Breaking the Killing Jar:
The Representation of Women in Twenty-first Century Canadian Opera

Sophie Bisson

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ABSTRACT

Breaking the Killing Jar: The Representation of Women in Twenty-First Century Canadian Opera examines how contemporary Canadian opera represents women under conditions of aesthetic inheritance, historical pressure, and ethical constraint. Through comparative analysis of seven works—*Filumena* (2003), *Inês* (2009), *Lillian Alling* (2010), *Alexandra* (2012), *Regina (2014)*, *Oksana G.* (2017), and *Shanawdithit* (2019)—the dissertation argues that these operas do not merely recount women's suffering but interrogate the systems through which women become audible, visible, and narratively legible. A cross-operatic, thread-based framework enables comparison across distinct musical languages, dramaturgical structures, and production contexts.

Four analytical chapters examine voice after erasure, feminist archival labour, the ethics of looking at women's suffering, and the distribution of vocal space as both possibility and constraint. Together, these threads reveal tensions between containment and resistance. Women are positioned within familial, civic, colonial, and mythic structures that constrain voice and agency, yet the operas also create space for endurance, refusal, recovery, and re-voicing. The "killing jar" metaphor captures how operatic and cultural frameworks confine women within repeatable trajectories, even as contemporary works seek to unsettle or reconfigure their boundaries.

Methodologically, the dissertation integrates close reading of scores and texts with feminist criticism and dramaturgical analysis, calibrating interpretive claims to available performance documentation. It demonstrates how contemporary Canadian opera contributes to feminist debates about representation, memory, spectatorship, and the ethical risks of making women's suffering visible. Ultimately, *Breaking the Killing Jar* positions Canadian opera as a vital site for examining how twenty-first century culture negotiates gender, history, and power through music and theatre.

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2018, the Teatro del Maggio in Florence, Italy, staged a controversial performance of *Carmen*, Georges Bizet's famous opera. Leo Muscato, the Italian director, altered the ending scene; instead of dying, Carmen rebels against Don José and shoots and kills him. Although Muscato intended the alteration as an indictment of femicide, the controversy that ensued pitted various groups against one another, from feminist groups and musical purists to stage directors, music critics, and even elected officials (Giurato 2018; Pretini 2018). Put simply, some believed that rewriting the ending was an insult to tradition, which must remain unchanged and faithful to its time (Rampazzo 2018; Fedeli 2018); others contended that the issue was not so much about censorship as the need to send, once again, a strong signal condemning violence against women (Crichigno 2018; Goldnadel 2018; Huffington Post Italia 2018).[1] Traditional operatic repertoire is typically unkind to women at the centre of eponymous operas, from *Lucia* (*di Lammermoor*) and *Carmen* to *Lulu*, *Manon* (*Lescaut*), *Salomé*, and *Elektra*, who all die by the end of the opera. This pattern extends to the non-eponymous heroines, including Cio-Cio-San (*Madama Butterfly* by Puccini), Katerina (*Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* by Shostakovitch), Mimì (*La Bohème* by Puccini), and Violetta Valéry (*La Traviata* by Verdi). As conversations increase around the challenges of performing the inherited canonical repertoire (Nattiez 2019; Opera America 2020a), I was not so much surprised by the controversy as by the virulence of the belief that Carmen must die.

The Teatro del Maggio's presentation, the extensive press it generated, and this insistence on fatal inevitability prompted me to turn to contemporary Canadian opera, a repertoire I know well. I began to wonder whether the narrative fatalism surrounding *Carmen* also shaped the

[1] The controversy sparked its own hashtags #FakeEndings and #CarmenNonMuore (CarmenDoesntDie). For a comprehensive examination of the enduring debate surrounding fidelity in opera staging, see Nattiez 2019.

depiction of women in Canadian works. Did Canadian operas simply inherit opera's long-standing fatal grammar, or were they rethinking it? What happens to female protagonists when they are created in a different cultural context, with different historical responsibilities and aesthetic priorities? Most importantly, do Canadian operas reproduce the expectation that the woman must die, or do they imagine other possibilities? These questions became the starting point for this dissertation.

Aims and Objectives

This research explores the recurring operatic devices that shape the portrayal of female leads in Canadian opera, focusing on how these narrative and musical strategies are conveyed through music, text, and performance. I maintain a consistent focus on the representation of women and frame my inquiry around the following open-ended questions: Who are the women of Canadian opera, and how are they constructed musically and dramatically? How do these characters operate in relation to recurring tropes and stereotypes of women in opera? And, in what ways do these works affirm, resist, or transform the operatic tradition of female death?

These questions frame a broader inquiry into the cultural narratives that opera perpetuates, and the possibilities it may hold for resistance or revision. By examining how each composer-librettist team employs their distinct craft to shape these narratives, I explore whether, and how, they disrupt opera's conventional trajectory, and whether they can break free from the structures of containment that have functioned, metaphorically, as a vehicle for the death of women in opera. This approach allows me to consider not only the fate of individual characters, but also the kinds of storytelling that contemporary Canadian opera makes possible. The corpus examined in this dissertation was therefore not intended to represent contemporary Canadian

opera as a whole. Rather, it was constructed to pursue the questions prompted by *Carmen* and the long operatic tradition of female eponymous protagonists. The decision to focus on operas centered on eponymous operas serves as a methodological parameter rather than a claim to represent the full breadth of contemporary Canadian opera. By following that tradition into the Canadian repertoire, I ask whether these works merely adjust the terms of inherited narratives, or whether they begin to articulate new grammars of voice, agency, and survival within the genre.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws heavily on musicological practices established in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, scholars began addressing previously overlooked topics, such as the role of women in music, and laid the groundwork for contemporary intersections between music studies and related disciplines. Key figures in this movement include Ellen Koskoff (1989, 1991, 2002, 2005, 2014), Lawrence Kramer (1995, 2002, 2004, 2010), Susan McClary (1992, 2000, 2002, 2006), Philip Purvis (2013), and Rose Rosengard Subotnik (1991, 1996), whose contributions significantly advanced gender studies, feminist musicology, and feminist music criticism, as well as cultural studies, aesthetics, and music criticism.

Catherine Clément's *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, originally published in French in 1979 and translated into English in 1988, provides the conceptual foundation for this study, revealing opera's most troubling paradox: that women's most glorious musical moments coincide with their destruction (Clément 1988). The operatic canon, she argues, transforms female pain into beauty, making women's deaths the site of aesthetic and ideological pleasure. In this reading, opera becomes a machinery of enchantment and violence: an art form that seduces its audiences with the spectacle of women's undoing. Clément's critique, though directed at the nineteenth-century repertoire, remains alarmingly pertinent to twenty-first century works that

continue to stage the female voice as a site of both transcendence and control. Her work forms the gravitational centre of feminist opera scholarship, a point from which later theorists have extended and re-articulated the tension between voice and subjugation.[2]

Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* (2002) both amplifies and transforms Clément's argument. Where Clément locates violence in the stories opera tells, McClary hears it in the music itself. Tonal structures, she argues, encode the very hierarchies that define Western gender ideology. The urge toward tonal closure mirrors the disciplining of desire and the musical resolution of feminine excess into masculine control. McClary's reading of *Carmen* (1992) epitomises this dynamic: Carmen's music, fluid and syncopated, resists containment, while Don José's tonal authority reinstates the patriarchal order.[3] When Carmen dies, both narrative and tonality achieve closure; freedom is extinguished through harmony. McClary thus reframes Clément's "undoing" not as a theatrical device alone but as a formal principle, locating patriarchy within the grammar of Western art music itself. In the chapters that follow, I draw on McClary's work not as a universal account of tonal meaning, but as one interpretive framework for examining moments in which musical structure intersects with questions of gender, voice, and representation.

Ethnomusicologist Ellen Koskoff's *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1989) expands this frame, reminding scholars that music is not merely a text but a social practice that both reflects and reproduces power relations. Her emphasis on the role of women in diverse musical cultures underscores the importance of asking who has access to composition, performance, and creative authority. Like Clément, I am concerned with the operatic compulsion

[2] For a collection that further extends these debates across questions of gender, sexuality, voice, embodiment, and operatic representation, see Smart 2014, particularly the introduction, 3–16.
[3] For more on the international performance and reception history of *Carmen*, see Smith and Rowden 2020.

toward female death, but I also follow McClary in listening for moments of agency within the music and text. Koskoff's cross-cultural perspective reminds me to situate Canadian opera within its social and institutional context.

Nicholas David Stevens's "Lulu's Daughters: Portraying the Anti-Heroine in Contemporary Opera, 1993–2013" (2017)[4] marks a generational turn within this genealogy. Where Clément saw opera as a site of unrelenting female demise, Stevens identifies composers and librettists who reclaim the operatic heroine's desire as a source of agency. His "daughters of Lulu" inhabit and transform the archetype of the fatal woman: they echo the dangerous allure that destroyed their predecessors, yet they use it to author their own narratives. Stevens's work thus imagines the possibility of agency within the very structures that once guaranteed erasure: a move from critique to creative re-inscription and from undoing to re-voicing.

McClary's more recent writing on Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho (1952–2023) similarly considers how contemporary opera might reconfigure inherited models of female subjectivity. In her discussion of Saariaho's *Émilie* (2010),[5] McClary (2025) contrasts its historical protagonist with opera's familiar female victims and femmes fatales, arguing that Saariaho redirects conventions of female vocal intensity toward intellectual ambition even as Émilie remains confronted by mortality. McClary's reading therefore shifts the question from

[4] My dissertation is enriched by the works of a newer generation of scholars whose contributions, though less widely known, bring valuable perspectives to the study of opera and performance. These scholars approach opera and performance from distinct disciplinary and institutional perspectives: respectively, Stevens 2017 (PhD, Case Western Reserve University, USA), Soper 2011 (DMA, Columbia University), Hinson 2016 (MFA, University of New Mexico, USA), Šimić Anderson 2007 (PhD, Lancaster University, UK), MacArthur 2013 (MA Theatre, University of South Carolina, USA), Guo 2021 (PhD, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, USA), Feldman 2017 (DMA, University of North Texas, USA), North 2020 (PhD, Pacifica Graduate Institute, California, USA), Forner 2020 (PhD, Columbia University, USA), Pollock 2012 (PhD, University of California, Berkeley, USA), Price 2020 (PhD, University of South Carolina, USA), LaBonte 2019 (DMA dissertation, Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA), and Barrettara 2019 (PhD, The Graduate Center, City University of New York).

[5] Kaija Saariaho's *Émilie* (2010), a one-act monodrama for soprano and orchestra with a libretto by Amin Maalouf, portrays the final night of French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher Émilie du Châtelet (1706–1749).

whether the operatic heroine survives to how her life, ambitions, and death are made musically meaningful.

Through the Stevens dissertation I also encountered Kate Soper's "*Voices from the Killing Jar*" (2011), a work whose title and premise left a profound impression on me. The "killing jar"—an instrument used by entomologists to kill butterflies and other insects without damaging their fragile bodies—became, in Stevens's reading, a metaphor for the aesthetic containment of women in art. Soper's musical cycle gives voice to female protagonists suspended within this poisoned glass, each struggling to articulate desire, frustration, and endurance. Stevens's analysis situates her work within a broader lineage of female entrapment and resistance in opera, foregrounding the tension between beauty and suffocation that underlies the genre itself. The title of this dissertation, *Breaking the Killing Jar*, acknowledges that lineage and reimagines its metaphor: if Soper's women sing from within the jar, my project asks what possibilities might emerge when its boundaries are tested, and when the structures that preserve beauty through containment are made visible and open to reconfiguration.

The metaphor of containment also opens onto broader ethical questions that reverberate through contemporary feminist performance scholarship, with Suzanne G. Cusick and Monica A. Hershberger's 2018 colloquy on sexual violence in opera providing an important point of departure. The colloquy brings together scholarship examining how gendered violence is interpreted, staged, performed, and taught, and how representational choices may either reproduce or resist the traditions in which they participate. Lisa Fitzpatrick's *Rape on the Contemporary Stage* (2018) and Margaret Cormier's *Rape at the Opera: Staging Sexual Violence* (2024) extend these concerns to interrogate how representations of sexual violence persist under the guise of tradition or aesthetic necessity. While Fitzpatrick turns the ethical

inquiry towards spectatorship by asking what it means to stage or witness rape in contemporary performance, Cormier deepens the inquiry by demonstrating how canonical works eroticise coercion and how modern productions risk reinscribing these dynamics when they claim to "update" them. Both scholars redirect the questions Clément posed—about pleasure, violence, and the female body—toward twenty-first century audiences, exposing how opera's aesthetic legacies intersect with modern debates about consent, trauma, and representation. Together they insist that what was once aestheticised as "beauty" must now be examined as harm, and that the ethics of looking and listening are inseparable from the art form's survival. These ethical lenses prompt me to ask what these operas demand of their audiences as witnesses to female suffering. Through close reading of music, text, and staging, I map how specific Canadian operatic works construct or resist archetypal portrayals of women, track their character arcs, and consider the ethical and affective demands they make on audiences.

Two writers outside the operatic canon bring the wider cultural resonances of these patterns into focus. British feminist author and activist Caroline Criado Perez's *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (2019) demonstrates that gender bias is not confined to artistic representation but embedded in the infrastructures of knowledge itself. Her argument that masculinity functions as the unmarked standard of the human parallels the male-centred norms of musical canons and historiography, so that what is absent from the data, like that which is absent from the repertoire, is treated as unimportant. American historian Eleanor Herman's *Off with Her Head* (2022) complements this perspective historically, tracing the vilification of women in power from antiquity to the present. The patterns she identifies—recurring narratives of female deviance, emotional excess, and moral threat—resonate strongly with the figures who populate Clément's operatic world. Together, Perez and Herman expose how operatic

representational habits participate in much broader systems of epistemic and cultural exclusion. Across these intersecting works, a shared theoretical horizon emerges. Clément's revelation that women's suffering is central to opera's aesthetic power becomes, through McClary, an interrogation of musical language itself; through Cormier and Fitzpatrick, an ethical confrontation with representation and spectatorship; through Stevens, a model for creative transformation; and through Perez and Herman, a link between the stage and the social structures that sustain its hierarchies. This framework recognises opera as both an art form and an ideology: a site where gendered histories of violence, pleasure, and invisibility are performed and, in contemporary re-voicings, potentially undone. This dissertation builds on this shared horizon, treating these theorists as interlocutors rather than authorities and examining how their frameworks adapt and evolve within the distinct cultural, historical, and ethical terrain of Canadian opera.

Literature Review

The works discussed above provide the conceptual lens through which this dissertation interprets representation and agency, while the ensuing studies demonstrate how such concerns are variously applied, expanded, or elided in contemporary opera scholarship. The literature review that follows traces how questions of voice, representation, spectatorship, and agency have evolved within operatic and specifically Canadian contexts. Representational and dramaturgical theory provide a framework for understanding how operatic heroines are shaped by cultural expectation and artistic convention. Rather than treating these patterns as universal templates, feminist scholars have shown how opera repeatedly returns to familiar gendered scripts—figures of sacrifice, seduction, abandonment, and punishment—that are embedded not only in narrative

design but also in musical form. As Clément's and McClary's work has shown, these conventions recur through opera's dramatic and structural languages, embodying broader social anxieties about gender and power.

Pamela Hinson (2016) and Magdalena Šimić Anderson (2007) each turn to archetypal dramaturgy to consider whether inherited character types retain emancipatory potential. Hinson, writing from a practice-based perspective, identifies recurring archetypes—the Maiden, the Mother, the Sexualised Woman, and the Trickster—and reimagines them as dramaturgical scaffolds that can enable, rather than constrain, female subjectivity. Šimić Anderson explores processes of identification and disidentification with figures such as Medea, Mary Magdalene, and Joan of Arc, demonstrating how contemporary performance can destabilise even the most fixed cultural symbols. Hillary MacArthur's (2013) analysis of the femme fatale in U.S. stage history further contextualises these debates, showing how the trope has functioned as a barometer for cultural anxieties surrounding the "New Woman." Collectively, these studies demonstrate how archetypes persist not as static templates but as dynamic, negotiable sites through which gender, power, and performance continue to be reimagined. Extending this discussion beyond the Euro-American frame, Xin Guo's (2021) study of *Xi Shi*[6] in Chinese national opera considers how archetypal figures are mobilised in the service of cultural identity and nation-building. Guo's reading underscores that archetypes are historically and geographically situated, reminding scholars that questions of representation must always be read through context.

[6] Xi Shi is one of the legendary *Four Beauties* of ancient China, celebrated both for her physical beauty and her political significance. According to historical and literary sources, she was sent as part of a political strategy to seduce and distract the King of Wu, ultimately leading to his downfall. Over centuries, Xi Shi has become a recurring cultural symbol embodying the intersection of beauty, sacrifice, and national identity, themes that continue to resonate in modern artistic reinterpretations, including Chinese national opera (Guo 2021).

Kate Soper's *Voices from the Killing Jar* introduces a creative dimension to this discourse, transforming the figure of the entrapped woman into musical embodiment. Soper's work revoices literary heroines—among them Iphigenia, Emma Bovary, and Lady Macduff—rendering audible their suffocation within the "killing jars" of their fictional worlds. Her project demonstrates how music can literalise forms of entrapment while simultaneously enacting resistance through sound. For instance, in the section centred on *Iphigenia* (Soper 2011, movement III), Soper constructs the musical texture from the overtone structure of the character's name: the voice repeats fragmented syllables while the ensemble produces dense, ritualistic chords derived from spectral analysis, creating a sonic environment that feels both inescapable and incantatory. This is one way the piece sonifies enclosure—through circular repetition shaped by breath-pressure and timbral saturation—while also allowing the character's agency to flicker through vocal inflection and emergent force.

Lauren Feldman (2017) traces how the figure of the prima donna has been "shrinking" across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, both in vocal scale, as large, dramatic sopranos give way to lighter lyric voices, and in narrative significance, as female characters increasingly cede the dramatic centre to collective ensembles or male protagonists. She attributes this contraction to broader institutional and aesthetic shifts: the consolidation of conductorial authority, changing expectations of performer compliance, and contemporary trends that favour ensemble-based dramaturgy over diva-centred display. Her analysis exposes the interdependence of vocal and narrative agency: what a character sings, and how much she sings, indexes her importance within the dramatic world. Taken together, Feldman's observations about vocal scale, institutional authority, and dramatic centrality point to a reconfiguration of operatic

femininity shaped by evolving production practices and cultural attitudes toward virtuosity. This is the broader transformation that Stevens approaches from a different but complementary angle.

Stevens continues this line of inquiry by examining the evolution of the operatic anti-heroine in late twentieth and early twenty-first century works. He argues that contemporary creators maintain these complex female figures at the centre of operatic action but frame them with critical distance, inviting audiences to reflect on their suffering rather than passively consume it. This shift most likely emerges from broader cultural and aesthetic changes during this period: increased attention to gendered representation, a growing unease with unmediated depictions of women's suffering, and the influence of postmodern dramaturgies that foreground analysis over identification. Together, these forces encourage creators to retain the anti-heroine's dramatic centrality while reimagining the terms of her visibility.

In this reframing, Stevens locates a shift from spectacle to critique, a move that transforms the operatic gaze from voyeuristic to self-aware. Stevens's attention to the anti-heroine's evolution invites a broader consideration of how narrative form itself encodes gendered expectation. Diana North's (2020) analysis of the "gendered hero's journey" demonstrates how structural conventions—progress, transformation, resolution—have historically privileged masculine trajectories of agency and self-realisation. If operatic heroism has long been aligned with the masculine, as North argues, then reimagining the heroine's path becomes both a dramaturgical and a political act. My dissertation brings these insights together by treating vocal writing, narrative pacing, and staging as interdependent determinants of agency. I examine whether Canadian operas allow their heroines to claim musical space, to survive and grow across the arc of the drama, and to resist or rewrite the narrative scripts that have historically confined operatic women to suffering and death.

By engaging with both critical and creative responses to operatic inheritance, I position twenty-first century Canadian operas within a continuum of global reimaginings: works that negotiate the tensions between inheritance and innovation, and between silence and voice. In this dissertation, I place these scholars and creators in dialogue with one another as I examine whether contemporary Canadian operas continue to rely on familiar structures of female visibility and vulnerability, or whether they open space for new possibilities of female subjectivity. Through a consistent analytical framework, I trace how representation is shaped not only through character and plot but through voice, archival logic, spectatorship, the distribution of vocal space, and mobility within a distinctively Canadian operatic context.

Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson's *Opera Indigene* (2011) foreground questions of representation and sovereignty, asking how opera can ethically engage with Indigenous histories and voices. Their framework reframes adaptation not only as artistic reinterpretation but as cultural negotiation. Similarly, Mary Ingraham, Joseph So, and Roy Moodley's *Opera in a Multicultural World* (2016) situates the art form within a globalised and plural context, highlighting tensions between inherited European forms and local cultural expressions. Together, these studies emphasise that adaptation carries ethical as well as aesthetic weight: it determines whose stories are told and how power circulates through narrative. My dissertation extends these insights by examining whether Canadian operas adapt their sources in ways that reproduce colonial tropes or create space for decolonial and plural voices.

Colleen Renihan's "Sounding the Past" (2011) and *The Operatic Archive* (2020) position opera as an active participant in the construction of historical memory. Renihan shows that opera not only stages the past but shapes it, selecting which voices are amplified and which remain silent. Her historiographical model intersects with Pollock's (2012) and Forner's (2020) analyses

of how opera revisits the past to process cultural trauma: whether through mythic distance or postwar reconstruction, women's roles often become the means through which collective reflection occurs. Reading these perspectives together suggests how the operatic stage performs cultural memory, transforming women's narratives into the vehicles of moral and historical negotiation.

Where Renihan's work centres on opera's function as an archive of memory, Forner and Pollock extend the discussion of opera's relationship to history into the realm of political ethics. Forner examines how contemporary composers and librettists turn to mythic, medieval, and ritual "distant pasts" to confront urgent questions of war, religious extremism, and gender justice. She argues that these works use historical distance to expose how inherited narratives continue to shape the moral landscape of the present, often doing so through gendered symbolism in which women embody the tensions between collective memory and renewal. Pollock's study of postwar West German opera complements this approach by showing how German composers such as Hans Werner Henze (1926–2012) and Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1918–1970) employed the genre as a form of cultural reckoning after 1945, navigating the difficult balance between repudiation and continuity in the wake of fascism. Both scholars reveal that opera's return to the past functions not as nostalgia but as a mode of ethical reflection—an attempt to resituate beauty, tradition, and suffering within a transformed moral consciousness. Read through Ellen Koskoff's ethnomusicological emphasis on the relationship between musical practice and the social structures within which it operates, these insights underscore the extent to which operatic creation and reception remain embedded in larger negotiations of power and identity. Such perspectives are essential to this dissertation's approach, which reads Canadian operas' engagements with history and myth through the intertwined lenses of gender, cultural memory,

and ethics. These perspectives are particularly resonant in my readings of *Inês*, where medieval legend returns as a living structure of gendered inevitability, and *Regina*, where postwar erasure becomes an ethical crisis of historical continuity and responsibility.

The ethical questions raised by Cormier and Fitzpatrick about the staging and spectatorship of sexual violence resonate beyond theoretical critique, shaping the politics of opera production in the twenty-first century. The same feminist concerns that underlie Clément's and McClary's analyses—of beauty, suffering, and the gaze—now re-emerge as questions of institutional responsibility and cultural accountability. In the Canadian and North American context, this responsiveness finds concrete expression in debates over programming and production practice. Craig Price (2020) interrogates the ethics of continuing to stage canonical operas that glorify female suffering in the post-Me-Too era, arguing that programming decisions have moral as well as aesthetic stakes. He asks whether opera institutions should continue presenting works that risk retraumatising or alienating audiences—a question that remains central to my study as I consider whether new Canadian operas offer alternatives to the endless repetition of female death on stage. Hilary LaBonte (2019) shifts the focus from repertoire to production structures, analysing commissioning patterns and institutional hierarchies to reveal persistent gender inequities in who gets to create and whose stories are told. For my work, these studies underscore that feminist critique cannot stop at interpretation: it must also engage with the material and institutional conditions that determine which voices are heard. My dissertation builds on this foundation by applying consistent interpretive criteria to a corpus of Canadian operas, moving beyond documentation toward sustained critical analysis of how representation, authorship, and agency intersect within contemporary operatic creation.

Any discussion of character construction must consider the libretto, which provides the textual framework for the protagonist's journey. Julie Salverson's *When Words Sing: Seven Canadian Libretti* (2021) reveals the collaborative interplay of librettists, composers, and performers in shaping meaning, while also noting that textual potential often remains unrealised until staging.[7] Treating the libretto as an active site rather than a neutral vessel aligns with my approach, which reads text and score as interdependent structures that condition how agency and relationality are expressed.

