, 1979), 131–43, discusses how the father in Verdi's works represents the highest values of moral behavior, though he may be forced to act in a way that might otherwise be seen as dubious for the sake of honor. The obvious example is Germont in *La Traviata*, who goes to see Violetta, the prostitute with whom his son is openly living, to ask her to give him up, as she is ruining both his son's future and his daughter's chance of a good marriage. Monterone is also such a father and stands in both similarity and contrast to Rigoletto as a father.

²³ On 10 July 1870, Verdi wrote to Giulio Ricordi, his publisher, "[N]on vorrei altresì si dimenticassero le *parole sceniche*. Per parole sceniche io intendo quelle che scolpiscono una situazione od un carattere, le quali sono sempre anche potentissime sul pubblico" (I would not want theatrical words to be forgotten. By theatrical words I mean those words that carve out a situation or a character, words whose effect on the public is always most powerful) (Abbiati, 3:348). Verdi also discussed the concept previously with Antonio Somma, although without using the phrase "parole sceniche," on 6 November 1857; see Pascolato, 79–81. See also Emanuele Senici, "Words and Music," in Scott L. Balthazar, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 88–110, especially 103–4.

²⁴ Martin Chusid proposed the key of the work as D-flat major, with important secondary areas of C and D, in "The Tonality of *Rigoletto*," in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1989), 241–61. A convincing case, though, can be made for C minor, with which the work opens, to end in D-flat at "Non morir mio tesoro," with a secondary tonal center of E major/minor—E major for Gilda's aria "Caro nome" and the quartet in act 3, and E minor for the scene in act 2 between Rigoletto and the courtiers, "Povero Rigoletto!"

²⁵ "Del teatro italiano," *Civiltà Cattolica* 4 (1854): 257–77 (261).

²⁶ Elizabeth Hudson, "Gilda Seduced: A Tale Untold," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4 (1992): 229–51.