Salverson's attention to the interplay between text and performance also resonates with Karantonis and Robinson's emphasis on the ethical dimensions of staging and with Renihan's notion of opera as a living archive of cultural memory. Together, these perspectives suggest that the libretto is never static but rather a generative framework through which performance continually realises new layers of meaning. Salverson also reminds me that libretti often embed layers of meaning that may not be fully realised until staging. This is an important consideration when working with operas that are sparsely documented—*Filumena*, *Inês*, and *Lillian Alling*—and therefore approached primarily through study of their scores and texts, supported by publicly available excerpts and secondary materials rather than complete staged video. By contrast, complete staged performance documentation for *Alexandra*, *Oksana G.*, and *Shanawdithit* permits closer attention to staging and embodiment, while the complete concert recording of *Regina* provides fuller access to performance but more limited evidence of staging.

Scholarship on Canadian opera has examined a range of critical concerns, including historiography, intercultural negotiation, and creative process. Studies by Colleen Renihan

[7] The librettists discussed in *When Words Sing* are Robert Chafe (*Ours*), Anna Chatterton (*Rocking Horse Winner*), George Elliott Clarke (*Beatrice Chancy*), Marie Clements (*Missing*), Ann-Marie MacDonald *(Nigredo Hotel*), Julie Salverson (*Shelter*), and Royce Vavrek (*Dog Days*).

(2011, 2020) have examined opera's relationship to historical narrative and archival practice, while Mary Ingraham, Joseph So, and Roy Moodley (2016) have addressed questions of multiculturalism and representation. Dylan Robinson and Pamela Karantonis's edited collection (2011) examines the representation of Indigenous cultures in opera and the contemporary practices of Indigenous artists, while Julie Salverson (2021) has foregrounded the ethical and community-based dimensions of libretto creation. Yet despite these contributions, few studies have approached this repertoire through a sustained feminist lens that treats women's representation as an aesthetic and ethical problem. Moreover, no existing study adopts a cross-operatic, thread-based framework for analysing how female protagonists are made audible, visible, and narratively legible across multiple works.

This dissertation addresses that absence by bringing existing scholarship into dialogue and applying its insights to a focused corpus of seven Canadian operas. Its contribution lies in a cross-operatic, thread-based design that reads these works in relation rather than in isolation, enabling sustained comparison without flattening their differences. By tracing voice after erasure, feminist archival labour, the ethics of looking, and the distribution of vocal space as interlocking representational systems, the study shifts discussion of Canadian opera beyond documentation and adaptation toward a sustained critical examination of how operatic form produces meaning: how it distributes voice, structures spectatorship, performs recovery, and frames women's mobility as both possibility and constraint. In doing so, it demonstrates how contemporary Canadian opera reshapes the conditions under which women become audible, visible, and narratively imaginable, reconfiguring inherited operatic traditions of gender, memory, and power.

Methodology

During my undergraduate studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, I began researching and collecting Canadian operas in the context of a Directed Study supervised by Canadian composer Dr. John Burge. I initially collected repertoire indiscriminately, ranging from one-line references to complete articles, sourced from microfilm, microfiche, newly digitised media, newspapers, and opera journals in both French and English, covering the period from the late 1850s to 1998. My research also included correspondence with Canadian composers, who generously and enthusiastically responded to my requests and whose letters became invaluable primary sources. What began as an anticipated corpus of twenty or thirty operas quickly exceeded eighty works in the first year of study and has since expanded to more than 500 operas (1867–2025). This growing body of research has become the foundation for an encyclopedia of Canadian opera that I hope to continue developing beyond the dissertation, with the aim of documenting the repertoire and making it more readily accessible to performers, researchers, companies, and audiences.

As this dissertation springs from this collection, I would like to acknowledge some of the challenges in collecting this repertoire in order to better explain how I selected the operas examined here. The principal question with which I continue to grapple is how to define a Canadian opera. Does a Canadian opera require a full orchestra and a large cast, or can it be performed by a chamber ensemble with only a few singers? Can its score incorporate recorded or electronically manipulated music? Does the absence of arias, or the use of a through-composed structure, disqualify it? Can a work for a single singer accompanied by one instrument still be

considered an opera? Must it be staged by an opera company or do productions by lyric companies[8] qualify as well?

Rather than seeking an essential definition of Canadian opera, I use the term in this dissertation as an operational category through which to delimit the corpus. The larger collection from which this study emerges was assembled according to deliberately flexible inclusion criteria. At least half of a work's creative team (composer and/or librettist) must be Canadian, whether by birth, permanent residency, or naturalisation; the work must have a minimum duration of thirty minutes, except in the case of children's operas or works forming part of a cycle; and it must contain at least one vocal part, whether live or prerecorded. A work need not have received a premiere to be included in the larger collection.[9] The dissertation draws from this collection but is restricted to works that have been premiered, thereby providing performances through which questions of representation can be examined. These criteria are methodological rather than ontological: they establish the parameters of the corpus without suggesting that the works within it share an inherently "Canadian" musical, aesthetic, or cultural identity.

The second question concerned chronology, specifically when and how one might identify the first "Canadian" opera. This issue reflects a broader challenge in Canadian cultural scholarship, where questions of national identity and artistic origin have long shaped discussions across multiple disciplines. As early as the 1990s, pre-eminent scholar of ethnomusicology

[8] Lyric companies often specialise in smaller-scale vocal productions or works outside the traditional operatic repertoire, while opera companies typically focus on classical, large-scale operas. According to my research, over approximately the past fifty years, lyric companies have been the single driving force behind new Canadian operas.
[9] The encyclopedia I am developing serves a different function from the dissertation. In addition to its educational purpose and its role in documenting and promoting Canadian operatic works, the encyclopedia is intended to facilitate repertoire discovery by making works more readily accessible to performers, companies, researchers, and other interested users. One of its aims is to bring greater visibility to works that may otherwise remain unknown or unperformed, with the possibility that their inclusion might encourage future study, programming, or performance. For this reason, the encyclopedia includes works that have not yet received a premiere. The dissertation, by contrast, is limited to premiered works, since its methodology requires performances that can be examined and evaluated.

Beverley Diamond highlighted the hegemonic structures embedded within narratives of Canadian music, arguing that definitions of the "national" are inseparable from colonial, patriarchal, and institutional hierarchies (Diamond and Witmer 1994). Her critique revealed that identifying a "Canadian" tradition is never neutral but bound up with decisions about whose voices, musics, and aesthetics are authorised to represent the nation. I therefore do not regard the instability of "Canadian opera" as a definitional problem that can ultimately be resolved. Rather, that instability is itself significant: the category is historically contingent, constructed through changing relationships among geography, citizenship, cultural identity, musical practice, and the institutions that commission, produce, archive, and study both opera in Canada and works designated as Canadian opera. Accordingly, this dissertation does not presume a singular Canadian operatic tradition.

These tensions remain central to more recent debates, such as those articulated in *Contemporary Musical Expressions in Canada* (2019), edited by ethnomusicologists Anna Hoefnagels, Judith Klassen, and Sherry Johnson. The volume asserts both the specificity of musical practice as it is currently articulated in Canada and the heterogeneity of its methodological approaches. Its contributors engage complex themes of multiculturalism and nationhood through a series of situated narratives, inviting readers to (re)discover diverse, perhaps even unfamiliar, artistic practices and reconsider how national identity is constructed through music.

Debates over national identity and representation are not limited to scholarly discourse and extend to the repertoire itself. The question of when Canadian opera begins, and whose creative voices define it, reveals how the politics of nationhood continue to shape the historiography of music. If the criterion for national identity is simply composition on Canadian

soil, the distinction might belong to *Colas et Colinette* (1790), written by Joseph Quesnel (1746–1809) in what was then Lower Canada. Yet Quesnel, who was born in France and emigrated to North America in his thirties, complicates the notion of national authorship. Should the term "Canadian" instead refer to a composer's birthplace? On that basis, *The Widow* (1882) by Calixa Lavallée (1842–1891) could be considered the first; however, its European setting, characters, and French operetta style remain far removed from Canadian subject matter. If we shift the emphasis from authorship to theme, Oscar Telgman's (1855–1946) *Leo, the Royal Cadet* (1889) offers a more persuasive example. Based on real events at the Royal Military College of Canada, the opera premiered in Kingston, Ontario, the College's home. Telgman, however, was born in Mengeringhausen, Germany (c. 1855; Beharriell 2007). Finally, if "Canadian" is understood as encompassing both Canadian authorship and Canadian content or idiom, then the opera *The Land of the Maple Leaf* (1902) by Roberta Geddes-Harvey (1849–1930) may be the first to fulfil these combined criteria.

The very attempt to identify a "first" Canadian opera also requires scrutiny. Such a chronology risks locating the beginning of operatic history on these lands within European-derived forms of musical production and within the subsequent political construction of Canada itself. It consequently raises questions not only about what is included in a national operatic history, but also about what forms of cultural and musical expression are rendered peripheral or excluded by the category. The designation "Canadian opera" is therefore not politically neutral, but participates in broader histories of colonialism, nation-building, and cultural authority. The historiography of "Canadian opera" risks making the settler nation the self-evident container through which musical history on these lands is organised.

These processes of inclusion and exclusion also intersect with questions of gender. Just as this dissertation examines the mechanisms through which women are made audible, visible, and narratively legible within opera, the category of "Canadian opera" itself invites consideration of whose voices, histories, and aesthetic practices have been made legible as representative of the nation. A feminist and decolonial approach therefore requires attention not only to representation within the operas examined, but also to the structures through which the repertoire itself has been constituted and understood as Canadian.

This evolving logic exposes a more fundamental question: by what musical, aesthetic, or cultural features can an opera truly be said to be *Canadian*? Amid shifting cultural and artistic contexts, "Who or what is a Canadian?" and "What is an opera?" are questions that will likely never be fully answered to everyone's satisfaction (and perhaps they should not be). The corpus assembled for this dissertation should consequently not be understood as constituting, or speaking for, Canadian opera as a whole. Its purpose is to provide a defined body of repertoire through which particular patterns of gendered representation can be identified, compared, and interrogated. The dissertation draws from the original collection, which spans the period 1867–2025, but restricts its analytical corpus to works dating from 2000 onwards.

Selection Process

Recalling one of the open-ended questions outlined in the Aims and Objectives section—"Who are the women of Canadian opera?"—I began by surveying my Canadian opera collection to identify works relevant to this research. In doing so, I realised that the question was imprecise, as it could also refer to the women who compose and create these works. Recognising this

ambiguity led me to refine the inquiry as follows: "Who are the eponymous female protagonists of Canadian opera?" [10]

To identify eponymous[11] female protagonists in Canadian opera, I began surveying works premiered since 2000. Although it is important and relevant to understand the trajectory of Canadian opera over time,[12] I wanted to better understand the stories our operas tell today, and examine the vehicles used to tell these stories. I then conducted a database search for operas composed between 2000 and 2023 whose titles bear the name of a female protagonist, deliberately echoing the long operatic tradition of *Carmen*, *Lulu*, *Manon Lescaut*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. The eponymous heroine provides a consistent analytical entry point because the act of naming places a woman at the apparent centre of the work, allowing this dissertation to ask whether that narrative centrality is matched by musical, dramatic, and ethical agency, or whether it ultimately reproduces the fatal structures inherited from the operatic canon.

Due to the complexities of Canadian commissioning policies, most Canadian operas are chamber works with an approximate duration of 60 minutes. This policy turned into a practicality for the scope of my study; had the operas been of typical grand opera durations, I would not have been able to include as many as I did. This search identified nine operas: *Filumena* 2003 (John Estacio/John Murrell), *Naomi's Road* 2005 (Ramona Luengen/Ann

[10] The survey revealed the historical underrepresentation of women composers in Canadian opera. From 1866 to 1999, only thirteen women composed music for an opera in Canada; from 2000 to 2025, twenty-one operas were composed by eleven women. This apparent increase requires context. Between 2000 and 2005, the Canada Council for the Arts invested $2.5 million in new opera and music theatre through the Canadian Opera Creation Program (Canada Council for the Arts 2000, 26). Sixteen of the twenty-one operas were composed between 2000 and 2009, leaving only five between 2010 and 2025. The earlier concentration appears largely attributable to this funding and to millennial commissions, which enabled companies to commission lesser-known composers whose work might otherwise have been considered commercially risky.

[11] While many Canadian operas feature compelling female characters who are not eponymous, I have chosen to focus on eponymous characters as a practical parameter to delimit the scope of this study. This decision does not suggest that non-eponymous characters are less significant but rather allows for a manageable corpus while maintaining a focus on works that foreground female figures in their very titles.

[12] Some of this history can be found in dissertations and a monograph that focus on a specific composer or opera, including Zinck 1990, Elliott and Smith 2001, Zapf 2004, Peters 2008, and Losier 2022.

Hodges), *Inanna* 2009 (Randolph Peters/Margaret Atwood), *Inês* 2009 (James Rolfe/Paul Bentley), *Lillian Alling* 2010 (John Estacio/John Murrell), *Alexandra* 2012 (Zack Settel/Yan Muckle), *Regina* 2013 (Elisha Denburg/Maya Rabinovitch), *Oksana G.* 2017 (Aaron Gervais/Colleen Murphy), and *Shanawdithit* 2019 (Dean Burry/Yvette Nolan).[13]

Analysis

To analyse the representation of women in these operas, I employ an interdisciplinary approach that integrates musical, dramaturgical, and feminist analysis. Rather than organising the dissertation around one opera per chapter, the study is structured around four analytical chapters, each of which develops a distinct interpretive thread across the full corpus of seven operas. This design enables comparison without flattening difference: each opera is treated as a self-contained dramatic and musical world, while also functioning as part of a wider representational field shaped by operatic convention, cultural memory, and the politics of gendered visibility.

Across the dissertation, analysis proceeds through close engagement with multiple levels of operatic meaning. I attend to how female characters are shaped by narrative structure, by relations of power between characters, and by the distribution of vocal and expressive space. In addition to the works' texts and dramatic action, I consider musical dimensions—such as vocal writing, pacing, text-setting, recurrence, interruption, sonic density, and timbral framing—as integral to the representation of agency, constraint, endurance, or disappearance. While detailed score-based analysis is developed in later chapters, musical materials are treated throughout as shaping the dramaturgical and ethical conditions under which voice becomes audible. This

[13] For reasons explained in Sources and Access, *Naomi's Road* and *Inanna* are not included in this dissertation.

approach recognises that representation in opera is never purely narrative; rather, it emerges from the interaction of voice, dramaturgy, embodiment, performance, and reception.

Throughout the dissertation, descriptive passages function as analytic interventions rather than neutral preliminaries. When I summarise a scene, a relationship, or a character's trajectory, I do so with attention to what is made perceptible, what is withheld, and what is structured as inevitable. These descriptive passages translate dramaturgical and musical observations into narrative form, preparing the ground for interpretation by making visible the interpretive choices that analysis requires. In this sense, description is not separable from analysis; it is one of the ways the dissertation articulates how meaning is produced through operatic form.

Because each opera introduces distinct dramaturgical pressures and representational stakes, the balance of analytical emphasis necessarily shifts from work to work. Some operas invite greater attention to staging, embodiment, and performance detail, while others require analysis grounded primarily in score study and textual structure. Rather than treating these differences as methodological inconsistencies, I treat them as integral to the field under study: contemporary Canadian opera operates across diverse conditions of documentation, production history, and archival presence. Analytical claims are therefore calibrated to the scope of available evidence, and interpretive weight is placed where the sources can support it.

Throughout, I treat analysis as an interpretive practice rather than a neutral report of facts. The readings I offer are grounded in the materials available, but they remain proposed interpretations: ways of making sense of how these operas construct women's visibility, voice, and agency.

Creators' Intentions and Analysis

Early in the research process, I made the deliberate decision not to interview the composers or librettists of the works examined in this dissertation. This choice was intended to preserve a degree of interpretive independence and to allow my readings to emerge from sustained engagement with the operas themselves rather than being guided by their creators' explanations of intention. Creators' accounts of their intentions are undoubtedly valuable, but they answer a different set of questions from those pursued here. My concern is not primarily with what a composer or librettist intended a work to communicate, but with how representation is constructed through music, text, dramaturgy, and performance, and with what these elements make available to interpretation.[14] This choice also establishes an important limitation: I do not claim that my readings correspond to the intentions of the works' creators or that they constitute the only possible interpretations. As with all interpretive work, these readings are necessarily shaped by my own experiences, scholarly and artistic training, and worldview, as I discuss later in the Researcher Positionality section. The musical analysis undertaken here is interpretive and comparative rather than exhaustive, focussing on questions of representation rather than comprehensive formal or theoretical accounts of each score. Other analysts may hear or interpret the same passages differently, and further analytical detail would not necessarily resolve such differences into a single authoritative reading.

Analytical Approach

The analytical framework used in this dissertation developed through sustained engagement with the operas themselves. As I conducted close readings of scores, libretti, other

[14] For a related distinction between authorial intention and the meanings produced through operatic works and their reception, see Smart 2018.

textual materials, and available performance documentation, certain recurring patterns emerged: the persistence of women's voice beyond silencing, the processes of recovery and erasure, the ethical demands of spectatorship, the unequal distribution of musical space, and the complex meanings of movement. These patterns became the basis for four interpretive threads that structure the dissertation's analysis.

Each analytical chapter develops one thread as a guiding lens and traces how it operates differently across the seven operas. This approach allows the dissertation to balance consistency and flexibility. The shared framework makes it possible to compare representational strategies across works while remaining attentive to each opera's unique artistic logic, compositional language, and dramaturgical aims. Comparison is therefore not an attempt to standardise the operas into a single model, but a way of clarifying what each opera makes newly visible about operatic womanhood in the twenty-first century Canadian context.

Methodologically, the dissertation combines close reading of text and music with feminist critique and dramaturgical interpretation. I analyse how the operas construct women as subjects of voice and knowledge, how they position women within systems of containment or survival, and how they shape audience attention through formal and narrative design. In addition to character and plot, I treat operatic structures—especially the shaping of vocal space, the organisation of time, and the framing of women through visibility or withholding—as central mechanisms of representation.

This thread-based design also enables a cumulative argument. Each chapter contributes a distinct analytical emphasis, but the chapters build toward a shared claim: contemporary Canadian opera repeatedly confronts the ethical and structural conditions under which women are represented. Across the corpus, the dissertation therefore reads representation not only as a

question of what stories are told, but also as a question of how operatic form distributes voice, attention, movement, and interpretive authority.

Sources and Access

The primary materials for this dissertation consist of scores, texts, libretti, and available performance documentation for seven Canadian operas: *Filumena* (2003), *Inês* (2009), *Lillian Alling* (2010), *Alexandra* (2012), *Regina (2014)*, *Oksana G.* (2017), and *Shanawdithit* (2019). These works form the final corpus through which the dissertation examines the representation of women in twenty-first century Canadian opera. The process of establishing this corpus was shaped directly by access to materials and by the uneven state of documentation and preservation in contemporary operatic production.

During the initial research stage, I explored a broader group of operas. However, two works were ultimately excluded for reasons tied to methodological consistency and source availability. I excluded *Naomi's Road* because the focus of this dissertation is on operas written for general and adult audiences rather than works designed specifically for young audiences. Works designed specifically for younger audiences often operate according to distinct dramaturgical aims, pedagogical frameworks, and audience expectations, which would make sustained comparison with the remaining operas methodologically inconsistent. I also excluded *Inanna* because the opera had not yet premiered at the time of this research, and the composer indicated that both the score and the libretto were undergoing substantial revisions (Randolph Peters, email message to author, October 23, 2024). These exclusions were not simply practical decisions; they clarified the scope of the project and reinforced the dissertation's commitment to making interpretive claims grounded in stable, accessible evidence.

Even within the final corpus, the availability of primary sources is uneven across operas. Some works are accessible through complete recordings of staged performances or other professionally captured documentation, while others are documented primarily through score study, libretti, production materials, and shorter publicly available excerpts. This unevenness in documentation shaped the dissertation's methodology and chapter structure. Rather than excluding operas without complete video documentation, I developed an approach that is responsive to the evidentiary limits and possibilities of each work and that remains transparent about the conditions under which interpretation is possible.

For operas without complete performance documentation, analysis is grounded primarily in the score, including the sung text and stage directions contained within it, supplemented where possible by programme notes, production information, published reviews, and publicly available video capsules or excerpts. Unless otherwise indicated, my analyses concern the operatic works themselves, as represented in their musical scores and libretti, rather than particular productions or directorial interpretations. Where a specific production informs the discussion, it is identified explicitly. This applies especially to *Filumena*, *Inês*, and *Lillian Alling*, for which my analysis focuses on musical and dramaturgical construction rather than performance-specific detail. In these chapters, I attend to features such as vocal allocation, formal pacing, recurring musical material, text-setting, and narrative organisation, without making claims that depend on directorial choices, gesture, or staging practices that cannot be reliably verified.

For operas supported by more extensive performance documentation, the dissertation incorporates additional attention to embodiment, staging, and the ethics of spectatorship produced in performance. This applies most fully to *Alexandra*, *Oksana G.*, and *Shanawdithit*, for which video documentation permits analysis of how visual framing, physical presence, and

theatrical pacing interact with musical structure to shape women's representation. The complete concert recording of *Regina* provides more limited evidence of staging. Across the dissertation, analytical claims are calibrated to the scope of the available sources: I do not treat missing documentation as a gap to be filled through speculation, but as a material condition that determines what can responsibly be interpreted and how women's operatic legibility is produced.

In addition to these primary materials, I draw on secondary sources including scholarship in feminist opera studies, performance studies, and cultural theory, as well as contextual writings such as programme notes and critical reviews. These materials support the dissertation's interpretive framing and provide historical and cultural context, particularly in cases where the operas engage historical figures, inherited myths, or legacies of institutional and colonial violence. Together, these sources form the evidentiary foundation for a dissertation that approaches opera not only as an artistic object, but also as a representational practice shaped by access, preservation, and the limits of what remains available to be heard and seen.

Researcher Positionality

As with all research, this study is shaped by the positionality of the researcher and by the particular lens through which the material is approached. In the spirit of feminist self-reflexivity, I would like to acknowledge my own standpoint as a white woman from the lands now known as Canada (Kanata). I was born and raised in the area surrounding Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), on the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk). I now live and study in Tkaronto (Toronto), on lands that have long been cared for by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat, and whose current treaty holders are the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

My scholarly and artistic formation has similarly shaped the perspectives I bring to this research. I trained as a classical singer at the undergraduate level before pursuing graduate studies in musicology. I therefore approach opera not only as a musicologist but also as someone whose training and professional work have been situated within, and have benefited from, the institutions and traditions of Western classical music.

I recognise that both Western classical music and the academic disciplines in which I have been trained and worked have histories deeply entangled with colonialism, histories whose structures and effects continue into the present. My position within these traditions consequently affords particular forms of knowledge while also producing limitations and potential blind spots. I do not claim access to perspectives or experiences that are not my own.

Throughout this research, I therefore seek to remain attentive to the assumptions embedded in my disciplinary training and analytical practices and to the ways in which my own social and institutional position shapes the questions I ask, the materials I privilege, and the interpretations I produce. My approach is informed by feminist, Indigenous, and decolonial scholarship and, wherever possible, by the scholarship and perspectives of people whose lived experiences differ from my own. I understand decolonising research not as a position that I can claim to have achieved, but as an ongoing practice of critical reflection, listening, accountability, and reconsideration of the structures through which knowledge is produced.

Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation examines the representation of women in twenty-first century Canadian opera through an integrated feminist and musicological framework. Across seven contemporary works, it argues that Canadian opera has become a particularly significant site for rethinking how

women's lives are voiced, witnessed, recovered, and mobilised under conditions shaped by patriarchal tradition, colonial history, and inherited operatic convention. Rather than treating women's suffering as an inevitable dramaturgical endpoint, the dissertation traces how these operas interrogate the systems that render women visible or invisible, audible or suppressed, and mobile or constrained.

The core of the dissertation is organised around four analytical chapters, each developing a distinct but interlocking interpretive thread. Together, these chapters form a cumulative argument: contemporary Canadian opera reconfigures operatic womanhood not primarily through narrative revision alone, but through the ethical and structural conditions of representation—conditions produced through voice, archives, spectatorship, musical form, and movement.

Chapter 1, Cracks in the Glass: Voice After Erasure, establishes the dissertation's foundational claim by examining how contemporary operas challenge what Catherine Clément describes as opera's long fatal grammar, in which women are permitted to "speak" most fully at or through death. Instead, the chapter argues that these Canadian works repeatedly stage voice as something that persists beyond silencing: as testimony, survival, historical correction, and relational inheritance. Focusing on *Regina*, *Shanawdithit*, and *Oksana G.*, the chapter develops listening as an ethical practice and positions posthumous voice as a form of continuity, care, and responsibility rather than resurrection or catharsis. Across these three works, voice emerges through structures of recovery, mediation, testimony, and near-silence, revealing both the possibilities and the fragility of speaking after erasure.

Chapter 2, Reassembling the Fragments: Opera as Feminist Archive, argues that the operas studied in this dissertation do not merely represent women's histories; they actively

perform archival labour. Here, the archive is approached as an unfolding feminist practice of retrieval, rewriting, re-sounding, and reanimation, rather than as a static repository. The chapter demonstrates that these works reassemble fragments—documents, drawings, mythic residues, and near-absences of evidence—into forms of embodied and musical presence. Examining *Regina*, *Shanawdithit*, *Inês*, and *Oksana G.*, the chapter reconceptualises "recovery" as an ethically fraught process shaped by incompleteness, refusal, and the limits of representation, moving beyond conventional notions of narrative restoration or nostalgia.

Chapter 3, Peering into the Jar: The Ethics of Looking at Women's Suffering, shifts the dissertation's emphasis from what opera shows to how opera positions its audience as witness. Building on feminist critiques of opera's reliance on female suffering as spectacle, the chapter develops a situated model of spectatorship in which the "gaze" is not singular but multiple, uneven, and structurally produced. Through sequential readings of the dissertation's seven operas, Chapter 3 identifies distinct regimes of looking—including civic scrutiny, mythic recognition, voyeuristic violation, endurance as spectacle, archival non-looking, colonial hyper-visibility, and self-witnessing vision. In doing so, it demonstrates how contemporary Canadian opera frequently refuses the neutrality of spectatorship and instead forces ethical confrontation: to look is never innocent, and to represent harm risks repeating it even when the work intends to offer a critical perspective.

Chapter 4, Pressure in the Jar: Aria and the Conditions of Vocal Space, turns to musical form as an explicitly gendered architecture. Historically, the aria has functioned as a privileged chamber of operatic subjectivity: a bounded space in which interiority is intensified, rendered audible, and made spectacular. This chapter argues that contemporary Canadian operas redistribute, fracture, withhold, or multiply that chamber in ways that fundamentally reshape

how women's agency is staged. Through comparative analysis, it traces a spectrum of vocal allocation across the corpus: interrupted lyricism (*Filumena*), migratory and culturally inflected vocal containers (*Inês*), restrained arioso as ethical witness (*Regina*), collective and relational voicing (*Shanawdithit*), the denial of extended vocal space (*Oksana G.*), dispersed vocality shaped by landscape and motion (*Lillian Alling*), and recursive vocal architecture through doubled selfhood (*Alexandra*). The chapter demonstrates that feminist critique in these works extends beyond plot and character into the compositional structures that determine whether, and how, a woman is given room to sing.

Following the conclusion, Appendix 1 brings together brief synopses of the seven operas, providing a single point of reference for their narratives. Appendices 2–8 provide opera-specific reference materials and contextual documentation. Each of these appendices is organised into three sections: (a) Characters and Relationships, (b) Scene-by-Scene Summary, and (c) Production Overview and Analytical Materials. Readers unfamiliar with the works examined in this dissertation may wish to consult the synopses and, where greater detail is useful, the relevant opera-specific appendix for additional narrative, production, and analytical context before reading the corresponding chapters.

Appendix 9 presents scanned programme covers and posters. Appendix 10 provides creative team biographies, Appendix 11 documents commissioning and producing organisations, and Appendix 12 lists performance venues. Appendix 13 outlines the broader cultural afterlives of the historical figures examined in this dissertation: six of the seven female protagonists are based on historical individuals, and this appendix surveys major sources—books, (auto)biographies, graphic novels, films, and other media—that depict or discuss each woman. Some of these materials informed the librettists' creative processes, while others supported my

own contextual framing as I positioned each figure within both her historical context and the operatic work itself. Together, these supplementary materials serve as a reference framework that underpins the dissertation's interpretive analysis and enables readers to consult the empirical and contextual record on which its arguments are built.

A number of contemporary Canadian organisations and initiatives are working to address inequities in opera and classical music. Their work seeks to expand opportunities and representation for women, gender-diverse, queer, and other historically underrepresented artists. Their activities range from the creation and promotion of new operatic works and the reimagining of existing repertoire to professional development, advocacy, research, documentation, and initiatives supporting composers, singers, conductors, and other artists, and other creative practitioners. While a comprehensive examination of these organisations and their work falls beyond the scope of this dissertation, they provide important context for the changing landscape of opera and classical music in Canada and demonstrate the multiple ways in which questions of gender, equity, and representation are being addressed in contemporary practice. A selection of these collectives, organisations, programmes, and projects, together with brief descriptions of their mandates and activities, is provided in Appendix 14.

Chapter 1 – Cracks in the Glass: Voice After Erasure

Contemporary Canadian operas about women repeatedly stage the act of speaking after silencing, allowing women not only to appear onstage, but also to articulate the conditions of their own erasure, before, during, or even after death. The operas give musical, theatrical, and archival voice to women whose historical or social circumstances prevented them from speaking for themselves. In doing so, they engage directly with Catherine Clément's argument that opera has historically placed women most intensely at its centre at the moment of their undoing. Yet these works add a crucial layer of revision: they allow women to narrate the very violence that sought to erase them. This narrative reversal transforms opera's fatal grammar into an act of historical correction. Rather than treating voice as the final expression of a dying heroine, these operas reposition it as an ongoing practice of testimony, allowing women to interpret, contest, and carry forward histories that would otherwise remain incomplete. The voice that once signalled disappearance now records survival, recasting the operatic heroine not as the object of tragedy but as its witness and author.

This chapter focuses on the dramaturgical and textual dimensions through which voice after erasure is articulated, examining how texts, staging, and narrative structure construct the ethical conditions of listening. The musical dimensions of these works are equally important to this inquiry and are examined in detail in Chapter 4.

The analyses that follow trace how contemporary Canadian operas reconfigure the conditions under which women's voices are heard after historical erasure. The discussion begins with *Regina*, where archival recovery becomes a model of ethical listening grounded in testimony and historical responsibility. It then turns to *Shanawdithit*, where colonial documentation is reconfigured through counter-archival practice, collective voice, and relational

continuity. Bringing these works together, the chapter considers how listening itself may function as an ethical practice grounded in relation rather than mastery. The final section turns to contested voice in *Shanawdithit* and *Oksana G.*, examining how women's speech remains mediated by structures of colonial, institutional, and moral authority, and concluding with Oksana's dying words and the uncertain responsibilities of listening.

1.1 Testimony and Posthumous Voice: *Regina* and *Shanawdithit*

The first articulation of voice after erasure begins not with survival, but with aftermath. In *Regina* and *Shanawdithit*, the female voice arises from the space between recovery and remembrance: from archives, artefacts, and memories that outlive the body. These operas confront the paradox of speaking after death: they do not resurrect their subjects but allow them to be heard differently. Through voice and music sound becomes testimony and absence is transformed into presence. Both works transform silence into agency, redefining what it means for the dead to speak within a genre long preoccupied with the spectacle of women's dying. In place of transcendence, they offer continuity: an afterlife of sound grounded in relation rather than redemption. Each work turns listening into an ethical act in which remembrance itself becomes a mode of care.

1.1 a) *Regina*: Archival Voice and Ethical Listening

Regina unfolds within an East Berlin archive in 1991, where the spirit of Regina Jonas—the first woman ordained as a rabbi in 1935 and later murdered in Auschwitz—waits to be found among confiscated papers. Set across two temporalities, the opera interlaces Berlin of the 1930s and 1940s with the archival present of 1991. The earlier timeline, recounted through Regina's

recollections, traces her struggle for ordination amid the tightening grip of fascism and patriarchal orthodoxy, while the later frame centres on Anna, a German archivist haunted by her father's Nazi past, whose act of recovery becomes a form of atonement. The archive thus operates as both setting and metaphor: a liminal space where the living encounter the voices of the erased.

The rediscovery of Jonas's story in post-Cold War Germany provides a striking real-world parallel to the opera's dramaturgy of recovery. Her legacy remained largely obscured until archival materials became accessible after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Regina's writings and papers were rediscovered in 1991 by Dr. Katharina von Kellenbach in the *Gesamtarchiv der deutschen Juden* (General Archive of German Jews). Alongside her article, "God Does Not Oppress Any Human Being: The Life and Thought of Rabbi Regina Jonas" (Kellenbach 1994), subsequent works such as Elisa Klapheck's *Fräulein Rabbiner Jonas: The Story of the First Woman Rabbi* (2004), Diana Groó's documentary *Regina (2014)*, as well as profiles in the Jewish Women's Archive, have collectively restored Jonas's voice to historical memory (Jewish Women's Archive n.d-a, n.d-b).

Within this historical context, Regina transforms archival retrieval into an act of embodied listening. The opera opens with Regina alone, suspended between memory and oblivion; her voice, at once present and posthumous, summons the past before any living witness arrives. Only later does Anna enter the archive, seeking redemption through the act of uncovering. Across the opera's unfolding scenes, the movement between Regina's recollections and Anna's gradual recognition suggests that remembrance itself can function as ethical care, binding the work of the scholar to that of the witness.

Anna's search does not simply recover an archival trace; it initiates a form of listening. As she moves through the archive—sorting files, opening boxes, and reading fragments of the past—the boundary between researcher and subject begins to blur. The encounter unfolds less as discovery than as audition: Anna comes to know through hearing. In this sense, the archive functions not as a site of mastery but of relation, where the living and the dead are joined through acts of attention.

A central moment of this relational listening occurs in the repeated declaration, "There is something in me," delivered in Regina's arioso (see below for lyrics). The phrase returns several times within the sung text of the score, each repetition slightly recontextualised by the surrounding text, as though conviction were forming in the act of articulation itself. Rather than presenting belief as a sudden revelation, the opera stages it as a process of self-recognition: an emerging certainty shaped through repetition, breath, and reflection. The textual insistence of the phrase constructs testimony not as a proclamation but as a gradual affirmation, a voice discovering its authority through the act of speaking.

The stillness of this moment finds its echo in the opera's closing encounter between Anna and Regina, where their brief phrases—"Here I am" and "I found her" (VI 53; 432–443)[15]—unfold in overlapping repetitions. The exchange does not function as conventional dialogue but as reciprocal naming, transforming recognition into a shared act of presence.

In this way, *Regina* redefines listening as an ethical rather than a purely aesthetic act. The archive becomes a relational space in which documents enable acts of hearing that are

[15] The opera scores vary in their treatment of measure numbers: some use continuous numbering throughout the score, while others restart the numbering at the beginning of each scene. To avoid confusion arising from these differing conventions, all score references in this dissertation have been standardised using the following format: act-scene page number(s); measure number(s). For operas divided into acts, a reference to act 1, scene 3, pages 37–38, measures 236–247, would appear as (I-III 37–38; 236–247). For operas divided into scenes only, the equivalent reference would appear as (III 37–38; 236–247).

inseparable from responsibility. Listening to Regina's voice becomes an act of participating in its survival, recognising remembrance itself as a form of response. Within the broader framework of voice after erasure, her story transforms archival recovery from an act of historical retrieval into one of ethical attention, modelling a form of listening that sustains rather than consumes.

Lyrics for "*There is something in me"*

The musical setting reinforces this process of conviction through repeated textual statements.

> There is something in me.
> There is something in me.
> There is something in me.
> I know it.
> I know it.
> There is something in me.
> There is something in me.
> There is something in me.
> I know it.
> I know it.
>
> Why would I have this impossible desire, this calling, for no reason at all?
> Ah ___ x 3
>
> I woke up one day and I knew this was it.
> And it is.
> And it is.
> And it is. (V 37–40)

1.1 b) Operatic Memory and Ethical Recovery

Building upon this framework of archival listening, *Regina* extends evidence beyond its documentary function and makes it a profound thematic and emotional anchor; documents, letters, papers, and official records carry the weight of existence. Their confiscation by the Gestapo represents more than administrative loss; it enacts a symbolic annihilation of voice, presence, and memory. Regina's anguish over her erased legacy echoes broader histories of Jewish persecution, where the systematic destruction of records facilitated both physical and

historical erasure. In contrast, Anna's desperate effort to recover even one life: "If only I could help one person" (VI 48–49; 405–407), transforms evidence into an instrument of recovery, resistance, and repair. Her work in the archive is not merely bureaucratic; it is existential, feminist, and redemptive.

At the same time, the opera itself engages in a parallel act of recovery through its nonlinear structure, spectral presences, and layered musical textures. These elements perform a kind of narrative and sonic reconstitution, allowing Regina's voice to resurface in fragments, echoes, and repetitions. This layered treatment of evidence parallels the labour of scholarship. In engaging with the opera, the researcher and, by extension, the audience, participates in a restorative gesture that reclaims Regina Jonas's story and reanimates what was silenced. Within this framework, evidence functions as both a narrative device and an ethical imperative, positioning listening itself as a form of memory work. This ethical framing resonates with the work of Hungarian-born Canadian composer István Anhalt (1919–2012), particularly his opera *Traces* (*Tikkun*) (1996), which transforms musical composition into a meditation on restoration and repair. Anhalt's work is particularly compelling because it offers a Canadian musical engagement with the idea of *tikkun*, an aesthetic and ethical orientation that also informs the interior world of *Regina*.[16] Anhalt's engagement with *tikkun* was informed by his reading of Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), whose writings on Kabbalah provided an important impetus for his creative exploration of these ideas. As musicologist William E. Benjamin explains, Anhalt was drawn to Scholem's account of the Lurianic processes of *zimzum* (self-limitation), *shevirah* (the breaking of the vessels), and *tikkun* (the gathering of scattered sparks): a cosmology in

[16] I introduce Anhalt here as a Canadian composer whose treatment of *tikkun* offers a conceptual and aesthetic parallel to Regina's arioso, situating the opera within a broader musical and philosophical context in which processes of repair, fragmentation, and interior renewal can be rendered musically.

which creation itself is marked by rupture and the labour of restoration (Benjamin 2001, 236–237). Benjamin connects these dynamics of breakage and restoration to Anhalt's broader creative preoccupations, describing the recovery of what remains valuable from fragmentation and debris as a recurring concern in his work.

Similarly, as Canadian musicologist Carl Morey observes, *Traces* (*Tikkun*) is prefaced by quotations from Plotinus and Scholem that link voice to restoration: "Whenever intellectual principle becomes the determinant of soul, it shapes it into Reasoning Soul, by communicating a trace of what itself has come to possess," and "*tikkun* … the restoration of the universe to its original design" (Morey 2001, 321). Through this lens, Anhalt's aesthetic of fragmentation becomes a form of theological poetics: each utterance participates in re-creation, and each sound enacts the ethical work of *tikkun*.

Though never named in *Regina*, this same principle of repair is enacted symbolically through Anna's recovery of Regina's confiscated papers, an act of witness that reassembles what history has broken. If *Regina* enacts *tikkun* through rediscovery, *Traces* does so through invocation, layering spectral voice and silence not to complete a history but to hold its rupture in tension. Both works transform memory into resistance: a redemptive act that keeps loss audible while acknowledging the impossibility of full restoration.

The ethical power of *Regina* lies in its refusal of spectacle. The opera performs its own *tikkun olam,*[17] the Jewish imperative to repair the world, by giving sonic shape to remembrance. The chamber-scale scoring and restrained vocal textures in *Regina* create a space of reverence rather than revelation. When Anna and Regina's voices intertwine, their lines remain distinct, preserving the individuality of each woman's experience. This restraint transforms the operatic

[17] For a concise introduction to *tikkun olam* and its historical and contemporary interpretations, see Brandeis University 2023.

duet into a form of ethical listening, an encounter in which difference is sustained rather than resolved. The opera's quietness thus becomes a form of testimony, a musical theology of attention and repair.

Through this layering, *Regina* redefines what it means for an opera to bear witness. The final scene unfolds within the East Berlin archive, where Anna searches among the remnants of the past while Regina's spirit occupies the stage alongside her. Though they exist in different temporal planes—one living, one remembered—their voices sound together, dissolving the boundary between presence and absence. The result is not a duet in the conventional operatic sense but an act of shared resonance: each sustains and extends the other's tone, shaping a dialogue across time.

In the closing scene, this encounter reaches its most restrained and intimate form. The exchange between Anna and Regina unfolds without dramatic culmination, suspending the forward motion typically associated with operatic resolution. Their brief phrases—Regina's "Here I am" and Anna's "I found her" (VI 53; 432–443)—recur in overlapping patterns that gradually blur the distinction between recognition and response. The act of finding becomes indistinguishable from the act of being found, transforming the scene from narrative closure into an ongoing gesture of relation.

Rather than resolving their encounter, the opera sustains a fragile continuum of presence in which voice itself becomes the medium through which remembrance persists. The surrounding stage environment—shared space, temporal simultaneity, and the absence of decisive theatrical finality—holds the encounter open, allowing the two figures to coexist across historical boundaries. In this way, the archive becomes an audible field of relation as well as a setting, a space in which breath, memory, and utterance are sustained together. The closing scene

thus replaces operatic finality with endurance, leaving relation rather than resolution: a shared act of sounding that transforms listening into an ethical practice of care and remembrance.

1.1 c) *Shanawdithit*: Counter-Archive and Collective Voice

If *Regina* imagines the archive as a space of spiritual recovery, *Shanawdithit* reconfigures it as a space of resistance. Set between 1823 and 1829 in what is now Newfoundland, the opera recounts the final years of Shanawdithit, the woman remembered as the last known member of the Beothuk people. The opera opens during her period of enforced residence in St. John's, where she works in the household of William Cormack, a Scottish explorer who seeks to document her people's history through drawings and oral accounts. Across its seven scenes, the work moves between personal memory and collective trauma, culminating in a visionary final sequence in which Shanawdithit's spirit joins those of her ancestors.

Co-created by composer Dean Burry (non-Indigenous) and librettist Yvette Nolan (Algonquin), the opera, developed through extensive collaboration with Indigenous artists and advisors,[18] transforms colonial ethnographic documentation into a collaborative act of witnessing, one that acknowledges archival absence rather than attempting to overwrite it. Its dramaturgy echoes the structure of testimony itself: fragmented, cyclical, and unfinished. Where

[18] In the Opera America Breakout Sessions panel titled "Achieving a New Normal," Yvette Nolan explained that although she had access to Shanawdithit's sketches, there were significant gaps: Shanawdithit left no words of her own, her voice was absent, no Beothuk elders remained to consult, and no Beothuk community could speak to her legacy. To address these absences, the sketches were shared with Indigenous artists from various disciplines, inviting them to bring their perspectives into the conversation. Nolan then crafted a libretto that incorporated a sense of place and opened space for other Indigenous voices to respond to what Shanawdithit had left. This process also involved an ongoing collaboration with Dean Burry as they worked together to shape the music and language of the opera (Opera America 2021). Rather than attempting to reconstruct an authoritative Beothuk musical or cultural voice, the creative team acknowledged the irretrievable gaps left by colonial violence. The work therefore foregrounds contemporary Indigenous artistic collaboration rather than ethnographic reconstruction, treating Shanawdithit's surviving drawings as points of ethical engagement rather than as artefacts to be reanimated through speculative historical authenticity.

Denburg's *Regina* stages recovery through rediscovery, *Shanawdithit* confronts the colonial mechanisms of documentation that once claimed to "preserve" Indigenous life while enacting its erasure. Rather than attempting to reconstruct a lost Beothuk expressive tradition through ethnographic recovery, the opera openly acknowledges the limits of archival knowledge and situates its creative authority within a contemporary collaborative process.

When the opera premiered in 2019, its historical resonance intersected with ongoing national processes of remembrance and accountability. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008–2015)[19] had recently concluded, and public discourse continued to grapple with the ethical responsibilities of cultural retelling. Within this context, *Shanawdithit* transforms the operatic stage into a counter-archive, one that resists closure by reclaiming the right to narrate.

The opera initially presents Shanawdithit's voice through Cormack's ethnographic gaze; his attempts to document her story reproduce the same asymmetries of power that silenced her people. As the work unfolds, Shanawdithit gradually reclaims her narrative through drawing, song, and communal breath. Her art becomes a living record that refuses containment. The projected images of her surviving sketches function as recurring dramaturgical anchors, structuring the action around acts of witnessing rather than linear narration. Each drawing, whether depicting dance, lodging, or violent encounters, initiates a new moment of testimony, transforming the stage into a space where visual record, spoken memory, and collective response converge.

[19] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada operated from 2008 to 2015, culminating in the release of its Final Report in December 2015 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015).

In scene IV, Shanawdithit is exhausted from sketching, yet William Cormack urges her to continue because her work is "so important" (IV 85; 179–181). Left alone, she turns inward, questioning the very premise of preservation:

> Is it true what he says?
> This buggishaman?
> The only one who has ever shown me kindness.
> If I put these things down with his buggishaman tools,
> will someone hear me in the future?
> Even if I can speak across the time,
> what ear will there be to hear me? (IV 85–86; 186–200)

What follows is a moment of profound stillness. In the score, the phrase "How can I sing to descendants I will never have" unfolds incrementally, building word by word as if testing the possibility of transmission itself. This gradual unfolding transforms speech into invocation, with each fragment suspended before the next emerges, creating a dramaturgical space in which voice appears not as fluent expression but as effortful survival.

> How
> How can
> How can I
> How can I sing
> How can I sing to
> How can I sing to descendants
> How can I sing to descendants I
> How can I sing to descendants I will
> How can I sing to descendants I will never
> How can I sing to descendants I will never have (IV 87–88; 1–14)

The subsequent whispered articulation of her name by the chorus—"Shhh … Shan … aw … dit … hit"—blurs the boundary between life and the spirit world, suggesting that remembrance is already taking place even as she fears its impossibility. What begins as isolation becomes a gathering of voices, the invocation of her name functioning as both memorial and continuation.

Here, the opera articulates the *Voice After Erasure* thread in its most distilled form. Shanawdithit does not sing *for* her people but *after* them. Her utterance acknowledges the impossibility of transmission even as it performs it. Through this fragmented line—its pacing, its silences, its inhalations—she enacts what I describe here as *iterative presence*: a voice that endures by continually re-sounding into emptiness, with each breath becoming both testimony and threshold. [20]

As Dylan Robinson cautions in *Hungry Listening* (2020), settler modes of hearing often aestheticise Indigenous expression, converting it into spectacle. In my reading, *Shanawdithit* gestures toward resisting that conversion by staging listening itself as the site of encounter. The audience is invited to hear differently: to approach breath, silence, and the whispered name not as lack, but as forms of sonic sovereignty. I take this scene to suggest, rather than assert, a shift toward what I understand as counter-archive and collective voice. What begins as an individual act of remembrance gradually expands into a communal act of witnessing in which the Spirit Chorus, and eventually the audience, participate in sustaining a fragile continuity of voice. Shanawdithit's song becomes both an end and a beginning: a bridge between erasure and endurance.

1.1 d) Kwe[21] and the Continuum of Voice

Shanawdithit's closing exchange with Kwe and the Spirit Chorus crystallises the opera's transformation of representation into relation. As Shanawdithit faces her mortality, the Spirits

[20] I use the term "iterative presence" to describe a form of sonic continuation that emerges not from stable lineage or communal reciprocity, but from repeated acts of sounding into absence. The term is meant as an analytical tool for this chapter rather than as a reference to an established theoretical concept.

[21] Kwe appears in the final scene of *Shanawdithit* as the spirit of Shanawdithit's "daughter". Her presence bridges generations, embodying the continuity of the Beothuk people and transforming Shanawdithit's solitude into relation.

softly whisper her name—"Shhh-an-aw-dith-it" (VII 156; 100–101)—surrounding her in a breath of remembrance. Her ensuing reflection is both sorrowful and accepting:

> It is time then? So soon? Such a lonely life.
> No husband. No child.
> I should not be so sad to leave it yet.
> I hear my name in spirit mouths.
> Will my name be spoken only in the next world? (VII 156–157; 102–113)

Kwe's entrance interrupts this solitude. Addressing Shanawdithit as "Mother," she names a relationship that extends beyond the physical, transforming absence into kinship:

> Kwe: Mother?
> S: What spirit is this? Are you lost? I know what it is like to lose a mother.
> Kwe: Mother, listen.
> S: I could listen to you for all time, if you only call me mother again. For I'll never have a daughter. (VII 157–158; 114–124)

In this exchange, naming becomes creation. Kwe's invocation of "Mother" reconstitutes lineage not through blood but through voice—through the act of calling and answering. When Kwe responds, "Just as your mother is in you, so are you in me. And we go on in our descendants" (VII 158; 125), she affirms continuity as relational rather than biological, locating survival in the transmission of memory, story, and address.

The opera's final sequence amplifies this gesture. As the Spirit Chorus encircles Shanawdithit, banners are planted on and raised electronically above the stage while the chorus repeats the refrain "And the Beothuk will live again," layering the line across successive voices. Through this cumulative repetition—"Carried from one generation to the next / and the next and the next / in story and song" (VII 161–162; 153–163)—the once-solitary voice is absorbed into collective expression, transforming mourning into continuity.

In this closing movement, death is not presented as an endpoint but as circulation: an ongoing dialogue between the living, the remembered, and the listening community. The stage becomes a counter-archive where voice and breath inscribe survivance rather than disappearance. Shanawdithit's final invocation, when her name is carried across multiple voices, reframes remembrance as relational inheritance, sustaining presence beyond erasure; breath becomes archive, and voice becomes inheritance. This moment resonates with what Michelle Raheja terms "visual sovereignty" in *Reservation Reelism* (2010): the assertion of Indigenous self-determined modes of representation that intervene in and reshape colonial visual regimes. Though Raheja's framework emerges from film studies, I invoke it here by analogy to describe how *Shanawdithit* performs a related act of sonic sovereignty, reanimating the colonial archive through breath, rhythm, and relation. The projected drawings—once treated as colonial evidence of extinction—are reclaimed as living documents of survivance. The final sequence gathers voices into a shared sonic field that resists dramatic culmination, allowing presence and absence to coexist without narrative resolution. The posthumous voice, once a symbol of isolation, becomes a chorus of continuation.

This collective sounding gestures toward what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe as an ethic of refusal, grounded in an insistence on the incommensurability of decolonisation with broader projects of reconciliation or social repair. In their 2012 essay "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," Tuck and Yang insist that decolonisation demands the material repatriation of Indigenous land and life and warn against its dilution into a general discourse of social repair (Tuck and Yang 2012, 1–5, 9–21). Their argument cannot therefore be transferred directly to an aesthetic context without reproducing the metaphorisation they critique. With this distinction in mind, Shanawdithit's closing scene might instead be understood as enacting a related form of

aesthetic refusal: it resists narrative closure, resolution, and containment. The opera does not offer reconciliation between settler and Indigenous histories, sustaining instead an unresolved relational space that resonates with Tuck and Yang's account of incommensurability. In this sense, *Shanawdithit* does not claim to decolonise the operatic form but instead exposes its limits, staging listening itself as a practice of ethical suspension.

By refusing closure, *Shanawdithit* reframes listening as an act of ethical endurance rather than resolution. This suspension—of cadence, of meaning, of reconciliation—extends beyond the opera's narrative, resonating with a broader shift in contemporary Canadian opera.

1.2 Toward a Shared Ethics of Listening

The continuity between *Regina* and *Shanawdithit* also reveals an evolving approach in the treatment of historical recovery within Canadian opera. Both composers treat sound as a mode of historiography: Denburg through sacred stillness and ritualised repetition, and Burry through participatory and communal forms of voicing. Their librettists similarly transform textual recovery into a feminist ethics of attention. Building on Ellie M. Hisama's call for socially and culturally informed modes of musical analysis in *Gendering Musical Modernism* (2001), this parallel suggests that ethical listening requires attention to the cultural and historical contexts through which difference is heard.[22] Hisama's approach demonstrates how musical analysis can be informed by questions of identity, gender, politics, and social context rather than treating musical structures in isolation. Extending this principle to *Regina* and *Shanawdithit*, I consider how structures of power shape whose voices are heard and how they are received. The operas invite a mode of listening that recognises inequality while seeking resonance, modelling a

[22] For more on Hisama's argument for socially and culturally situated modes of listening, see Hisama 2001.

form of analytical care: hearing not for mastery but for relation. To engage with them is to participate in a reparative labour that joins sound, history, and ethics.

In their refusal of spectacle, *Regina* and *Shanawdithit* enact the first phase of this dissertation's argument: the reclamation of voice as ethical presence. The women they depict do not return to life but remain audible through music that renders survival as process and testimony as resonance. Together, they suggest that posthumous voice marks the beginning of relation rather than the end of erasure. Even within these reparative frames, however, the question of mediation remains: who listens, who speaks, and through whose authority? It is this instability that leads to section, 1.3 "Contested Voice," which examines the dynamics of power and possession within acts of listening.

1.3 Contested Voice: *Shanawdithit* and *Oksana G.*

In *Shanawdithit* and *Oksana G.*, the woman's voice is not simply recovered but contested and mediated through the authority of men who claim to interpret, protect, or redeem her. The operatic voice, traditionally framed as the expressive property of the heroine, becomes the terrain over which epistemic and moral power are exercised. What emerges is not only the sound of recovery but the friction of its mediation, the struggle over who may speak, and on whose behalf.

This contestation takes ethnographic form most clearly in *Shanawdithit*. William Cormack's presence in the score embodies the colonial will to record and thereby to translate the Indigenous witness into categories legible to the archive. His questions shape what Shanawdithit can say and his authority determines how her words are inscribed. Yet the opera refuses to allow him mastery. Through both text and music, Shanawdithit's act of "showing" rather than "telling" reclaims authorship: her drawings, projected on stage, disrupt the logic of transcription that once

silenced her. The Beothuk woman who in the historical record appears as the object of study becomes here the architect of representation.

I suggest that this reversal resonates with what Linda Tuhiwai Smith identifies in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021) as the reclaiming of research from its imperial entanglements. Writing from the standpoint of the colonised, Smith argues that research has long functioned as a tool of imperial power, "a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other" (Smith 2021, 2–3). She situates "researching back" within a lineage of anti-colonial acts such as "writing back" and "talking back," linking it to an understanding of the coloniser, the recovery of Indigenous selves, the analysis of colonialism, and the struggle for self-determination (Smith 2021, 8).

Read alongside Smith's broader emphasis on reciprocity and the ethical sharing of knowledge, this framework offers a way of understanding the transformation of ethnographic documentation in Shanawdithit. The opera turns such documentation toward collaborative storytelling, participating in a broader effort to foreground Indigenous perspectives and modes of representation. In this sense, Shanawdithit can be read in relation to decolonising methodologies without claiming that the opera itself performs decolonisation: it repositions listening as relational, reciprocal, and ethically accountable. By centring Indigenous perspectives and collective authorship, the opera resonates with what Smith calls a "humble and humbling" (2021, 5) practice of research, foregrounding survival, reciprocity, and the ethical stakes of telling stories about women whose histories, like Shanawdithit's have been mediated by colonial documentation.[23]

[23] For more on Smith's framing of research as a colonial encounter and her articulation of Indigenous methodologies rooted in resistance and survival, see the introduction of Smith 2021, especially pages 1–9.

If *Shanawdithit* redefines the colonial mediation of voice, *Oksana G.* relocates the question within moral and spiritual structures of care. The opera's central relationship between Oksana and Father Alexander is framed as one of ethical tension rather than domination. Although his compassion is sincere and his pastoral guidance well-intentioned, the interpretive framework through which he listens remains constrained by institutional faith. His voice—musically steady, harmonically consonant—bears the weight of moral authority, while Oksana's fragmented phrases trace the fragile terrain of trauma and survival. The imbalance that emerges is not psychological but structural: the priest's care is fully audible, while Oksana's agency remains precariously scored.

Oksana's final scene may be understood as unfolding in an atmosphere of profound restraint, where speech fragments, pauses, and incomplete phrases shape the dramatic space more decisively than conventional operatic climax. Rather than centring instrumental expansion, the scene invites a reading in which the encounter between institutional authority and vulnerable testimony is staged through contrasting modes of vocal expression. Oksana's words emerge in short, broken phrases, frequently interrupted by silence, while Father Alexander's speech retains a steadier rhetorical continuity. This asymmetry can be heard not only as a reflection of individual psychology but as a dramatisation of the unequal conditions under which voices are heard, recognised, and granted authority.

Oksana's final plea—"Do not forget my name" (II-X 430–432; 2280–2290)—is delivered without the dramatic expansion typically associated with operatic dying scenes. Instead, the moment is marked by restraint: her words appear almost as a remainder of speech, a voice that persists at the threshold of audibility. The absence of theatrical culmination denies the audience the consolations of transcendence, leaving the final words suspended in uncertainty. In this

suspension, the opera foregrounds the precariousness of reception itself, asking not only whether Oksana speaks, but whether her voice can be sustained within the structures that claim to hear her.

This withholding may be understood as operating on both aesthetic and ethical levels. Unlike the operatic heroines whose deaths are ennobled through musical transcendence, Oksana's dying words appear to deny the listener catharsis. Her final sound exists almost as residue, a fragment that gestures toward meaning without fully securing it. In this way, *Oksana G.* may be read in light of Cavarero's account of the voice as that which reveals the embodied uniqueness and relationality of the speaker, dimensions that philosophical discourse has historically sought to suppress. As she observes, "that which each voice as voice signifies—namely, the uniqueness and the relationality that the vocal manifests—does not even get proposed as a matter for reflection" (Cavarero 2022, 42). Oksana's last words entrust her existence to the listener, yet that act of entrustment is shadowed by uncertainty, as the opera offers no assurance of how, or even whether, her final words will be received. The fragmentary quality of the moment produces an indeterminate field of reception: one listener may hear a conventional tragic ending, another may apprehend it as a gesture toward ongoing structures of exploitation, while another may fail to register the words at all. This variability appears integral to the scene's ethical force, foregrounding the precariousness of being heard, particularly for those whose voices have been structurally marginalised.

The moment may be experienced as devastating not because it restores her voice but because it exposes that voice's dependence on systems of hearing that remain unequal. Her speech is faint, nearly lost, and the opera withholds any gesture of transcendence. The power of the scene lies in its restraint, the near-silence that follows her words functioning as a kind of anti-

aria that resists the conventional aesthetic expansion of operatic suffering. Rather than consoling the listener, the scene appears to hold the audience within a space of witness, where the responsibility of listening remains unresolved.

Through Oksana's dying request, the opera poses a question that extends beyond its narrative frame: what does it mean to remember a woman whose story cannot be sung without re-enacting her suffering? *Oksana G.* may be understood as transforming the feminist project of recovery into one of discernment, suggesting that certain forms of attention are themselves ethically charged. From this perspective, the work invites reflection on the risk that speaking for another may overwrite her and that listening ethically may require recognising the limits of empathy rather than presuming its adequacy.

CHAPTER 2 – REASSEMBLING THE FRAGMENTS: OPERA AS FEMINIST ARCHIVE

The operas in this chapter behave like archives in motion. They collect, reorder, and reinterpret women's histories that were partial, suppressed, or colonially framed. Each work transforms the operatic stage into a space where music and narrative participate in the labour of remembrance. The feminist archive emerges through acts of retrieval, listening, rewriting, and the re-sounding histories once denied legitimacy. At the same time, these operas complicate the very idea of retrieval, asking what can be recovered, what remains partial, and what may endure through forms other than documentary preservation.

Opera as Feminist Archive examines the transformation of women's stories from objects of record to forms of historical and narrative presence. The rupture here is archival: the moment when established structures of historical transmission are unsettled and women's voices, memories, and stories are rearticulated. The feminist archive breathes, sings, and revises itself, becoming a space in which memory and history can be recovered, reconfigured, or carried forward in different forms. These works question what it means to preserve, to name, to withhold, and to narrate. They move across different modes of archival practice, from documentary recovery and visual memory to myth, song, and testimony.

This thread unfolds through different forms of recovery, re-voicing, transmission, and remembrance. Together, they chart a movement from material forms of archival reconstruction toward increasingly contingent forms of historical and cultural memory. *Regina* begins with the recovery of a woman from surviving documents; *Shanawdithit* confronts the colonial archive through drawing, memory, and relational forms of representation; *Inês* carries history through myth, diaspora, and song; and *Oksana G.* tests the limits of recovery when remembrance itself becomes precarious. Together, these works reveal that the archive, whether historical, cultural, or

scholarly, is less a repository than a practice: a continual negotiation between absence, evidence, and imagination.

2.1 *Regina*: Archival Space, Archival Voice

Regina begins in the archive—an actual room of papers, fragments, and bureaucratic residue—and transforms it into a space of feminist handling. Regina's opening words, "Here I am. Here I am. Waiting" (I 1; 5–9), frame the archive not as a neutral container but as the place where the drama of recovery will unfold. As mentioned earlier, the opera is set in Berlin just after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991. This situates the opera's story at a moment when suppressed histories resurfaced and previously sealed documents re-entered public circulation. This temporal and spatial framing is not merely atmospheric. It positions the work as an encounter with evidentiary absence, political rupture, and histories that demand reconstruction. The acts of touching, sorting, and listening that structure the opera make the labour of feminist archival work materially visible, underscoring one of this chapter's central claims: that the feminist archive is enacted not through nostalgic retrieval but through practices of reanimation that bring silenced histories back into relation with the present.

The concept of the archive has been richly theorised within feminist and postcolonial scholarship. Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1996) positions the archive as a site of both authority and loss: a repository shaped by the same powers that enforce forgetting, where preservation itself generates a continual tension between remembering and erasure rather than offering a neutral record of the past. Ann Laura Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain* (2018) shifts attention to the archive as an active site of colonial knowledge production, examining how documentary forms, practices of classification, and habits of administration shaped what could

be recorded, organised, and made intelligible (Stoler 2018, 1–4). In *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (2016) Stoler approaches the problem from another direction through her concept of "colonial aphasia," describing a political condition in which colonial histories become difficult to retrieve, articulate, or recognise, involving a loss of access that can approach active dissociation (Stoler 2016, 12–13). Antoinette Burton likewise challenges the neutrality of the archive, emphasising that archives are shaped by the political, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions of their production, as well as by exclusions that determine what enters the historical record and becomes available for subsequent interpretation (Burton 2006, 6–8). Sara Ahmed offers a more relational formulation, conceptualising the archive as a "contact zone" produced through multiple forms of institutional and everyday encounter, some of which are authorised and preserved while others remain missing or erased even as they leave traces (Ahmed 2014, 14). Taken together, these perspectives inform my analysis of *Regina* by directing attention not only to what the archive preserves, but to the institutional and interpretive processes that determine how erased lives are reconstructed, recognised, and heard. These insights deepen our understanding of the material labour of reconstruction that *Regina* makes visible: Anna does not simply "discover" Regina's papers; she handles them, orders them, and reads them aloud.

Anna's role is therefore more than curatorial. She becomes the opera's witness, interpreter, and surrogate listener, navigating an uneasy ethical terrain. Her desire to restore Regina's story is entangled with her own inheritance of German guilt, situating her within broader debates about the ethics of listening to traumatic testimony. Drawing on philosopher Kelly Oliver's concept of ethical witnessing (Theory & Philosophy 2024), which emphasises the listener's responsibility to receive and respond to another's testimony, I understand Anna's witnessing as requiring attention without appropriation or substitution. Further, drawing on

Dylan Robinson (2020), this reading also highlights the risk of "hungry listening," the impulse to consume another's story without attending to the structures that shape its vulnerability. Anna's engagement is thus neither neutral nor automatic: it is a form of reparative labour, undertaken within a matrix of responsibility and continually marked by the risk of repeating the very violences that structured the archive she now moves through.

In this sense, Anna occupies a role structurally similar to mediators such as Cormack in *Shanawdithit*—the explorer who records Shanawdithit's drawings and oral accounts through ethnographic work—figures who handle the stories of others and must confront the ethics of transmission. Yet the opera sharply distinguishes her labour from his: where Cormack's ethnographic gaze extracts and classifies, Anna's engagement is deliberately reparative and oriented toward restoring voice rather than appropriating it. Regina's "return" is staged through Anna's acts of reading but is not limited to them; the opera refuses spectrality. Unlike Kwe in *Shanawdithit*, whose appearance is recognisably spiritual, Regina does not emerge as an apparition. She appears instead as embodied musical presence, insisting upon her own voice. This refusal of ghostliness is itself a feminist intervention.

From the ghost of the Countess in *The Queen of Spades* and the offstage voices in *Dialogues des Carmélites* to the silent film projection of Marie in a contemporary staging of *Wozzeck* (William Kentridge's 2019–2020 production), opera has a long history of rendering women as ethereal, absent, sacrificed, or already dead. In each case, the female protagonist is experienced through distance, memory, or mediation rather than as a fully embodied presence on stage. *Regina* breaks from this lineage by granting full corporeal presence to a woman whose historical record was almost erased. Her arioso "There is something in me" enacts an archival return that is neither ventriloquised nor mediated through male authority. Through its textual

repetitions, gradual unfolding of declarative statements, and the staging of voice as self-articulation, the passage functions as a counter-archival moment. The aria therefore does more than recover a forgotten figure. It temporarily reverses the archive's asymmetry by allowing Regina's own voice, rather than the surviving document alone, to shape how the audience comes to know her. In doing so, the opera restores Regina as subject, thinker, and theologian, whereas the historical archive had reduced her to a handful of surviving documents.

This process of restoration is shadowed by what I refer to here as "double erasure." Regina was marginalised first by the patriarchy of her religious tradition. Despite completing a rigorous theological dissertation and earning the support of some rabbis, she was denied full ordination for reasons stemming from gendered authority structures. Her writings were sidelined, her rabbinical labour minimised, her theological positions treated as exceptions rather than contributions. This structural silencing created the conditions for a second, more catastrophic erasure: the annihilation wrought by genocide. Regina was murdered in Auschwitz; her papers were confiscated; her community dispersed or destroyed. The first erasure diminishes her as a thinker; the second eliminates her as a living subject. Taken together, they underscore that recovering her voice is not merely an intellectual project but an ethical and memorial one.

One of the most significant contributions *Regina* makes to the feminist archive is its treatment of listening as a form of repair, a theme developed in the previous chapter. The opera also encourages attention not only to what is said but to the conditions under which saying becomes possible. In this sense, *Regina* resonates with Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory (2008, 2012), which describes a relationship to traumatic histories not directly experienced. These histories are transmitted through stories, images, behaviours, and other forms of mediation, acquiring an affective force that can approximate memory without becoming

memory itself (Hirsch 2008, 106–7). Hirsch emphasises that this relationship to the past is mediated not by recall but through imaginative investment, projection, and creation (107). Her concept of affiliative postmemory[24] is particularly pertinent here, since it extends postmemorial transmission beyond the vertical, familial relationship between parent and child to more distant forms of affiliation made possible through shared structures of mediation (114–15). Hirsch's discussion of German writer W. G. Sebald's (1944–2001) *Austerlitz* (2001) is especially suggestive: the novel's non-Jewish German narrator stands outside the protagonist's family yet receives and affiliates with the story of Austerlitz, a Czech Jew whose childhood history has been fragmented and obscured, demonstrating how postmemorial affiliation can cross the divide between victim and perpetrator (119–20). Anna's archival labour reflects a comparable affiliative postmemorial orientation. Like Sebald's narrator, she occupies the position of a receiver rather than an inheritor of the history she encounters, listening to Regina's words not as neutral artefacts but as historically charged transmissions whose meanings must be held, tended, and rearticulated.

This focus on the ethics of listening places *Regina* within a wider contemporary operatic movement that uses historical documents, testimony, and textual fragments to reconstruct public memory. In John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* (2005), for example, Peter Sellars's libretto draws on declassified government documents and communications, alongside poetry and sacred texts, making the opera's historical discourse emerge through assembled documentary and literary materials. *Nixon in China* (1987), also composed by John Adams, similarly transforms a documented political event into operatic myth: Alice Goodman's libretto draws on the historical record surrounding former U.S. President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to China, while the original

[24] For Hirsch's discussion of affiliative postmemory, including its capacity to extend beyond familial inheritance, see Hirsch 2008, 114–15.

staging foregrounded television and news media as part of the event's historical mediation. Poul Ruders's opera *the Handmaid's Tale* (2000) by contrast, retains Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood's framing device in which Offred's recorded testimony survives as a record interpreted after the fact. The opera intensifies this testimonial structure through large-scale choral, orchestral, and dramatic forces. David Lang's *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* (1999) turns disappearance itself into an evidentiary problem: based on Ambrose Bierce's one-page story, the opera centres on a plantation owner who vanishes in plain sight, leaving competing witnesses to interpret the "hole" left by his absence. Philip Glass's *Satyagraha* (1980) constructs a philosophical and textual historical framework through texts adapted from the *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred Hindu scripture. By setting Gandhi's early years in South Africa through sacred text rather than documentary realism, the opera frames the development of his philosophy of nonviolent resistance within a broader spiritual and ethical discourse.

Regina participates in this broader operatic engagement with historical reconstruction, yet its archival work remains more explicitly feminist and reparative. Rather than using archival material simply as source, frame, or historical texture, the opera stages archival recovery itself as the central dramatic action. Anna's handling, ordering, and reading of Regina's papers turns the archive into an embodied practice, while Regina's sung return resists remaining a document, trace, or ghost. The difference, then, lies in the direction of the archival act: where these other operas often use documents to reconstruct political history, public memory, or historical disappearance, *Regina* uses the archive to restore a woman whose intellectual, theological, and bodily presence had been doubly erased. Its feminist archival force emerges not only from the fact that Regina Jonas's papers survive, but from the opera's insistence that those fragments must be touched, voiced, and ethically received.

More broadly, *Regina* demonstrates that the feminist archive is not merely a repository of recovered stories but a method and a practice. The opera stages archival work as relational, embodied, and ethically fraught. It reveals the fragility of women's historical presence and the responsibility borne by those who inherit such fragments. By returning Regina Jonas to embodied voice, the opera enacts a feminist historiographical repair that operates simultaneously on aesthetic, political, and memorial registers. In doing so, it strengthens this chapter's broader argument: contemporary Canadian opera mobilises the archive not simply to gather women's histories but to transform the terms under which they may be heard.

2.2 *Shanawdithit*: Drawing, Memory, and the Decolonial Archive

Shanawdithit approaches the archive not through written documentation but through the visual language of drawing. Her maps, diagrams, and recollected scenes, created during her final year of life while under the observation of William Cormack, constitute one of the few surviving records of Beothuk history produced by a Beothuk person. These images, catalogued by colonial institutions as ethnographic material, were long treated as evidence of disappearance: artefacts of a people presumed extinct. By placing these drawings at the centre of its dramaturgy, the opera reconfigures their archival status. The images become the visual and conceptual score from which the opera unfolds, and in transforming these records into sound, *Shanawdithit* reclaims authorship over materials historically treated as colonial property. The result is not merely a reframing of the past but an intervention into the very conditions through which Indigenous histories have been preserved, distorted, and constrained. To understand this intervention, it is helpful to situate the drawings within the broader epistemic traditions that shaped them.

Jolene Rickard's theorisation of visual sovereignty in "Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors" (2011) offers a framework for understanding Indigenous visual practices as forms of self-determined representation grounded in culturally specific traditions and modes of knowledge rather than confined by Western representational logics. Shanawdithit's drawings, depicting hunting routes, encampments, massacres, and the deaths of her family members, offer a record shaped by experience, affect, and selective revelation rather than by a colonial desire for categorisation. The opera honours this epistemic framework through its staging of the drawings as active narrative agents rather than static historical objects. As Shanawdithit sketches, projected images gradually appear on stage, not as museum artefacts but as unfolding visual presences that prompt storytelling and collective recollection. Cormack often responds to the drawings by asking about their meanings, and each image becomes the catalyst for spoken memory, transforming visual marks into relational acts of transmission. In this dramaturgy, the drawings do not function merely as evidence to be interpreted; they generate voice, story, and communal witnessing, allowing visual record and living memory to emerge together.

On stage, the gestures of drawing are repeatedly mirrored through bodily movement and vocal response: Shanawdithit traces the shapes of the images in space, returns to the same gestures across scenes, and speaks memories that originate in the act of drawing itself. Through this process, the drawn line becomes an embodied action rather than a static mark, bringing archival and embodied forms of transmission into relation. This interaction resonates with Diana Taylor's distinction in *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003) between the archive of supposedly enduring materials and the repertoire of embodied practice and knowledge, through which

memory and social knowledge can also be transmitted (Taylor 2003, 19). In this way, the opera constructs a sensory counter-archive that unsettles the authority of the written colonial record.

This reframing is especially significant given the original conditions under which Shanawdithit's drawings were produced. Created in St. John's under colonial supervision, and preserved through Cormack's annotations, the drawings were interpreted through the racialised logic of the nineteenth century, which positioned the Beothuk as a "vanishing race" whose documentation served imperial curiosity rather than Indigenous continuity.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* (2015) examines how power shapes the production of history, arguing that silence enters the historical process through the creation of sources, the making of archives, and the construction of historical narratives. This framework is particularly relevant to the case of Shanawdithit: her drawings entered the colonial archive within structures that shaped how they were preserved, interpreted, and made historically legible. When Shanawdithit narrates her own drawings, speaking of displacement and the violent deaths of relatives, the colonial record is reanimated from within. What was once preserved as evidence within colonial account of Beothuk disappearance becomes instead a medium through which survival is articulated.

The opera's transformation of drawing into voice also resonates with scholar of African American literature and cultural history Saidiya Hartman's reflections in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019) on working with fragmentary archives. Hartman's approach seeks to recover historical presence while remaining attentive to the limits of what can be known from records structured by absence and erasure. Rather than simply filling the gaps of the archive, her method preserves a degree of incompleteness and openness. *Shanawdithit* similarly avoids imposing narrative certainty where the historical record is incomplete, while nevertheless

creating space within that partial record. This emphasis on incompleteness signals an ethical stance: the opera recognises that the record cannot yield a complete recovery of Shanawdithit's life, even as it seeks forms through which her presence, knowledge, and memory might be encountered.

This refusal to complete the archive resonates with Eve Tuck's "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities" (2009), which calls for a refusal of research practices that reduce Indigenous communities to narratives of damage, loss, and brokenness. Tuck instead advocates frameworks attentive to desire, complexity, sovereignty, and survivance, including the protection of cultural and sacred knowledge from appropriation or disrespectful handling (Tuck 2009, 422–423). Read through this framework, the incompleteness of the archival record surrounding *Shanawdithit* need not be understood simply as a deficiency to be overcome. The opera's decision not to fill every gap with explanatory narrative allows absence and uncertainty to remain, while resisting the reduction of Shanawdithit and the Beothuk to a narrative defined solely by loss and disappearance.

The opera's decolonial ethics also emerge in its creation process. A key feature distinguishing *Shanawdithit* from the other operas in this dissertation is its collaborative structure. Developed through partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, the opera's creation process can be understood as engaging the decolonial principles it explores thematically. Collaboration becomes a methodological counterpoint to the extractive logic of the colonial archive, which claimed authority over Indigenous representation and knowledge. In contrast, the opera's relational authorship resonates with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's articulation in *As We Have Always Done* (2017) of Indigenous relationality as a network of connections and responsibilities grounded in land, family, community, reciprocity, and self-

determination. Simpson ultimately imagines such relationships as "constellations of coresistance," working collectively through deep reciprocity toward alternative Indigenous presents (Simpson 2017, 8–9). No single perspective dominates; rather, the work emerges from a network of voices, each accountable to community, history, and the ethical demands of representing Shanawdithit's life.

Drawing thus becomes not only a thematic concern but a methodology for thinking memory otherwise. Building on the opera's collaborative creation process, drawing functions as another form of relational knowledge-making: constellated, situated, and accountable to community. Shanawdithit's act of drawing under conditions of extreme loss and confinement constitutes an assertion of presence that exceeds the documentary purposes imposed upon her. The opera translates this insight into performance by emphasising drawing-as-remembering: a practice of reassembling knowledge in the face of disappearance. Shanawdithit's words in the opera underscore this refusal of reduction: "Do not tell the world only about our death, William Cormack. Tell them about our life" (V 102; 86–89). This plea articulates a counter-archival demand—not for commemoration through suffering, but for the preservation of lived experience, relations, and knowledge.

Trauma theory offers a useful but limited lens here. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth's account of trauma as belated and repetitive helps to explain how recurrent musical figures can register historical violence without narrating it directly. Yet the opera resists framing Shanawdithit solely through loss. Instead, it recognises drawing as an act of survival, a form of what Gerald Vizenor terms survivance: the active presence and continuance of Indigenous life beyond narratives of victimhood (Vizenor 1994). This orientation becomes audible in scenes where Shanawdithit's vocal lines continue with

steady tonal focus even as the surrounding orchestral texture thins or fragments, allowing continuity of voice to stand against the musical suggestion of disappearance. Even in its most fragile passages, Shanawdithit's voice maintains clarity, integrity, and forward motion; it does not collapse under the weight of trauma but presses outward, insisting on continuity where archival logic once demanded erasure.

The act of re-sounding the archive—the transformation of Shanawdithit's drawings into musical expression—can be understood as placing the audience in a different ethical relation to what they hear. Rather than simply receiving a reconstructed history, listeners are invited to reflect on their own positionality in relation to the events depicted and to the colonial archive that mediates them. This dynamic anticipates the broader questions of ethical listening that I explore later in the chapter in relation to *Oksana G.*, where the staging of testimony raises concerns about spectatorship and its potential for voyeurism.

In *Shanawdithit*, the challenge is shaped by the opera's archival foundations: to listen responsibly may require acknowledging both the violence embedded in the creation of the colonial record and the possibilities for its reimagining. Dylan Robinson's critique of "settler hungry listening" is instructive here. Rather than offering a neatly consumable narrative, the opera cultivates a mode of attention grounded in relational accountability, one that resists appropriation and centres the conditions under which Indigenous knowledge is shared.

The broader operatic canon offers instructive points of comparison. In Poul Ruders's *The Handmaid's Tale* (2000), the narrative is framed as an act of archival recovery: future historians sift through cassette tapes to reconstruct the heroine Offred's testimony, underscoring how her story survives only through mediated fragments. This model presents the archive as something already formed but partially lost, requiring later interpretation in order to restore meaning. John

Adams's *El Niño* (2000) reworks the Nativity by layering biblical passages with Spanish-language and Latin American poetry, bringing maternal and female perspectives into dialogue with inherited sacred texts. Here, archival work can be understood as occurring through the recombination of textual traditions, producing a polyphonic reinterpretation of inherited sources rather than the creation of new archival forms. Philip Glass's *Satyagraha* (1980) stages political history through ritualised musical repetition, using Sanskrit texts adapted from the *Bhagavad Gita* to frame Gandhi's developing philosophy of non-violent resistance. In this case, the archive can be understood as functioning as a ritual structure that preserves philosophical teachings through repetition and transmission.

By contrast, *Shanawdithit* departs significantly from these models. Its "archive" is not a cache of documents, nor a revoiced scripture, nor a ritualised political history. Instead of recovering, recombining, or ritually preserving existing materials, the opera constructs archival meaning through the act of performance itself. Drawings are reimagined onstage, breath is shared among performers, and narrative is shaped through partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. In this sense, the opera's archive is less textual than enacted; less something uncovered than something continually made; and less possessed than collectively held.

In staging the Beothuk woman's story through practices of relation rather than possession, *Shanawdithit* invites the possibility that archival memory might be approached differently: from ownership toward reciprocity, from categorical ordering toward constellated connection, and from silence toward forms of re-sounding that honour the limits and responsibilities of representation. The earlier operas demonstrate how archives may be recovered, reassembled, or ritualised; *Shanawdithit*, by contrast, suggests that archival work can

occur through relational performance practices that generate new modes of historical presence rather than restoring pre-existing records.

In its treatment of drawing, collaboration, and memory, *Shanawdithit* can be read as suggesting that the feminist archive is not limited to recovering lost stories but extends to reimagining archival practice itself. By transforming Shanawdithit's drawings into a living, relational performance, the opera appears to turn the colonial archive inside out. What once functioned as evidence of disappearance becomes, in this reading, a foundation for presence. Materials historically catalogued under the authority of empire are re-voiced through the perspective of the woman whose life they purported to record.

In this way, *Shanawdithit* may be understood as contributing not only to Indigenous resurgence but also to the broader argument of this chapter: that women's histories in opera emerge not solely through retrieving the past, but through altering the conditions under which the past is permitted to speak.

2.3 *Inês*: Diaspora, Myth, and the Sonic Archive of Endurance

Inês reframes the archive through myth, treating story itself as a medium of transmission across time, diaspora, and loss. Rather than preserving history in a conventional sense, the opera appears to remake it, exploring how desire, power, and memory circulate through acts of retelling. Its central images—Inês's forbidden love, her violent death, and the corpse-coronation that has long defined the legend—become, in this reading, the mythic material through which the work asks what it might mean for a woman's story to endure.

This re-voicing takes shape by reclaiming a mythic past and reimagining the medieval story of Inês de Castro through the lenses of exile and diaspora. Unlike the archival terrains

navigated in *Regina* or *Shanawdithit*, *Inês* does not emerge from historical documents or testimonial fragments. She begins instead from a legend, one that has circulated for centuries as a tale of forbidden love, royal betrayal, and spectacular injustice. Within this operatic retelling, however, the familiar contours of the myth are subtly displaced. Inês is not figured as the corpse-queen resurrected by male grief; she is rendered instead as a contemporary migrant woman in Canada, negotiating the residues of her past while shaping a life in the present. In this way, myth becomes a language refracted through migration rather than a narrative inherited unchanged. The mythic becomes migratory, crossing borders and temporalities, reshaped by the contingencies of diaspora.

The historical Inês de Castro appears in chronicles largely as the object of others' desire, fear, or political calculation. Her story survives not through her own words but through accounts shaped by those who used her life and death to comment on royal legitimacy, power, or moral order. The opera may be seen to disrupt this dynamic by treating myth not as fixed narrative but as mutable material, something women can handle, reinterpret, and resist. This approach resonates with literary and cultural scholar Cristina Santos's examination of how inherited narratives can reinforce restrictive gender stereotypes, and how feminist reinterpretation and rewriting can challenge their patriarchal structures (Santos 2017). By relocating Inês to a diasporic setting, the opera suggests that myth is not a static inheritance but a form of cultural memory that travels with people, shifting as they shift. In this sense, myth becomes a site of negotiation rather than destiny.

The opera's transformation of myth is crystallised in one of its most understated yet potent lines: "I left my real name and my old life in Portugal" (II 36–37; 145–150). This refusal to disclose her name reorients the narrative in ways that invite a reading of naming as a practice

of sovereignty. Whereas in *Regina* and *Oksana G.* naming becomes a plea for recognition, *Inês* may be understood to stage withholding as a different kind of agency. Her silence is not necessarily evidence of shame or severance; rather, it can be read as a deliberate refusal to be claimed by the familial, cultural, and mythic structures that once defined her. Concealment becomes a mode of authorship.

In this respect, Inês's refusal to disclose her name may be read alongside Édouard Glissant's notion of the "right to opacity" (Glissant 1997, 189–194), which affirms the value of remaining partially unknowable rather than being made fully legible according to the terms of others. Developed within Caribbean postcolonial theory and Glissant's broader thinking on relations and identity, opacity functions as an ethical and political refusal of the demand for complete legibility. My use of the concept in this case does not seek to conflate these historical contexts but to suggest an analytical analogy: Inês's selective self-disclosure may be understood as a form of narrative sovereignty that echoes, in a different register, Glissant's insistence on the value of the partially unknowable. Her withholding is not an act of severing but of shaping: she determines how, when, and whether her past appears. Naming, in this opera, functions less as a fixed marker of identity than as a shifting resonance, an echo that signals who she was, who she is becoming, and what she chooses not to reveal. By allowing her name to surface in some moments and recede in others, Inês asserts a form of narrative sovereignty that resists the myth's tendency to claim, stabilise, or possess her. Rather than being recovered from a medieval legend, she is repositioned within a diasporic present on her own terms, where opacity becomes both a mode of protection and an assertion of agency.

This act of withholding carries added resonance in the context of migration. Diasporic identities often rely on naming as a means of anchoring oneself within dislocation: names

become portable archives, carrying memories of place, lineage, and belonging. Yet names also expose vulnerability: they can mark difference, signal foreignness, and attract suspicion. By refusing to offer her real name, Inês resists being made legible through normative frameworks of identity—national, cultural, or mythical. Her withholding thus becomes an assertion of agency in a world that demands transparency from migrant subjects while offering little protection in return. It also creates space for self-authorship, allowing Inês to define herself not through the legend that precedes her, but through the life she constructs in her new environment.

Constanza, Inês's narrative counterpart, can be understood as a counterweight to this concealment. As staged in scenes where she is addressed primarily through her dynastic and marital roles, Constanza inhabits a position of heightened visibility structured by familial and political expectation. Their relationship forms a feminine dyad that subtly unsettles the patriarchal logic of rivalry often embedded in mythic and operatic narratives. Whereas the medieval legend positions Inês and Constanza as opposing figures in a struggle over legitimacy and desire, the opera imagines them in more interdependent terms. Viewed in this way, their stories become mutually revealing: Constanza's visibility throws Inês's opacity into relief, while Inês's refusal highlights the constraints within which Constanza moves. Together, they create a relational constellation suggesting that women's experiences of myth, displacement, and memory are rarely singular or isolable. This dynamic resonates with Adriana Cavarero's argument in *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (2000) that the narratable self is fundamentally relational: we encounter the uniqueness of others through their life stories, while our own identity is disclosed to us through the stories others tell about us. The opera's portrayal of Inês and Constanza exemplifies this relational logic, presenting each woman's identity as intelligible not independently but through the shifting perspective the other provides.

The opera's use of the fado idiom deepens this relational memory work by grounding diasporic experience in a recognisable sonic lineage. Fado's affective vocabulary of saudade—often described as a bittersweet longing that holds together absence, memory, and the possibility of return—captures the temporal complexity of migration, where attachment is oriented simultaneously toward what has been lost and what remains imagined. As scholars of Portuguese culture note, saudade is central to fado performance, expressing emotional states shaped by distance, separation, and historical mobility (R. Gray 2001; L.E. Gray 2013). Its musical language thus carries the histories of those who left Portugal as well as those who remained, waiting for news, letters, or return.

In this sense, fado functions as a cultural archive: a repository of displacement, intimacy, and endurance transmitted not through documents but through sound. By threading fado motifs throughout the score, the opera situates Inês's story not within the monumental frame of medieval tragedy but within the everyday textures of Portuguese diaspora. The recurring fado refrain thus operates as more than a stylistic marker; it becomes a vehicle of cultural memory, binding past and present and signalling how myth is continually remade through the sonic practices of those who carry it.

Colleen Renihan's (2011) concept of opera "sounding the past" offers a useful lens through which to understand this dynamic. Renihan suggests that opera does not simply reproduce historical material but transforms it into embodied, sonic presence, inviting audiences to encounter the past through resonance rather than reconstruction. Viewed through this framework, *Inês* can be heard as mobilising sound, particularly through its fado-inflected vocal writing, to activate cultural memory in the present.

The opera does not attempt to restore the legend to an "original" form; instead, it re-sounds it, allowing its emotional and cultural textures to circulate in new ways. Rather than presenting fado as a stable or historically "authentic" style tied to a fixed past, the score mobilises its characteristic features through recurring accompaniment patterns, flexible vocal writing, and harmonic circulation that does not consistently move toward cadential arrival. As I explore in Chapter 4, these recurring musical patterns create a sense of motion and return through which memory can be continually rearticulated. In this sense, myth becomes less an inherited narrative than a set of feelings, histories, and affiliations that music reanimates across temporal and geographical distance.

The opera's fado-inflected idiom thus becomes a kind of sonic methodology of continuity: a way in which histories endure not because they remain fixed, but because they continue to resonate across contexts and temporalities. In *Inês*, this is realised through recurring accompaniment figures, flexible vocal phrasing, and musical gestures that return across the three fados while acquiring different expressive meanings. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, sound here functions as a conduit for migratory and diasporic experience, carrying memory forward, refracting it through new surroundings, and sustaining it through repetition rather than permanence.

This conception of endurance echoes insights from feminist theorists such as Sara Ahmed, whose work in *Living a Feminist Life* examines how marginalised subjects persist through practices of refusal and willingness to "keep going despite or even because of what we come up against" (Ahmed 2017, 6). Ahmed's account foregrounds the affective and embodied labour required to navigate structures that do not readily accommodate them, offering a useful conceptual parallel for understanding how *Inês* frames endurance as an ongoing negotiation

rather than a moment of triumph or defeat. It also resonates with Lauren Berlant's account in *Cruel Optimism*, of ordinary life as shaped by ongoing crisis, adjustment, and the pressures of "living on" (Berlant 2011, 8).

Inês, however, redirects these frameworks in a distinctive way. The opera treats endurance primarily as continuity rather than depletion: a mode of carrying memory forward without requiring resolution or revelation. Inês's songs do not attempt to "solve" her past; they hold it open by allowing fragments of history to remain active rather than closed. In this sense, the work offers an alternative to the archival logics animating the other operas in this chapter. Rather than reconstructing a fragmented history, Inês sustains a living relationship with memory, carrying it through voice, presence, and relation rather than through documents.

In its reimagining of myth, its attention to naming and concealment, its relational portrayal of women, and its use of fado as a migratory archive, *Inês* broadens the scope of the feminist archive outlined in this chapter. The opera invites us to consider archives not only as repositories of recovered materials but also as ongoing practices through which women sustain, adapt, and reshape their histories. It suggests that memory may persist through endurance as much as through recovery, through song as much as through speech, and through moments of withholding as much as through moments of disclosure. In this way, *Inês* emerges as a vital part of the feminist archive this chapter traces: an archive in which myth is rearticulated, memory moves across borders, and the past is carried forward not solely through retrieval but through the resonances that continue to sound.

2.4 *Oksana G.*: Voice at the Limit of the Feminist Archive

Oksana G. extends this exploration of archival recovery by testing the very possibility of recovery itself. Whereas the preceding operas engage with recognisable archival terrains—confiscated papers, colonial drawings—*Oksana G.* confronts a story for which no stable archive exists. Oksana's life, marked by displacement, coercion, and systemic erasure, leaves behind only the most fragile of traces. Her story strains the structures that have previously supported feminist recuperation. Rather than constructing a seamless narrative through documentation or testimony, the opera foregrounds the conditions under which archival forms falter or prove insufficient. In doing so, *Oksana G.* shifts the conversation from historiographical recovery toward the ethics and limitations of remembrance itself.

Rather than positioning *Oksana G.* outside the conceptual trajectory of this chapter, it may be more productive to read it as the point at which the feminist archive reveals its own limits. In *Regina* and *Shanawdithit*, forms of recovery remain imaginable. They may be partial, contested, or fraught, yet they remain anchored in material traces such as confiscated papers or colonial drawings. These traces do not ensure restoration, but they render the labour of reconstruction thinkable. *Oksana G.* unsettles this premise. Here, the challenge lies not in fragmentation but in near-total absence. It is not distortion that is at stake, but an erasure that continues to unfold in the present. The opera asks what it means to write about, and listen to, a woman whose life leaves almost nothing that can be archived. If the feminist archive in the earlier works operated as a site of recuperation, however precarious, *Oksana G.* foregrounds the ethical urgency of recognising when recovery may not be possible, and of considering what forms of responsibility arise in the face of that impossibility.

It is in the opera's final moments that this dynamic becomes clearest. Oksana's last request—addressed to Father Alexander, the one person who attempts to advocate for her—is not for rescue, justice, or absolution. She asks only that he remember her name: "Do not forget my name" (II-X 430–432; 2280–2290). In a chapter concerned with archives, this request functions as a distilled expression of the ethical stakes of remembrance. Her request, spoken in a voice nearing collapse, is a plea for continuity that she cannot secure on her own. Father Alexander responds—"It is written on my heart" (II-X 431–432; 2285–2290)—and cradles her as she dies, willing her to live. His assurance conveys genuine care, yet the opera quietly underscores the precariousness of such a promise: a single vow set against the very structures that have already rendered Oksana vulnerable to disappearance.

Where testimony in *Regina* and *Shanawdithit* operates as a mode through which subjects reclaim agency or shape their own archival presence, *Oksana G.* presents a more fragile configuration. Here, the survival of Oksana's name rests on the memory of another, a witness whose capacity to remember is heartfelt but necessarily contingent. The scene concludes not with recuperation but with the image of Oksana's body held in Father Alexander's arms: an intimate moment of remembrance that is at once deeply humane and profoundly unstable. It gestures toward the limits of what a single act of witnessing can withstand when set against systems that fail to protect the very lives they allow to slip into silence.

This dependency destabilises the sentimental assumption that being remembered is an unqualified good. To be remembered is also to be spoken for, to have one's story mediated through another's voice, values, and interpretive frameworks. Gayatri Spivak's distinction between representation as "speaking for" and representation as "re-presentation" becomes particularly salient here (Spivak 2010, 32): Oksana's final plea asks that her existence be

acknowledged, yet the survival of her story necessarily depends on another who will speak in her place. What she seeks is recognition; what the structure of the scene permits is a form of representation dependent upon substitution and mediation.

Saidiya Hartman's (2008) warning about the risks of narrative reconstruction, particularly the temptation to fill archival gaps and provide closure where none exists, is likewise relevant here. The opera therefore frames remembrance not as secure recovery but as an ethically fraught transfer, in which the effort to preserve a life may simultaneously reshape the voice it seeks to honour.

Oksana G. gestures toward this risk without resolving it. The opera closes in a suspended ethical space, one in which the act of carrying another's story remains at once necessary and fraught. Rather than offering closure, it leaves viewers with the unstable terrain between remembering and appropriating, suggesting that even the most compassionate acts of witnessing are shaped by structures that can distort, diminish, or reconfigure what they seek to hold. In this sense, the opera invites its audience to recognise remembrance not as a singular moral good but as an ongoing ethical negotiation—one that demands vigilance precisely because its failures are so easy to enact and so difficult to detect.

This refusal of transcendence situates *Oksana G.* against a long operatic tradition in which women's suffering is aestheticised through lyrical death, such as *La traviata*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, among many others. In those works, the protagonist's final aria often elevates her suffering into a moment of vocal apotheosis. Oksana receives no such transformation. Her voice does not swell; it diminishes. She does not become mythic, redeemed, or clarified. Her final utterance occurs on the threshold of silence, a boundary between articulation and disappearance. The refusal to aestheticise or monumentalise her death is itself a

feminist and ethical stance: the opera resists any temptation to convert her pain into catharsis, refusing the genre's historical tendency to turn women's suffering into spectacle.

This fragile mediation of voice, which risks collapsing into silence, stands in stark contrast to the grandeur with which opera has historically represented women's deaths. In this regard, *Oksana G.* may be understood as entering into direct dialogue with the ethical concerns raised in *Shanawdithit* around settler listening and the responsibilities of spectatorship. Dylan Robinson's critique of "hungry listening" helps to articulate the dangers of listening to *Oksana* without recognising the structures of exploitation that shape her testimony. While the contexts differ in crucial ways, the ethical issue can be seen to converge: listening must not become extraction. The opera mirrors these concerns by making Oksana's final request both unavoidable and impossible to stabilise. The audience is drawn into the same tension that binds Father Alexander. To listen risks a form of appropriation, while turning away risks a form of erasure, positioning spectatorship itself as a site of ethical risk.

Chapter 2 Conclusion – The Work of Remembrance

Across these four operas, the feminist archive emerges not as a static repository but as a dynamic field of relations. It becomes a practice of making, carrying, and at times refusing history. *Regina*, *Shanawdithit*, *Inês*, and *Oksana G*. demonstrate that to place women at the centre of operatic narrative is to confront the conditions under which they may be heard, remembered, or misrepresented. *Regina* stages archival recovery as a laborious, material practice; *Shanawdithit* transforms drawing into a relational mode of historical transmission; *Inês* reframes myth through migration, memory, and endurance; and *Oksana G.* exposes the limits and precarity of remembrance itself. Taken together, these works suggest that the archive is not

an inherited structure but an ongoing ethical process; it must be rebuilt, tended, carried forward, or reimagined each time a woman's story enters the present.

It is in *Oksana G.* that this process reaches its most precarious threshold. The opera leaves the audience with an echo: a name that persists only if repeated, a story that survives only through a form of remembrance that is ethically unstable. *Oksana G.* becomes the limit case of the archive not because it completes a trajectory of recovery, but because it reveals the point at which recovery itself becomes impossible. The opera reminds us that remembrance is never innocent. It is a responsibility shadowed by the risks of distortion, appropriation, and failure. The survival of Oksana's story depends upon mediation, making remembrance at once necessary and ethically fraught. This ethical weight is shared by listeners, performers, and spectators, though unevenly.

Across the chapter, these operas suggest that the feminist archive is less a project of restoration than a continuum of possibility, vulnerability, and invention. They show that voice after erasure may take many forms, including material reconstruction, collaborative transmission, mythic rearticulation, and, at its most fragile edge, a residue of testimony that cannot persist without the care of others. In this light, the archive becomes not merely a site of return but one of creation: a space in which listening, relationality, and creative re-authoring allow the past to move forward even when it cannot be repaired or made whole. The future of the feminist archive lies not in completeness but in transformation. Such transformation takes shape through practices that re-sound silenced histories while remaining attentive to the limits of what can be known, recovered, or preserved.

Chapter 3 – Peering into the Jar: The Ethics of Looking at Women's Suffering

Opera has long relied on looking. From the Renaissance courtly masque to the nineteenth-century diva tragedy, women's bodies, and especially their pain, have shaped the visual and emotional economy of the stage. Catherine Clément famously argues that opera is often structured around the spectacle of the woman who suffers and dies, the soprano whose demise fuels aesthetic pleasure and narrative closure. This dynamic has since been expanded by scholars such as Lisa Fitzpatrick (2018) and Margaret Cormier (2024) who show how theatrical traditions routinely transform scenes of sexual or gendered violence into legible, and often affectively gratifying events through mechanisms of framing, pacing, and viewer expectation. What Clément (1988) calls the undoing of women depends on a particular configuration of aesthetic attention: the audience's gaze becomes implicated in transforming gendered violence into beauty. The woman's body becomes the means through which the art form locates its expressive power. The problem is not simply that opera shows harm but that it invites us to enjoy the looking.

The contemporary Canadian operas examined in this dissertation do not escape this inheritance. Instead of avoiding it, they turn toward it. What distinguishes this corpus is a remarkable degree of self-consciousness about the politics of spectatorship. The works do not simply present scenes of harm but foreground the act of watching it. They expose the mechanisms that have historically rendered women's suffering recognisable, compelling, or consumable. Rather than relying on spectacle as an unexamined device, the operas transform that mode of staging into a site of critique, an approach that resonates with Fitzpatrick's argument that contemporary theatre must foreground the ethics of witnessing whenever gendered violence appears onstage.

This chapter proceeds from the premise that looking is a shifting set of relations, not a singular act. It is structured by power, positionality, culture, and institutional authority. Each opera tests the ethical limits of representation by constructing a distinct configuration of looking and by challenging the viewer's role within it. The danger that Clément identifies, namely that watching can become implicated in the harm it beholds, surfaces repeatedly across the corpus, though always in different forms. Cormier's insistence that representation can subtly reinscribe the violence it seeks to critique, and Fitzpatrick's warning that attention must remain ethically accountable, both sharpen this inquiry. The central questions, repeated across these operas, are therefore not "What is shown?" but "How are we asked to see it?" and, further, "What is at stake in the act of looking?"

Early work in visual culture studies establishes that looking is not a purely individual perceptual act but a socially structured practice shaped by historical and cultural norms. In *Ways of Seeing*, originally published in 1972, English art critic John Berger examines how conventions of representation shape the ways women are seen and judged, and how these conventions position women in relation to a presumed male spectator (Berger 1994). Seeing, in this account, is learned rather than natural, shaped by representational traditions that repeatedly position women's bodies within particular visual expectations.

Feminist film theory further develops this insight by analysing the relationship between spectatorship, pleasure, and narrative structure. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" argues that dominant cinematic conventions frequently position women as objects of display organised for a gendered viewing position, while narrative form reinforces this arrangement by associating looking and narrative agency with the male protagonist (Mulvey 1975). Although formulated in the context of cinema, Mulvey's analysis provides a transferable

framework for examining how performance traditions structure desire, recognition, and narrative through particular arrangements of looking.

Subsequent scholarship emphasises that spectatorship is also shaped by race, history, and unequal distributions of interpretive authority. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, scholar and activist bell hooks demonstrates that representation can reproduce structures of domination through established ways of seeing and representing race, while also identifying the possibility of oppositional ways of looking that resist these structures (hooks 1992). Spectatorship thus emerges not as a universal experience but as a historically situated practice conditioned by differential relations to visibility and power.

Visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff extends this perspective by framing visibility itself as a terrain of political struggle. In *The Right to Look*, he argues that visuality is bound to structures of authority that organise what can be seen, how it is interpreted, and whose ways of looking are authorised (Mirzoeff 2011). Looking is therefore inseparable from questions of governance, legitimacy, and representation, rather than functioning as a neutral act of observation. His later work, *How to See the World*, extends these concerns into contemporary global visual culture, foregrounding the political stakes of visibility in increasingly networked and mediated environments (Mirzoeff 2015).

Performance studies scholarship further clarifies the ethical dimensions of spectatorship within theatrical contexts. Theatre and performance scholar Jill Dolan's *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* conceptualises feminist spectatorship as an active interpretive practice attentive to how performances organise identification, desire, and power, and to how audiences negotiate their own implication within these processes (Dolan 2012).

Finally, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* by Saidiya Hartman offers an ethical framework for engaging lives marked by archival fragmentation and historical erasure. Hartman demonstrates that bringing marginalised lives into narrative visibility requires attentiveness to the risks of interpretive overreach and narrative completion, foregrounding the tension between historical recovery and the limits of what can be responsibly known (Hartman 2019). Her work underscores that practices of looking and narrating are inseparable from questions of accountability, narrative restraint, and historical responsibility.

Taken together, this scholarship establishes looking as a historically produced, politically structured, and ethically consequential practice rather than a neutral perceptual act. Visibility emerges not simply as a matter of what is shown, but as a question of how subjects are positioned within regimes of recognition, judgement, and narrative meaning. Approached through this framework, the operas examined in this chapter can be understood as staging distinct configurations of looking that test the ethical limits of spectatorship and representation.

The chapter develops its argument through a progression of ways of seeing that move from familiar forms of public scrutiny toward increasingly complex, reflexive, and epistemically unstable modes of perception. Drawing on Jill Dolan's (2012) understanding of spectatorship as an active interpretive practice, I approach the theatrical encounter as one in which viewers negotiate their own position within structures of representation. This negotiation also carries an ethical dimension, as spectators are asked to consider not only what they see but how they are positioned in relation to it. The discussion begins with *Filumena*, where the gaze is civic: a collective act of watching through which a community produces judgement as it narrates, interprets, and ultimately condemns a woman long before any legal verdict is reached. Attention then turns to *Inês*, which interrogates the mythic gaze, the inheritance of a legend that makes a

woman's death meaningful only when it is aestheticised, repeated, and bound to narrative expectation. *Oksana G.* extends the inquiry into the domain of the voyeuristic gaze, confronting the audience with scenes of sexualised violence that strain the very possibility of ethical looking.

The chapter moves toward forms of looking that are less overt but no less consequential. *Lillian Alling* foregrounds the spectacle of endurance: an attention that derives emotional intensity from the sustained exposure of a woman's physical depletion and migratory struggle. *Regina,* however, reconfigures the problem altogether: the violence is archival rather than corporeal and it takes the form of erasure—of not being seen, and of being removed from historical record.

Shanawdithit then reveals the opposite condition. It exposes the violence of intensified scrutiny under the colonial gaze. The opera confronts the long history of ethnographic looking that documented Indigenous women only to deny their presence, turning representation into a tool of disappearance. The chapter concludes with *Alexandra*, reversing the direction of looking: Alexandra is not the one watched, but the one who sees. Her acts of seeing, inflected by privilege, ambition, and imperial desire, expose the ethical tensions inherent in vision itself. Through her, operatic vision becomes self-witnessing, revealing how easily the act of seeing can reproduce power even when it appears aligned with autonomy or aspiration.

Taken together, these operas map a landscape in which the ethics of looking becomes a central aesthetic and political concern. They do not provide easy solutions, and they do not absolve their viewers. Instead, they reveal spectatorship as an unstable and negotiated site, one in which the implications of viewing are inseparable from the structures of domination that have historically rendered women vulnerable. This chapter argues that contemporary Canadian opera reconfigures the gaze as an ethical problem rather than an aesthetic given. These works ask

whether it is possible to represent gendered harm without repeating the structures that enable it—and, if not, what forms of looking might offer care rather than consumption.

3.1 *Filumena*

I begin this inquiry with *Filumena* by showing how civic surveillance shapes the ethics of looking. The opera offers one of the clearest examples in this corpus of how operatic form can render communal scrutiny both audible and visible. Rather than relying on a single moment of staged display, the opera builds a cumulative portrait of how a community observes a woman, interprets her actions, and eventually turns her into a symbol of cultural anxiety. The looking that shapes *Filumena* is civic. It belongs not to a single character but to a town, whose shifting and often contradictory acts of looking constitute a social drama that unfolds alongside the criminal narrative. What emerges is not simply a story of xenophobia or misrecognition, but an anatomy of the mechanisms through which shared observations become a form of power.

The opera's opening scene situates Filumena within a dense network of expectations about womanhood, marriage, and belonging. The wedding festivities in scene I create the conditions for public scrutiny, though not yet a hostile one. Papa's toast, urging his daughter to honour and obey and to accept her new English name, signals the first act of communal looking: Filumena's identity is being shaped by collective witnesses rather than by private choice. The insistence that she be called "Florence," reinforced by Charlie, her husband, and Papa, positions the act of naming as a tool of regulation. It is not overt punishment, but it is a form of surveillance: Filumena is monitored for compliance.

McAlpine's crude toast, delivered in front of the wedding guests—"I'm sure you won't reject her once you've had a chance to thoroughly inspect her!" (I-I 13–14; 129–136)—frames

her body as a site of public interpretation and commentary. This scene does not yet stage punishment, but it establishes the condition that will allow punishment later: Filumena is already a woman who is looked at, judged, and spoken about in communal terms. Her distance from the group, expressed as she steps aside with her mother and speaks quietly in Italian, might be read as a subtle act of resistance. However, the staging emphasises withdrawal rather than confrontation, and her lowered voice and physical retreat suggest not open defiance but a form of social misalignment with the expectations of those who watch her.

Much of act I establishes Filumena's vulnerability through ongoing observation rather than spectacle. Charlie's behaviour—ordering her to clean the parlour, shoving her toward the lobby, and accusing her of shaming him—reveals a private way of seeing her that carries public consequences. His repeated insistence on calling her "Florence," especially in scene IV—"Florence is dreaming… Florence is scheming"—shows how naming becomes disciplinary. When Steve enters and uses her actual name, "Filumena," the moment registers as resistance not only to Charlie's authority but to the social field that supports it.

When Charlie confronts her at the wedding for responding to Steve's song—"What right has he got to sing to you like that?"—the issue is not the song itself but its publicness. Charlie's accusation that she is "embarrassing" him and her family (I-I 18–21; 210–244), makes the social consequences explicit: her behaviour carries consequences because it is observed. In the kitchen confrontation in scene IV, Charlie is no longer policing her behaviour, but he is policing how that behaviour might appear to others. When he says that Filumena is "turning into a proper businessman" (I-IV 153–154; 197–203), Charlie also means that she is aligning with Picariello's ambitions. This could imply that Filumena has become an object of communal suspicion, one

whose choices are interpreted through the anxieties of men whose livelihoods and reputations depend on ethnic solidarity and patriarchal control.

The funeral procession for Constable Lawson in scene VII provides the opera's most explicit performance of judgement. Underscored by bagpipes and ritualised movement, it creates the staging conditions for a public verdict. The anglophone chorus frames the event as an assault on law, civilisation, and national identity: "They shot him in the back in front of his babies!" (II-VII 240; 35–36). Their refrain of "cold blood" (II-VII 239; 29) constructs a narrative of moral clarity that leaves little room for nuance. In this context, Filumena is not yet named, but she is already positioned within a collective imaginary of immigrant criminality.

What unfolds is therefore not a unified public drama but a choral clash of competing accounts in which each community interprets the death of a policeman through its own interpretive lens. For Filumena, this is the moment when public narrative becomes fate: the choral narratives do not simply respond to events but begin to organise culpability in advance, catching her between two publics, each mobilising her story for its own purposes.

Individual lines sharpen this rhetorical violence into a chorus of competing claims. The anglophone chorus escalates fear and expulsion—"Since they came here the streets aren't safe… Send them back home…" (II-VII 241; 40–44)—while Filumena offers a quieter account grounded in uncertainty and urgency: "There was such a storm that night… We only wanted to find out about Stefano" (II-VII 242–243; 48–55). Maria, Stefano's mother, insists that "both men were led astray" and that "that witch did it all" (*Quella strega tutto fe*)[25] (II-VII 243; 58–60). A member of the anglophone chorus reduces Filumena to an object of illicit pleasure, "like candy on a shelf" (II-VII 250–251; 127–34). Picariello reframes the pursuit as a paternal concern,

[25] Unless otherwise specified, all translations from French and Italian into English are my own. A separate note explains the approach adopted for Portuguese translations.

claiming that Lawson had pursued him for years so he and Filumena "only wanted to find out about [Stefano]" (II-VII 243–244; 62–67). Even Filumena's mother is drawn into this public theatre of judgement. Declaring "I do not speak English" (*Non parlo inglese*), she insists through Italian-inflected English that Filumena is "a good girl" (II-VIII 244; 67–71). The Italian chorus, by contrast, redirects blame outward and not only condemns the English as hypocrites but disputes the claims of premeditated violence: "Lawson shot first. The English are lying, hypocritical puritans. Every word from their mouths is profane" (*Quelle Lawson ha sparato prima. Mentiscono inglesi ipocriti puritane. Ogni parola è putrida da qualle bocche profane*) (II-VIII 244–245; 72–81).

These are not neutral testimonies, but social verdicts articulated in public. The scene's overlapping testimonies—contradictory, amplified, and strategically framed—do not clarify what happened so much as determine what can be believed, creating a sonic environment in which truth becomes secondary to volume and where the act of looking becomes inseparable from the act of assigning guilt.

By the time Filumena reaches death row in scene IX, the civic judgement has already done its work. Her final monologue is striking for how little public presence remains. Alone and released from public attention, she reflects on the events that led her here. If the crowd once interpreted her every gesture, she now withdraws from that interpretive economy: "Everyone forgets. Let them all forget, let the world forget" (II-IX 298; 119–120).

Her repeated invocation of her name—"Forever Filumena, forever, forever, forever!" (II-IX 302; 180–190)—reclaims identity from the community that had attempted to rename, reframe, and ultimately erase her. The public attention that once overwhelmed her has emptied out,

leaving only Filumena's own articulation of truth, responsibility, and interiority. What remains is a form of self-witnessing that refuses the public script that consumed her life.

In the context of this chapter, *Filumena* demonstrates that the production of women's suffering does not always unfold through physical violence or erotic display. Sometimes it emerges through social monitoring: the excessive watchfulness of neighbours, the interpretive power of community narrative, the cultural anxieties embedded in choral song. The opera shows how the civic gaze transforms Filumena from a woman into a symbol, first of assimilation, then of suspicion, and finally of culpability. What *Filumena* ultimately reveals is that collective attention can be as dangerous as voyeurism. The danger lies not in the act of looking alone but in the community's shared authority to interpret, circulate, and ultimately fix the meaning of what it sees. The community does not merely observe Filumena's life; it produces the terms under which her actions become intelligible, and therefore culpable.

3.2 *Inês*

Inês shifts the chapter from civic scrutiny to mythic recognition, in which looking becomes a form of narrative inheritance. Pedro's attention is staged as pre-scripted desire: a way of seeing that precedes encounter and frames Inês as an image already known.

Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's account of the male gaze becomes newly resonant here. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Mulvey describes a gendered structure of spectatorship in which women are positioned as objects of visual display, while looking and narrative agency are predominantly aligned with male figures. Although formulated in relation to classical cinema, I adapt this framework to analyse a comparable dramaturgical dynamic in *Inês*, where looking functions as a mode of narrative authority. Operatic myth can structure desire in

advance, casting a woman as a recognisable image rather than as a subject encountered on her own terms. Pedro does not encounter Inês as someone he is meeting for the first time; he perceives her as someone he already knows.

Before Inês and Pedro speak to one another for the first time, the score indicates that he moves slowly through the audience towards her, "fascinated" (II 23), possibly signalling a pre-existing fixation that precedes any genuine exchange. His first words—"To the most beautiful woman I have ever seen" (II 28; 57–59)—do not describe Inês; they summon her into a role. Within this script, recognition can become a form of capture. Rather than acknowledging the uniqueness of the person before him, Pedro's way of seeing confines Inês within the expectations of an inherited narrative, forcing resemblance and binding the living woman to the dead one she is made to echo.

The fado Inês sings complicates this dynamic. Its themes of solitude, danger, and memory—"I walked alone / in an unfamiliar city" (*Andei sozinha* / n*uma cidade desconhecida*)[26] (II 23; 1–6)—reveal a woman navigating displacement and loss. She recalls nights of fear, a love that is no more, and comfort sought in "wine, wine the colour of blood" (*Vinho, vinho da cor de sangue*) (II 25; 35–38). Pedro, tipsy and emboldened, interrupts this interior world with a call—"I will console you!" (*Eu vou te consolar!*) (II 27–28; 47–49)—and a nationalistic toast: "To Portugal, our homeland" (II 28; 54–59). The contrast is stark: while Inês's song discloses vulnerability shaped by migration, Pedro responds with the confident gestures of someone who assumes his attention is welcome, misreading performance as invitation.

The myth becomes explicit when Pedro declares, "My name is Pedro / Inês and Pedro / Like the lovers in the old legend" (II 37–39; 158–167). This act of identification is not benign. It

[26] I am grateful to Sandra Sebastiao for assistance with the Portuguese translations. Any remaining errors are my own.

initiates the ritual through which Inês becomes the object of a pre-existing narrative, a woman whose death has already been imagined, framed, and foretold. Cultural theorist Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia is especially useful in this context. In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Boym describes restorative nostalgia as an attempt to reconstruct an idealised past as a binding blueprint for the present, rather than as a space of ambivalence or loss. In relation to *Inês*, the past functions as a mandate rather than a memory, compelling the present to conform to a story already scripted. Even before their relationship begins, Pedro positions Inês within a narrative that renders her visible only as the echo of another Inês, as though her identity were already imagined, completed, and foreclosed. This dynamic also recalls the dramaturgy of *Bluebeard's Castle*, where Judith becomes legible only through the women who came before her, and recognition is mediated by a pre-existing sequence rather than emerging through encounter on its own terms. Recognition becomes a form of entrapment, and revelation leads toward confinement.[27]

Inês recognises the danger immediately. When Pedro presses her for her real name, she evades the request: "I left my real name and my old life in Portugal and began a new life… with a new name" (II 36–37; 145–156). Her refusal functions as a protective gesture, a deliberate withholding that resists being inscribed into a story that is not hers. Inês's self-renaming asserts agency, but within the dramaturgy it also marks her as vulnerable: a woman who will not offer the name demanded of her becomes the woman whose identity must be seized, defined, or revealed by force.

The opera soon moves to reassert the very legend she attempts to refuse, but not before allowing a brief textual disruption. When Pedro invokes the familiar narrative of royal romance

[27] The reference to *Bluebeard's Castle* (Bartók/Balázs) serves as a dramaturgical analogue rather than a claim of direct influence.

and dynastic continuation, Inês interrupts the trajectory with ironic resistance—"Oh no, they didn't / Not this Inês / I like my job and I love my figure / If you want children, Prince Pedro, stick to your wife" (II 48–50; 262–276)—momentarily articulating an alternative future that rejects the reproductive and historical script associated with her name. This refusal, however, is short-lived. Pedro and Inês soon voice lines drawn directly from the medieval narrative: "Inês de Castro, lady-in-waiting / Prince Pedro, Crown Prince / They loved each other then / Pedro loved Inês / More than his wife / More than his country / More than his parents / More than God" (II 54–58; 340–377). This shared recitation binds their present bodies to a mythic pattern that anticipates sacrifice. What begins as a flirtation becomes an inherited script, and the audience is invited to watch the moment the trap closes, when Inês's resistance, audible in her earlier ironic refusal, is gradually subsumed by the force of the legend that surrounds her.

The nightclub scenes frame Pedro's desire not as affection but as compulsion. His language grows increasingly possessive as the opera progresses, most strikingly in scene VI: "You fill my mind… you fill my heart… you fill my soul!" (VI 104–105; 99–109). What initially resembles romantic excess quickly reveals itself as a refusal to see Inês as anything other than the fulfilment of his own longing. The pivotal exchange in the same scene—Pedro's insistent "love me, Inês!" (VI 103–105; 85–92) answered by her firm "No! No! I believe in freedom, freedom, freedom, no!" (VI 103–104; 92–102)—exposes the structural asymmetry of their relationship. Inês articulates the danger plainly: "I felt myself falling… felt your chains coil around me" (VI 103; 86–92; VI 104–105; 104–112). Pedro's way of seeing thus becomes a form of binding: being seen by him is not recognition but possession.

Constanza provides the opera's most poignant exploration of the ethics of looking. When she discovers the framed photograph inscribed "To Inês, from Pedro, with all my love, Queen of

my heart" (VII 111–112; 42–49), her response unfolds through a sequence of questions: "Is she blonde? Is she beautiful? Who paid for her fur coat?" (VII 112–113; 51–54). These questions do not address Inês directly but instead attempt to situate Constanza herself within an image produced by Pedro's desire. Her gaze is therefore structured less as rivalry than as disorientation; she is trying to understand how another woman has come to occupy the space she once held.

Even her later insult, that Inês is "a cheap fadista" (VII 117; 97–99), emerges not as a sustained attack, but as part of a plea directed toward Pedro: "Believe in us… Give her up!" (VII 121; 129–136). The textual emphasis falls not on hostility toward Inês but on Constanza's repeated appeals to her husband and to the vows that once defined their relationship: "We are married in the sight of God" (VII 117; 95–96), "Remember your vow" (VII 117; 95–96), and "Believe in our love" (VII 123–124; 143–145). These lines position her not as an aggressor confronting a rival but as a woman attempting to restore a collapsing relational order. Inês herself remains largely unaddressed; even when she enters the scene, Constanza continues to speak primarily to Pedro.

For this reason, Constanza's looking is best understood as wounded rather than possessive. The sung text of the score stages her not as the classical jealous wife who attacks the other woman but as an unwilling witness to her own displacement, compelled to confront visual evidence—photographs, gifts, inscriptions—through which her abandonment becomes legible. The opera thus reframes operatic rivalry: the conflict lies not primarily between women, but between women and the structures that render them visible only through the terms of male desire.

In scene IX, the central act of violence—the murder of Inês by Pedro's mother, Maria—is staged as a ritual. The opera prepares the audience for this shift into symbolic logic through the

fado that immediately precedes the killing. As Inês sings of a blackbird who is shot at, escapes death, and sings again, her voice introduces an image of fragile survival: a creature pursued, nearly extinguished, yet briefly able to rise and re-sound. The lyrics, circling around danger narrowly escaped, foreshadow that the attempt on Inês's life is not a matter of personal grievance but part of a larger system of pursuit. The fado's cyclic structure, alternating between threat and flight, inscribes her voice into a pattern of precarity. By placing this song directly before the confrontation with Pedro's mother, the opera underscores that Inês, like the blackbird, is already positioned as a target long before the gun is raised.

When Maria enters, the scene shifts from metaphor to enactment. The confrontation begins not with an argument but with accusations framed through the language of lineage and contamination: "You have corrupted my son / You have poisoned his mind / You have poisoned his heart! … / Our flesh and blood will not be poisoned by yours" (IX 161–164; 20–36). The repeated invocation of blood reframes the conflict as one of hereditary purity rather than personal grievance, moving the moment beyond domestic confrontation and toward the ideological logic that historically underwrites honour killings. Maria's earlier declaration that "there is only one way to cleanse the family name" (VIII 151; 188–192) makes explicit what the scene now performs. Inês is not attacked because of a specific action but because she is positioned as a threat to lineage itself, a perceived impurity whose continued presence is imagined as contaminating the family's future. Inês's recurring image of the bird singing "but for how long?" (*mas por quanto tempo?*) (scene IX) runs beneath the confrontation like a fragile counter-narrative, suggesting the fragility of the life that Maria's rhetoric of blood purity seeks to extinguish.

The interplay between song and violence intensifies this symbolic frame. Even as Maria advances, Inês continues to sing, asserting, "when I sing, I live" (*Quando eu canto, vivo*) (IX 164; 37–38). Her voice functions as a form of resistance, not heroic or transcendent, but defiantly ordinary, maintaining a minimal yet crucial space of selfhood that the mother's approach seeks to extinguish. Pedro's mother mocks Inês by echoing fragments of the melody, turning Inês's survival-song into an instrument of humiliation. Inês sings the recurring question once more, "but for how long?" (*mas por quanto tempo*) (IX 165–166; 45–48), returning to the blackbird's earlier refrain. This repetition binds the symbolic imagery of the earlier fado to the unfolding violence of the present scene, transforming the once-metaphoric threat into its irreversible enactment.

The killing itself heightens the brutality of this ritual frame. Maria fires a gun[28] and shoots Inês "through the heart" (IX 167). Inês collapses. The staging forces the audience into acute awareness that the pleasure of listening to Inês's fado, her final assertion of life, is inseparable from the spectacle of her death. Where opera has historically aestheticised women's dying, this scene strips away that tradition. The fado does not lift Inês's death into a sublime, consoling climax. Instead, it becomes an interruption that refuses the sense of closure so often supplied by operatic death.

The opera's most disturbing sequence, and its clearest articulation of the mythic gaze, unfolds in the ritual that precedes the coronation of Inês's corpse. Before unveiling her body, Pedro stages a coercive sacrament: he seizes his father's gun and holds the others at gunpoint. He then forces each of them, in turn, to drink from a chalice containing drops of Inês's blood mixed

[28] In the score, Maria fires her gun and misses twice before striking Inês through the heart on her third attempt. In the audio file I had access to, the gunshot is heard only once.

with wine. By insisting that "this is the blood of Inês" (XI 184–185; 76–78), Pedro transforms his grief into a liturgy of punishment and possession.

The ritual does not imply that Constanza or his father have physically participated in Maria's act. Rather, it implicates all of them in the familial, patriarchal, and dynastic structures that made Inês's murder possible. Their forced ingestion of her blood becomes a symbolic reckoning: they are compelled to consume the consequences of what they enabled, whether through action or complicity. The scene thus exposes the extremity of Pedro's mythic seeing. Having failed to protect Inês in life, he now sanctifies and claims her in death, converting her body into the site where mourning becomes control.

The unveiling that follows drives this dynamic to its most grotesque conclusion. Pedro draws back the purple cloth to reveal Inês "seated on a throne, crowned, clad in royal robes, her heart exposed, [and] the bones of her left hand visible" (XI 187). This scene invokes the medieval legend in which Pedro exhumed the corpse of Inês de Castro and crowned her queen. In this staging, however, the coronation becomes unmistakably pathological. It is not an homage, but the culmination of a fantasy that has consumed every person onstage. Inês's body becomes "beautiful" only once she is silent, immobilised, and entirely available to the desires projected onto her.

Literary and cultural scholar Cristina Santos's work on female figures in myth, legend, and popular culture clarifies what is at stake in this final transformation. In *Unbecoming Female Monsters: Witches, Vampires, and Virgins*, Santos examines how inherited narratives and cultural value systems reinforce restrictive constructions of female identity, particularly around sexuality, purity, and socially acceptable gender roles (Santos 2017). Inês's coronation scene can

be read as staging an especially disturbing version of this dynamic: the myth becomes most fully realised at the moment of her complete disappearance.

In staging this coronation through a contemporary idiom of gun violence, forced ritual, and bodily exposure, the opera makes the audience confront the brutality embedded in idealisation. Pedro's chant—"This is the blood of Inês" (XI 184–185; 76–78)—renders her death a sacrament, and her body becomes a reliquary. The scene forces viewers to reckon with the long operatic history of aestheticising women's suffering, revealing how easily admiration becomes domination, and love becomes a pretext for annihilation.

The opera pushes spectatorship to its limit. One must watch a woman's corpse elevated, adorned, and revered, even as this elevation is the direct consequence of her murder. The coronation scene lays bare the aestheticisation of female suffering at the heart of the Inês de Castro myth and implicates those who watch in the pleasure of looking at what should never have become a spectacle. In *Inês*, beauty is inseparable from violation. The more silent and immobilised she becomes, the more fully she is rendered into an object of display.

Her final posthumous appearance intensifies this contradiction. After Pedro's suicidal invocation—"Inês, Inês, Inês, love of my life… your magical voice, your songs of saudade" (XI 194; 135–140)—the stage freezes, and Inês reappears transfigured, dressed in dazzling white. She sings the opera's last lines, narrating a fairy-tale account: "Once upon a time / There was a man who loved a woman / More than his wife / More than his country / More than his parents /More than God" (*Era uma vez um homem, que amou uma mulher, Mais do que à esposa, Mais do que país, Mais do que aos pais, Mais do que Deus*) (XI 198; 164–171). The moment is ethereal and luminous not only visually but musically: Inês sings *freely* at a very slow tempo, sustained at *pianissimo* dynamics, with long *legato* tones in the ensemble that suspend rhythmic

motion while the voice unfolds in gently ascending, stepwise phrases. The sparse instrumentation and extended harmonic resonance create a sense of temporal stillness, from which the vocal line gradually expands in register and intensity, growing from *mezzo-piano* to *mezzo-forte* as the narrative reaches its culmination. This gradual emergence of sound from near silence produces the radiant sonic atmosphere that surrounds Inês's final appearance, precisely the kind of aesthetic apotheosis Catherine Clément (1988) identifies as opera's most seductive undoing of women. *Inês* thus grants its heroine a Clémentian final aria, but only after reducing her to a corpse.

This contradiction is the point. The concluding vision offers no consolation, no redemption, and no restoration of agency. Instead, it exposes how myth transforms women into images and how storytelling can enact violence by binding the living to the dead. In this formulation, the opera's looking is both lethal and commemorative: what kills also crowns, sanctifies, and sings.

Placed within the larger structure of this chapter, *Inês* reveals a specific structure of recognition: the pleasure of recognising a story as it moves toward its inevitable tragedy. The opera forces its audience to consider the desire that drives this recognition. It insists that the myth's way of seeing is always double-edged: enchanted by beauty but implicated in destruction.

By ending with Inês's disembodied voice, the opera completes the trajectory of this visual structure. Paradoxically, she becomes most visible and musically radiant only at the moment of irrevocable loss, an effect produced through the aria's suspended tempo, transparent orchestration, and gradual expansion of vocal range and dynamics. In *Inês*, then, the question is not merely what we see, but what seeing costs: whether the final, dazzling apparition of a woman

already dead constitutes the ultimate fulfilment or the final indictment of opera's long history of looking.

3.3 *Oksana G.*

Oksana G. intensifies the chapter's trajectory by confronting those who watch with the unmediated violence of voyeurism. Among the operas in this study, it presents the most direct engagement with the ethics of representing women's suffering. Where earlier works embed gendered harm within civic or mythic frameworks, *Oksana G.* refuses comparable aesthetic distance. The opera asks what it means to confront gendered violence or to be confronted by it when nothing is left to metaphor, when brutality is staged rather than implied, and when the audience's implication can no longer hide behind aesthetic distance. The work pushes Clément's critique of operatic display to its limit: the risk is not only that trauma becomes aestheticised, but that it becomes starkly visible, forcing spectators into a proximity from which they cannot easily withdraw.

What also distinguishes *Oksana G.* is that the opera both shows and thinks about showing. Its dramaturgy revolves around a double bind: to acknowledge gendered violence requires looking, but to do so is to risk repeating the violation. The audience is repeatedly placed in positions from which it must see what Oksana cannot escape. At the same time, the opera continually exposes the structures—political, economic, and patriarchal—that turn women's bodies into objects of possession.

Nowhere is this tension more apparent than in the scenes of sexual violence in act I. In the Romanian forest, Konstantin announces Nataliya's offstage rape with chilling theatricality: "My colleagues are taking turns introducing her to the art of love" (I-II 66; 338–341). The

euphemism does not soften the brutality; it aestheticises it, refracting assault through a grotesque gloss of performance. Violence becomes something to be narrated, staged, and consumed. When he turns to Oksana moments later—"sorry for what I must do… necessity is cruel" (I-II 69; 352–356)[29]—his appeal to inevitability reveals the logic that underwrites not only the trafficking industry, but also the gendered optics of violence: women's suffering is framed as necessary, justified, and even tragic.

The onstage rape that follows destabilises operatic expectation. Konstantin reprises language introduced earlier in the opera—"Where comes such perfection as your wheat-coloured hair?" (I-I 26; 141–148 and I-II 70; 357–360)—recasting the rhetoric of admiration as a means of coercion, a phrase he will continue to repeat across the work.[30] As he throws Oksana to the ground, the compliment returns as a chilling verbal refrain demonstrating how the repetition of aesthetic language can convert admiration into a mechanism of domination. The moment forces the audience to confront its own position: what does it mean to witness admiration transformed into coercion? What responsibility lies in recognising how the repetition of aesthetic language can naturalise the very violence it accompanies?

The second scene of violence takes place during the human auction at the Atlas Bar in Kos, where the act of watching becomes part of the violence itself. Nataliya is dragged back onstage with facial lacerations and subjected to crude stitching on the bar table, using needle,

[29] Unless otherwise indicated, all textual references are cited according to the score. Where audio or video recordings are available (*Alexandra*, *Filumena*, *Oksana G.*, *Shanawdithit*, Regina's arioso), quotations follow the wording used in performance; where no recording has been consulted (*Inês*, *Lillian Alling*), quotations follow the text printed in the score. In every case, citations refer to the corresponding location in the score, regardless of whether the quoted wording is taken from the score itself or from an audio or video recording. For example, in *Oksana G.* the performance text reads "sorry for what I must do … necessity is cruel," whereas the score gives "sorry for what I will do. Necessity is always cruel." While such differences are minor and do not alter the dramatic outcome, this dissertation quotes the wording as performed while retaining the corresponding score reference.

[30] This phrase recurs at multiple points in the opera, detached from its initial context and reiterated in moments of increasing violence. Its repetition strips the language of any residual intimacy, functioning instead as a verbal marker of dominance that persists across encounters.

thread, and vodka in place of medical care (I-IV 152–156). The opera presses against the limits of what can ethically be shown. The stitching, a grotesque parody of repair, renders her body a site of medical, sexual, and visual violation. The moment is difficult to look at, which is precisely the point. The work tests whether attending to suffering can ever be ethically tenable in a theatrical frame.

Oksana is then stripped, displayed, and auctioned. When she protests the denial of medical care for her friend, Konstantin retaliates by telling the onlookers to "Take her, break her, she's on the house, she's free!" (I-IV 156–157; 893–897). As the patrons repeat his phrases, the opera destabilises the boundary between perpetrator and bystander; the violence is not enacted by a single aggressor but sustained through collective participation.

This staged crowd does not represent the theatre audience directly, yet its role as a watching and listening collective creates an unsettling structural parallel. The bar patrons become a visible public whose responses shape the meaning of what unfolds, prompting spectators in the theatre to recognise how acts of looking and listening can themselves participate in systems that render women's suffering consumable. In this sense, the scene stages the mechanism Clément identifies, in which the woman's body is exposed, and communal spectatorship becomes the apparatus through which that exposure acquires meaning.

The opera stages three distinct configurations within its ethics of looking, each marked by a different relation to power, vulnerability, and agency. First, and throughout the opera, Konstantin's fixation is structured through a regime of visual control. His desire originates not in intimacy, but in visual possession. The language of his first encounter with Oksana returns almost verbatim in the final confrontation: the same catalogue of admiration—her "wheat-coloured hair," her beauty, her youth—reappears as a rhetorical refrain, revealing that what

initially masqueraded as romantic fascination has always been a discourse of acquisition. In the Brindisi scene—"Where comes such perfection as your wheat-coloured hair? … How can you be so young, so beautiful and smart? Take my heart. Oksana, love me" (II-X 389–392)—love is framed as entitlement and beauty as possession. This grammar of ownership becomes explicit when he snarls: "I own you" (II-X 397–398; 2099–2100). The opera refuses to aestheticise this moment. Oksana's reply—"One human cannot own another" (II-X 398; 2100–2102)—articulates the ethical counterpoint at the centre of the work, marking the difference between recognition and objectification.

A quieter but no less consequential mode of looking runs through the opera in Sofiya's search. Her repeated returns to Asa's parlour trace a mother's desperate attempt to find her daughter across omens and silences. The tarot cards become a device that externalises her fears. This sequence moves from the Nine of Swords ("utter desolation") to the King of Swords reversed ("evil intentions") and culminates in Asa's devastating words, that "Oksana has been stolen and robbed of her soul" (I-III 76–81). The violence is not shown but divined, and Sofiya can neither save Oksana nor truly see her. Her looking becomes another form of helpless spectatorship. The opera thus sets two modes of seeing against each other: Konstantin's violent objectification and Sofiya's helpless recognition.

Father Alexander occupies an uneasy position in the opera's ethics of looking. His role is explicitly pastoral, yet he is continually placed in situations where care shades into personal attachment and ethical clarity becomes fragile. When Oksana recoils from his approach—"Don't touch me" (II-I 205; 1154) and later retorts "What God? No god helped me!... Even my mother's cards didn't help me! No gods, no cards, no one" (II-I 208; 1168–1173)—the opera clarifies that healing cannot be founded on unexamined compassion since touch, vision, and proximity are all

potentially retraumatising. Father Alexander tries to use the tarot card Oksana showed him to make a connection with her—"A woman calmly closes the mouth of a lion… courage… courageous in the face of danger…" (II-I 210–212; 1178–1187)—which introduces a counter-image to gendered brutality. However, even this symbolic gesture falters when Oksana insists that "[her] parents will die of shame" (II-I 214; 1194–1195). Father Alexander must learn to see Oksana without imposing a narrative of redemption upon her. The opera subjects him to sustained ethical scrutiny by asking whether he sees her suffering or reframes it as moral purpose. One of Oksana's darkest moments comes when she confesses: "If Konstantin walked in, I would leave with him" (II-III 253–254; 1377–1380). This admission shatters the healing narrative. It reminds both the priest and the audience that trauma reorganises pain, and that ethical seeing must accommodate contradictions that cannot be neatly resolved.

The opera also exposes Oksana not only as the object of violence but as the bearer of its consequences. In moments in which the dramaturgy turns toward memory and testimony, she carries the weight of what survival has required of her. One of the work's most morally complex disclosures arrives when Oksana recounts Nataliya's final moments: in order to escape, she releases Nataliya's hand, allowing her screams to distract the traffickers. The decision is framed through devastation, and Oksana recalls it with sorrow. Her survival remains ethically charged, bound to an endurance that implicates and torments her without offering redemption.

Father Alexander's final pastoral act, giving Oksana a knife, renders him complicit in a violence he cannot prevent. When he later discovers her dying body and hears her final words—"I have closed the mouth of a lion" (II-X 422–23; 2236–38)—the text enacts a devastating reversal: the image introduced to empower her at the opening of act II becomes a final, tragic declaration of agency made possible only through death.

In the final confrontation with Konstantin, Oksana's decision to feign compliance transforms her from observed to observer. For the first time, Konstantin does not fully see her; his delusion prevents him from recognising her resistance. The hidden knife—"place it under your pillow" (II-VIII 357; 1885), Father Alexander had instructed—becomes the instrument through which she overturns the objectifying look that has stalked her throughout the opera.

Yet this reversal is not triumphant. Her injury—ambiguous, possibly self-inflicted through the force of the struggle—exposes the cost of reclaiming agency within a world structured by gendered violence. Oksana dies looking at Father Alexander, not Konstantin, transferring the responsibility of testimony to someone who must now bear witness ethically rather than voyeuristically.

If *Oksana G.* fractures the terms of looking, it also builds a sonic counterpoint. The repeated choral lines—"Listen… we are here! Help us!" (I-IV 181–183; 1033–1042)—function as collective demands to be heard rather than seen. When the women are named—"Oksana, Nataliya, Mirna…" (I-VI 179–180; 1021–1026)—they are momentarily pulled out of the trafficking circuit and asserted as individual subjects. Crucially, these interventions work through sound rather than image. They insist on listening as an ethical practice, particularly in a work where the visual field is repeatedly organised around exposure and violation. The choral refrains do not undo what has been shown, but they alter how it is received by shifting attention away from spectacle and toward accountability. In this sense, the opera resonates with Adriana Cavarero's (2022) account of the voice as a relational act that calls another into ethical response, Dylan Robinson's (2020) theorisation of listening as a practice that must remain attentive to power and refusal, and Jill Dolan's (2012) conception of spectatorship as an active interpretive practice rather than passive reception.

Oksana G. poses the chapter's most direct version of a wider question: can opera represent gendered violence without reproducing the conditions of spectacle that make it legible? The work refuses resolution. It stages scenes that risk voyeurism, then exposes the audience's implication in that risk. It positions the spectator alongside Konstantin, the crowd, and the corrupt officials, only to make that proximity ethically unbearable. At the same time, the opera suggests that invisibility carries its own risks. As Sofiya's desperation indicates, the failure to attend to women's suffering can result in their further silencing. In this way, *Oksana G.* frames watching as a site of ethical tension, prompting reflection not simply on whether one looks but on how attention is practised and whether it is accompanied by listening.

3.4 *Lillian Alling*

Lillian Alling deepens the chapter's inquiry by introducing a mode of viewing structured around pursuit, endurance, and the aesthetics of depletion. Rather than eroticising or mythologising its protagonist, the opera focuses on a woman in flight as an object of communal attention. She is observed, discussed, and pursued across landscapes that both expose and endanger her. Among the operas examined in this chapter, *Lillian Alling* occupies a different ethical register. While it does not sexualise suffering or present female vulnerability as aesthetic pleasure, it nevertheless centres the audience's experience on Lillian's hardship, exhaustion, and physical danger through a sustained visual and narrative regime. Her journey, traced across borders, through wilderness, incarceration, and ultimately violence, unfolds as a sustained staging of endurance. The opera does not turn her into an object of desire but it does frame her struggle as an ordeal to be watched, drawing tension, awe, and emotional weight from its persistence.

Through this lens, the opera examines how being seen itself becomes a burden: the migrant woman is seen too much, followed too closely, and interpreted too easily by those who misunderstand the forces that drive her forward. In doing so, *Lillian Alling* participates in the broader dynamics that structure operatic looking, in which women's suffering becomes visually available so that narrative, emotion, and meaning can emerge from it. Black studies scholar Saidiya Hartman's caution about the representational risks of staging violence is instructive for *Lillian Alling*. In *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), representations intended to expose and condemn suffering can reproduce dynamics of subjection by turning violence into a scene for sympathetic identification, in which the experience of the sufferer risks being displaced by that of the witness. Hartman's later work (2019) further underscores that narrating marginalised lives requires careful attention to the limits of recovery and the ethical risks of rendering suffering legible. Read through this lens, the dramaturgy of *Lillian Alling* edges toward making hardship the condition of meaning. What distinguishes this opera is the way endurance itself generates ethical risk, as the experience of watching becomes increasingly shaped by depletion.

The opera constructs this visual grammar of suffering cumulatively, layering episode upon episode until hardship itself becomes the dominant mode of perception. In the scenes leading to the confrontation with Jozef, Lillian's body is progressively marked by the journey. She is first shown wrapped in rags in the Mendeltna Pass, and she is repeatedly placed in situations of physical precarity: freezing as a cougar's cries draw closer; inching across a rickety bridge suspended over churning rapids; clinging to a mountainside as rocks cascade around her and as her pasteboard suitcase falls irretrievably into a precipice. This sequence repeatedly shifts her body from suspension to collapse and back again, from clinging to a cliff to forcing herself upright along a steep descent. As time passes, her clothes disintegrate, her boots fall apart, and

her face, hands, and arms bear visible traces of injury. By the time Lillian emerges into the clearing near the mountain creek, dazed and barely upright, her exhaustion is no longer episodic but total. The work demands looking and ensures that the eye is never left idle. The accumulation of these images produces empathy while also functioning as a form of narrative conditioning. Lillian's suffering becomes the means through which the story advances.

Feminist cultural theorist Sara Ahmed's account of affect as something that accumulates on bodies through repeated encounters clarifies the mechanics of this process. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), she describes how emotions "stick" to bodies, signs, figures, and objects, producing forms of legibility that are shaped over time rather than simply expressing interior states. Read through this framework, suffering becomes attached to Lillian's body in a comparable way, organising how she is perceived and delimiting how the narrative can proceed. Her exhaustion functions as a plot condition while also leaving an affective residue that orients the audience's response to her vulnerability.

Nowhere is this process more apparent than in the prison farm sequence. Scene IX stages Lillian within an institutional structure of visibility shaped by state surveillance. The visual tableau of inmates, the uniforms, the regimented movements, and the physical labour demanded of the women materialise the prison as a site of gendered discipline. Lillian's suffering is not intimate but public: the state monitors her labour, punishes her, and contains her. The opera uses this spectacle of institutional control to explore how women who transgress social or migratory boundaries are made increasingly visible, even as their capacity to act freely is constrained.

This staging aligns with the chapter's broader interest in the politics of looking: the prison scene reveals how institutional spectatorship transforms hardship into a performance of compliance. Musicologist Jessica Sommer's work on embodiment and enaction offers a way of

understanding the ethical pressure at work in this visual regime. In "Embodiment, Enaction, and Signification in Analyzing Opera" (2018), Sommer argues that operatic meaning emerges not only from musical structure or vocal delivery but from the embodied labour of performers onstage—gesture, movement, stillness, and physical interaction as sites of signification (Sommer 2018, 1–12). She further develops enaction to describe how bodily motion under conditions of constraint—through repetition, routinisation, or imposed limitation—produces meaning through performance itself rather than expressive autonomy (Sommer 2018, 55–60). In scene IX, Lillian's forced movements—bending, lifting, and marching—function less as expressive action than as enactments of constraint. The prison farm sequence does not simply depict institutional power; it makes that power visible by turning Lillian's bodily labour into the medium through which the audience apprehends vulnerability.

Scene XIV crystallises the opera's most intense engagement with the visual stakes of suffering. The scene opens with Lillian alone, visibly weakened from days of travel. The stage directions describe her extreme exhaustion, her near-collapse, and all the ways that her body seems to resist her will. This vulnerability is not symbolic; it is embodied. Her suffering is staged for direct consumption, creating the visual conditions for the impending encounter with Jozef.

The opera does not stage Jozef as a hidden observer who sees Lillian first; instead, the score positions him alone at the creek, already part of the visible landscape, absorbed in panning for gold. Lillian enters later at the edge of the clearing and studies him before initiating the confrontation. This framing matters because the scene's tension does not come from the threat of an unseen observation, but from Lillian's decision to step forward and name him. The act of looking, and of calling him into recognition, belongs first to her. Read through Sommer's framework of enaction, this moment shows agency as something produced in performance:

through physical movement, spatial entry, and vocal assertion. Lillian's decision to cross the threshold of the clearing is thus not merely narrative but enacted, grounding her agency in the visible body.

From Lillian's first words, the encounter is structured around naming. She asserts: "Jozef Nikitich Lazinsky" (II-XIV 315; 21–22). When he ignores her first call of this name and then denies his identity a second time—"That is not my name" (II-XIV 315; 21–22)—she calls him out by naming herself: "I am Sofia Petrovna Abramova. That is a name you will know" (II-XIV 316; 30–31). The ethical emphasis shifts away from voyeurism and toward testimony. Lillian demands that he hear what happened to her family—"You will hear what happened to us!" (II-XIV 317; 44–45)—and the confrontation becomes an attempt to reclaim narrative authority. Lillian refuses erasure by insisting on legibility. Yet this insistence carries its own risk. The scene shows how even acts of testimony can pull pain into view in ways that exceed the speaker's control. Lillian's naming resists erasure, but it also situates her in an ethically charged bind. To speak is to re-enter the terrain where suffering becomes legible, and where the demand for recognition can inadvertently reproduce the exposure she seeks to overcome.

The dramaturgical tension intensifies and violence erupts, but only after the verbal confrontation, when Jozef taunts her: "I hope they are in Hell! Where you will join them soon" (II-XIV 318; 48–49). Lillian strikes him with a tree branch and Jozef responds not as a predator closing in on an unsuspecting woman, but as a man suddenly confronted by someone he believed dead. He seizes her, throws her to the ground, and begins to strangle her while taunting her resolve: "What do you think happens next? … You die and I go on living!" (II-XIV 320; 62–69). In this staging, the brutality is explicit and physical, but it emerges from the collapse of her attempt at testimony rather than from a predatory ambush. The audience watches Lillian

knowingly enter a confrontation she has deliberately sought, witnessing both her courage and the lethal consequences of confronting a man who has already erased her once.

Scotty's arrival further revises the ethical dynamics. He does not simply "rescue" Lillian; his intervention is hesitant, reactive, aimed at de-escalation rather than heroism. Jozef's escalation, reaching for a rifle and then pulling a knife, is what ultimately brings the scene to its breaking point. Lillian takes hold of the rifle only after Jozef lunges at Scotty, and the shot she fires is a response to immediate danger, not narrative destiny. The opera frames the killing as a collective necessity—"We did this as one" (II-XIV 327; 131–132)—rather than as triumph or revenge.

The aftermath of the attack reinforces the opera's fundamental ambivalence. Lillian neither rises in triumph nor claims a renewed or empowered voice; her body remains shaken, her breathing strained, and her footing unstable. The scene refuses any suggestion that the killing of Jozef provides cathartic release. Instead, the focus remains on Lillian's fragility, her shock, her exhaustion, and the immediacy of her physical danger. Her survival is secured through circumstances rather than inner transformation or symbolic awakening: Scotty's intervention, a moment of opportunity, and a single shot fired in desperation.

Yet, the opera still relies on the visualisation of Lillian's vulnerability to generate its affective weight. Even after Jozef's death, we continue to look at a body pushed beyond its limits. The emphasis falls on the spectacle of endurance rather than the scene of violence: Lillian struggling to stand, to breathe, and to continue. In this return to the opera's central visual economy, suffering remains the condition through which her experience becomes legible as feeling. Her exhaustion, wounds, and perseverance organise how her story is apprehended. Read through Ahmed's account of how affective associations accumulate through repeated encounters,

this repeated visibility sustains the opera's emotional meaning through endurance rather than event (Ahmed 2014).

Lillian Alling turns the viewer's attention to migration as a spectacle of persistence. The opera does not frame her suffering as visually pleasurable, but it does make her perseverance the centre of perception. This perceptual orientation is strongly affective, structured around empathy, dread, and the recognition of a woman continually pushed to the edge of survival. This shift clarifies the ethical terrain of looking in *Lillian Alling*. The dramaturgy does not ask the audience to look at violence for its own sake, but it nevertheless depends on the accumulation of Lillian's bodily hardship to sustain narrative momentum. The opera therefore participates in a broader operatic machinery in which female suffering is transformed into narrative currency, a mechanism that both critiques violence and requires it. The work asks spectators to see Lillian's pain, making the act of witnessing it integral to the story's progression.

Thus, the ethical demand placed upon viewers is subtly different from that in the preceding operas. The danger is not that viewers might sentimentalise or normalise Lillian's suffering, but that they might accept its narrative necessity. The opera risks converting her trauma—her physical collapse, her terror in the clearing, and her act of killing—into the turning point that enables Irene's later emergence as a coherent speaking subject. In this dramaturgical logic, Lillian's suffering becomes the narrative condition through which Irene's subsequent self-recognition and vocal consolidation are made possible. In other words, the opera edges toward a familiar narrative alchemy: suffering becomes the foundation of transformation.

Ultimately, *Lillian Alling* expands the critical questions at the heart of this chapter. It shows that the ethics of looking at women's suffering are not limited to scenes of sexualised violence or spectacularised pain. They also arise when the narrative coherence of a story hinges

on the legibility of female endurance. Through Lillian's long journey, marked by hunger, danger, near-death, and survival, the opera situates us within a mode of spectatorship that is both empathetic and entangled, compelled by her resolve yet dependent on her suffering for narrative fulfilment. In revealing this tension, the opera invites viewers to consider how their own interpretive habits participate in transforming a woman's hardship into a readable, moving, and unforgettable story.

3.5 *Regina*

Regina reorients the chapter's focus by turning from the harm of over-visibility to the harm of erasure, which operates through the violence of not being seen. Read alongside Hartman's (2019) attention to archival erasure and the limits of historical recovery, Mirzoeff's (2011) account of visibility as politically structured provides a useful framework for considering how absence from view may itself reflect relations of power. Regina's suffering is not staged for an audience, nor is her death staged as tragedy. Instead, her harm occurs in two registers: first, through the genocidal violence that ends her life in Auschwitz; and second—later, quieter, but structurally enduring—through the postwar erasure that ensured she remained largely absent from the historical record. The opera exposes this second injury as structured inattention, a non-looking through which institutions, historians, and communal memory collectively failed to recognise her. If other operas in this chapter trace the injuries of over-visibility, *Regina* exposes the injury of erasure. Regina Jonas's disappearance from the historical archive was not the result of benign oversight. It was the product of structural conditions and institutional decisions: wartime papers confiscated and not restored; documents misplaced or devalued; rabbinical institutions unwilling to acknowledge her legitimacy; and postwar scholars who did not search

for her with the diligence demanded by the enormity of her achievement. Her death at Auschwitz is a matter of historical fact; her posthumous invisibility is a matter of institutional priority.

The archive becomes a site of interpretive relations. Not looking—failing to preserve, record, or value—becomes consequential in itself, producing disappearance. Although Regina's life ended through overt, state-sanctioned violence, the archive's failure to recognise her ensured a second death: a historiographical one. This is the harm of the unrecorded, the erasure of the unacknowledged, the life that leaves almost no trace because no one believed it worth tracing. The opera stages this damage with clarity. It does so by placing absence at the centre of the stage: through fragmented documents, withheld continuity, and the quiet labour of searching, the drama makes institutional inattention perceptible as a material force rather than an abstract omission. Regina's voice reaches the audience as a presence that history nearly lost. Her words return because someone, decades later, decides to search. The stage becomes a space where archival neglect is made visible, forcing the audience to confront how patriarchal, theological, and historical mechanisms have long determined whose lives become knowable and whose are permitted to disappear into silence. *Regina* asks the chapter's central question, but from the opposite direction: what are the ethical consequences when women are not harmed by being seen but by being unseen?

Anna enters the archive not as a neutral researcher, but as a woman carrying a familial wound: a father who was implicated in Nazism. Her presence in the opera is marked by an urgency bordering on desperation. She searches for evidence of a life she can salvage, not because she trusts the archive to offer stability, but because she needs to believe it can yield some moral ground on which to stand. For Anna, Regina becomes a possibility of redemption: a

woman harmed by the machinery her father served, and a life that might be honoured or restored through Anna's labour.

This motivation complicates Anna's mode of engagement. She does not approach the archive with the detached caution of a scholar concerned with misinterpretation. Her search is deeply personal, grasping for a meaning that might free her from inherited shame. Her investment is therefore ethically charged not only because of what she finds, but because of what she seeks. She occupies the position of someone compelled to see in order to make sense of an inherited burden.

Yet the opera refuses to frame Anna's desperation as selfish. Instead, it becomes the engine that drives her toward ethical attention. She does not appropriate Regina's story for her own absolution. She allows the archive to unsettle her. She listens. She reads. She remains with the discomfort of what has been lost. Anna models a reparative practice of witnessing grounded in humility and persistence. Her engagement suggests that looking at a life like Regina's—fragmented, partial, and nearly erased—requires commitment rather than mastery. The labour of seeing becomes moral work.

Earlier in the dissertation, I suggested that the concept of *tikkun* underpins *Regina*'s dramaturgy. In *Regina*, repair is not achieved through visual restoration or archival triumph, nor does it take the form of a newly discovered document or a definitive historical revelation. Instead, I suggest it takes shape as an ethic of attention. To attend to Regina is to restore her not by completing her archive, but by honouring its incompleteness. This sets *Regina* apart from narratives that celebrate historical "rediscovery" as a form of rescue. The opera denies Anna, and the listeners, the satisfaction of certainty. Regina's papers remain partial, her biography fragmented, and her interiority unknowable. Yet this uncertainty is precisely what makes the act

of attending ethical. The goal is not to reconstruct Regina exhaustively, but to register the damage done by those who never looked. In this light, *tikkun* is not simply about making Regina visible. It also requires refusing the archival order that erased her. The opera offers a counter-mode of attention that listens rather than consumes, acknowledges the limits of what can be known, and makes space for a woman whom history failed to hold.

One of the opera's most powerful gestures is that Regina becomes more than an individual figure; she becomes emblematic of the other women erased by the same structures that hid her. The archive that did not recognise Regina has failed to look at many others, women whose contributions were dismissed, whose leadership was unrecorded, or whose lives were deemed too marginal to preserve. Regina's story thus becomes a mirror through which the audience glimpses the scale of this structural forgetting. The opera's dramaturgical framing reinforces this ethical orientation toward attentive listening in the face of archival absence. Rather than monumentalising Regina through spectacle or narrative resolution, the work amplifies her presence through restraint, fragmentation, and deferred closure, underscoring the fragility of memory and suggesting that listening can function as a mode of historical attention as rigorous as any visual or documentary record.

The opera extends the chapter's broader argument by showing that recognition is not only about what is visible but also about recognising the implications of what has been allowed to vanish. Regina stands at the centre of this tension: a woman made invisible not by the violence of attention but by the violence of turning away.

A contemporary parallel highlights the significance of Regina's rekindled presence. George Benjamin and Martin Crimp's opera *Written on Skin* (2012) likewise collapses the distance between past and present, blurring the boundary between the living and the remembered

through narrators who observe and recount events from outside historical time. As in *Regina*, the work interrogates who has the right to narrate a silenced woman's story and what forms of representation are ethically tenable. However, the operas diverge sharply in their treatment of the archive. In *Written on Skin*, the woman is "written into" the record through brutality: her story is secured through patriarchal control, and inscription itself becomes a wound. Read alongside *Regina*, the opera offers a counterpoint in which memory is preserved through forceful narration, rather than endangered through archival omission. *Regina* proposes an alternative framework. Rather than overwriting the past, the opera amplifies the faint traces Regina left behind. Its chamber ensemble functions not as a spotlight but as a resonant field in which memory can breathe, suggesting reparation through listening rather than inscription.

Placing these works in dialogue clarifies what *Regina* accomplishes. Where *Written on Skin* exposes the cost of making a woman visible through force, *Regina* exposes the cost of never having been made visible at all. Together, the operas reveal the dual dangers that shape women's historical transmission: violence through inscription and violence through omission.

The opera's final contribution to this chapter's argument lies in its implicit reimagining of lineage. Regina Jonas left no institutional successors, not by choice but because the structures of her world denied her that possibility. Yet the opera gestures toward another form of descent, one grounded in acts of witnessing and transmission rather than ordination or formal succession.

Anna becomes Regina's ethical descendant through her labour of attention. She does not inherit Regina's authority, but she inherits her unfinished story. This resonates with Yvette Nolan's reflections on *Shanawdithit*, where she describes herself as one of Shanawdithit's "artistic descendants," a successor through responsibility to carry a life forward rather than through genealogy (Opera America 2021). The parallel is strong: both Regina and Shanawdithit

died without biological descendants, yet both generate descendants through artistic, ethical, and archival care.

By extension, *Regina* invites contemporary audiences, scholars, and readers into this lineage. Those who attend to her story, those who refuse the archival forgetting that once erased her, become part of the network of keepers who carry her memory into the present. The act of looking becomes an act of continuation.

Ultimately, *Regina* reveals the violence embedded in archival silences, historiographic omission, and the institutional processes that determine whose stories are preserved. The opera does not resolve this harm, but it reframes attention as a mode of accountability. To look at Regina is to confront both the violence that ended her life and the violence that consigned her memory to obscurity. Rather than inviting narrative completion, the opera foregrounds incompletion itself, suggesting that ethical attention may require listening rather than seeing, attending rather than resolving. In this sense, *Regina* reframes looking not as a mechanism of domination but as a responsibility. It proposes an ethical orientation that acknowledges fragility and loss while participating, cautiously and without closure, in the ongoing work of historical repair.

3.6 *Shanawdithit*

Shanawdithit moves the chapter towards the colonial gaze, revealing the violence of hyper-visibility imposed upon Indigenous women. The opera reconstructs the historical conditions under which Shanawdithit's body and drawings were examined and interpreted by others, while her drawings were subsequently catalogued as ethnographic data and are now re-engaged as forms of cultural memory that resist the distortions of colonial scrutiny. Read

alongside Mirzoeff's (2011) account of visuality and authority, Dylan Robinson's (2020) critique of extractive listening offers a useful framework for considering modes of perception that seek knowledge without relational accountability. Shanawdithit's presence becomes a site where looking is both documentary and destructive, shaped by extractive practices that gather knowledge while erasing personhood. In this framework, the opera confronts an excess of observation rather than its absence: a mode of seeing that records in order to possess, and that represents in ways that fracture rather than honour the life observed.

Where *Regina* makes erasure visible through archival absence, *Shanawdithit* exposes the violence of being seen. The drawings she produced under the supervision of William Cormack are simultaneously acts of self-documentation and materials produced under colonial scrutiny. They were created because someone was watching, asking, and recording. The opera does not reproduce the sentimental trope of the vanishing Indian, in which Indigenous disappearance is framed as natural, inevitable, or mournfully resolved within a settler narrative of progress. Instead, the opera exposes the colonial terms of legibility that make such "vanishing" intelligible in the first place and turns the tools of ethnographic observation back on themselves. It asks the audience to recognise that Shanawdithit's presence has always been conditional: she is seen only because she is dying, only because colonial discourse positions her as the last of her people, and only because she has been rendered a rare object of study.

The final scene makes this tension acute. Shanawdithit sits alone, singing of her death: "I will soon walk out of this world" (VII 151; 20–21). Her reflections on whether her mother, aunt, father, or sister will welcome her, whether she will be "accepted" despite having lived among the English, situate her at the threshold between two worlds. The scene is quiet, sparse, and intimate. Much of the orchestra falls away, leaving a thin texture marked by sustained *pianissimo* strings,

isolated woodwind colours, and long-held tones that slow the musical pacing. Shanawdithit's vocal line emerges largely unsupported, surrounded by silence rather than dramatic accompaniment, creating the impression of a voice suspended at the threshold between presence and disappearance. This sonic restraint intensifies the scene's intimacy while underscoring the vulnerability of a character whose final reflections unfold without the protection of dramatic spectacle. This intimacy, however, is not free from the pressures of being seen. Her solitude is immediately broken by Cormack's entrance, his presence unannounced. Shanawdithit senses him before hearing him, and she asks: "No words for me William Cormack?" (VII 154; 60). His silence, followed by a declaration that he must leave her to attend to business overseas (VII 154; 65–67), registers the limits of his care. His attention remains conditioned by intellectual and documentary interests and, however well-meaning, by the asymmetries of power that made her the observed and him the observer.

The opera refuses to sentimentalise this relationship. Shanawdithit hands Cormack a drawing of the house, telling him he may take it to "remember the house in St. John's where Shanawdithit lived" (VII 155; 84–86). But even this gesture is double-edged: it is an act of agency because she chooses what is recorded, but it is also a reminder that the preservation of her memories within the colonial record has been channelled through him. When Cormack exits, the opera creates a brief silence, and with it a new possibility: a world in which the colonial over-seeing briefly loosens its hold.

It is at this moment that the spirits enter. They speak her name softly—"Shanawdithit… Shanawdithit…" (VII 156–157; 100–110)—not as a summons but as recognition. This change in address reorients the terms of attention. Instead of being looked at, Shanawdithit is addressed. Instead of being asked to render her memories visible, she is affirmed by those who already

know them. She asks whether the time has come, wonders if she will be reunited with her loved ones and acknowledges the absence of husband or child. Her question as to whether her name will be spoken in the next world—and, if so, by whom—is answered not by an external authority but by Kwe, who addresses her as "Mother" (VII 157; 114). This naming counters the ethnographic logic through which Shanawdithit has been defined by outsiders, placing her within a lineage and giving her a role in a future that colonial history declared impossible.

In the encounter between Shanawdithit and Kwe, the opera most clearly tests the ethics of viewing: Kwe does not treat Shanawdithit as an object; she recognises her. When Shanawdithit asks "What spirit this is? … Are you lost?" (VII 157; 116–117), Kwe responds with relational language: "As your mother is in me, so you are in me" (VII 157; 124–125). Kwe insists that the Beothuk "will not be disappeared" (VII 158; 129), directly countering the colonial regime of visibility that treated Shanawdithit as the last of her people. Kwe's presence introduces an alternative visual field: one in which meaning emerges through transmission and inheritance as opposed to extraction and cataloguing.

This is where the opera most decisively shifts the terms of looking. Rather than inviting the audience to look at Shanawdithit's suffering, the opera redirects attention toward recognising her continuity. Our position nevertheless remains ethically charged. We still watch her death, we still witness her final moments, and we still do so as outsiders. At the same time, the opera refuses to let that interpretive stance go unchallenged. By staging Kwe as the one who sees Shanawdithit relationally, and by shifting the final visual scene from a dying woman to an encircling community, the opera draws attention to the limits of our looking. We may see Shanawdithit's spirit depart the physical world, but we do not see what she now sees: the future, the lineage, and the generations who will take up her story.

The entrance of the Spirit Chorus intensifies this shift: banners are planted on and raised electronically above the stage while members of the Spirit Chorus encircle Shanawdithit and sing that the Beothuk will "live again" (VII 160; 148–152). Their movements replace the static ethnographic stare with the choreography of resurgence. The circling bodies, the banners, and the growing communal sound transfer the centre of visual attention away from Shanawdithit's individual passing toward a larger collective presence. In this turn, the opera enacts an ethics of looking grounded in non-possession. The audience is not invited to consume Shanawdithit's story; they are asked to acknowledge its ongoing life beyond their view.

The ethical complexity deepens when Kwe identifies these future storytellers as "the descendants of Shanawdithit" (VII 163; 174–176). This naming reframes the final image. Shanawdithit does not die as an object of colonial fascination; she dies as a mother, aunt, and ancestor, even if her descendants are relational rather than biological. We are thus repositioned, not as those who behold the last of a people, but as those who overhear the beginning of a new narrative that is not ours to author.

Compared with the other operas in this chapter, *Shanawdithit* performs an extraordinary inversion: *Filumena* and *Inês* reveal how civic and mythic structures render women into spectacles of judgement, punishment, or desire; *Oksana G.* confronts the ethical limits of representing trauma without reproducing it; and *Alexandra*, as discussed in the next section, interrogates the power of the woman who looks, exposing the colonial epistemologies embedded in acts of seeing. *Shanawdithit*, by contrast, turns attention to the violence inherent in particular forms of being looked at: being studied, interpreted, classified, and preserved.

The opera traces the long afterlife of colonial observation, a practice that sought to document the very people it helped destroy, while proposing a counter-ethic grounded in kinship,

continuity, and Indigenous presence. Its ethics of looking emerge through a refusal of the colonial terms of visibility that enabled such violence in the first place.

In the final scene, Shanawdithit leaves the stage with Kwe as the Spirit Chorus gathers around them. The opera suggests that some forms of looking must be relinquished. We cannot follow her into the next world, access the knowledge exchanged among the spirits, or enter the community she will rejoin. This withholding is not exclusionary but instructive. It models an ethics of restraint that resonates with Dylan Robinson's critique of extractive modes of listening. Such restraint suggests that care may sometimes require seeing less and relinquishing the desire to know, understand, or possess the woman onstage.

Shanawdithit offers one of the dissertation's clearest responses to Clément's critique. Rather than undoing the woman through spectacle, the opera redirects attention toward the conditions that make such looking possible. It invites the audience into a mode of looking that acknowledges its own limits through acts of witnessing that do not claim ownership and encounters that honour suffering without converting it into operatic pleasure. In doing so, it extends the chapter's central argument by showing that contemporary Canadian opera can do more than stage women's suffering: it can interrogate the visual and narrative structures that have historically shaped, constrained, or erased their lives.

3.7 *Alexandra*

Alexandra occupies an unusual place within this chapter's ethical landscape. Unlike *Filumena*, *Inês*, or *Oksana G.*, in which women are subjected to forms of scrutiny that render their suffering visible, *Alexandra* reverses the direction of looking. Whereas the preceding operas interrogate the consequences of women being seen, *Alexandra* turns the question inside out,

asking what ethical risks emerge when a woman becomes the agent of vision. At first glance, this inversion appears to free her from the structures Clément identifies as binding operatic women to pain, containment, or death. Yet the opera does not resolve the ethical problem so much as relocate it.

If opera has long made women's suffering available for viewing, *Alexandra* asks what happens when a woman becomes the one who sees rather than the one who is looked at, and what kinds of power, asymmetry, and entitlement accompany that shift. Rather than offering a stable feminist icon or anti-heroine, the opera situates Alexandra in a deliberately unstable ethical register, where autonomy, ambition, and exceptionality coexist with unease.

This tension between agency and spectatorship is built into the opera's dual structure. Alexandra the Narrator watches Alexandra the Explorer, producing a recursive dynamic of self-observation in which the self becomes both observer and subject. This split embodiment introduces reflexivity, but it also enables a form of mastery: to observe oneself is to curate one's own image, to aestheticise one's trajectory, and to frame transformation as purposeful design. The landscapes Alexandra traverses—mountains, plains, and villages—are rendered less as sites of encounter than as extensions of her interior development. Movement is marked not by exposure or risk, but by an openness that remains comparatively sheltered, allowing transformation to appear as chosen development rather than survival. The opera thus centres a woman whose defining traits of relentlessness, vision, and refusal are more often afforded to male wanderers, prophets, or seekers than to operatic women bound to suffering or sacrifice. The ethical contours of this configuration emerge early in the opera. In the opening scene, the Narrator frames her life as divided between two opposing paths. One is marked by struggle,

ambition, and the assertion of will, while the other is defined by renunciation and withdrawal. She concludes with the declaration, "I have done both" (*Moi, j'ai fait les deux*) (I 5; 31).[31]

At the same time, the Explorer articulates a powerful inner compulsion toward completion and creation, describing her journey as the fulfilment of lifelong aspirations and the path toward writing the books she has long imagined. Seeing is therefore aligned not with passive observation but with will, intention, and self-fashioning. The opera links vision, knowledge, and desire in ways that echo historical traditions of imperial exploration, where seeing functioned as a means of mapping, knowing, and claiming the world. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) helps frame this dynamic through its account of how Western systems of representation produce the Orient as an object of knowledge, constructing cultural difference through structures of authority and power. While the opera does not stage a direct allegory of colonial domination, it draws upon inherited visual habits that continue to shape how exploration and transcendence are imagined. In other words, the opera inherits a visual grammar in which exploration is imagined as an act of privileged access, allowing knowledge to be acquired through movement and observation rather than through reciprocal encounter. Alexandra's journey unfolds within this structure: she sees without being seen, learns without being challenged, and moves without being constrained.

Alexandra performs a subtle but consequential inversion of the problem that structures this chapter. Rather than staging the suffering of women for viewing, the opera risks staging a woman's entitlement. This entitlement takes the form of the capacity to look, to move, to cross borders, and to convert cultural difference into spiritual revelation. The ethics of looking thus

[31] Because the score is not paginated throughout, all page numbers cited in this chapter refer to the pagination of the PDF file rather than to page numbers in the printed score.

emerge not from the staging of gendered harm, but from the representation of gendered freedom, a freedom that remains unevenly distributed.

This dynamic becomes most explicit in the scenes of disguise and passing. When barred from forbidden territory, Alexandra erupts in indignation and boasts "If I must pass as a Tibetan, I will. A Parisian woman will pass, and they will see nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing" (*S'il faut passer pour une tibétaine, je passerai, une parisienne va passer, et ils n'y verront rien, rien, rien, rien*) (II 35–36; 262–270). Her ability to pass is theatrically framed as ingenuity, but it rests on asymmetries of race and empire that remain largely unexamined. Disguise expands her freedom of movement by allowing her to manipulate the terms of her visibility. Where other operatic women are rendered visible through objectification, Alexandra retains a degree of control over her visibility. Her mobility is framed as a spiritual quest, yet it is underwritten by privilege that insulates her from harm. Her journey is enabled not only by personal resolve but by the privileges of whiteness, material means, and colonial mobility. These conditions render her transgression possible while shielding her from consequence.

The opera does not present this configuration of mobility uncritically. Moments in which the Narrator places a hand on her younger self or reins in her bravado introduce an undercurrent of ambivalence. Alexandra's feminism is both compelling and uneasy. Her defiance of gendered restriction resonates with feminist traditions of refusal and self-determination. Stacy Wolf identifies a comparable tension in musical theatre's representation of independent women, observing that women's changing roles have often been portrayed with both "elation and anxiety," particularly when women occupy the stage alone (Wolf 2011, 20). Read through this lens, Alexandra's independence is similarly double-edged. Her agency is forged in isolation rather than coalition, driven by self-invention more than by collective transformation. Her

authority as a seer is facilitated by the fact that her sight is never recognised as dangerous. Because her vision is directed toward discovery rather than social transformation, it remains legible as curiosity rather than subversion. Her freedom is secured precisely because it does not fundamentally threaten the structures through which power circulates.

This representational imbalance becomes especially visible in the opera's depiction of Tibetan villagers, soldiers, and monks in scenes where these figures appear primarily as witnesses to Alexandra's passage rather than as agents of narrative action. These encounters are staged through a visual vocabulary that oscillates between curiosity, tension, and theatrical humour. The world Alexandra traverses repeatedly serves as a backdrop for her ingenuity and daring, rather than as a field of reciprocal encounter. Feminist film theorist and cultural critic Trinh T. Minh-ha cautions against representational practices that interpret others through the frameworks of those who observe them, while claiming the authority to speak on their behalf (Trinh 1989). While the opera does not entirely silence Tibetan figures, its dramaturgy consistently privileges Alexandra's perspective, rendering cultural and religious difference less a site of dialogue than a symbolic terrain through which her interior transformation is staged.

The opera's treatment of hardship further sharpens this contrast. In the storm sequence of scene XIV, Alexandra recounts days of starvation and disorientation, culminating in the fable-like image of boiling and eating boot leather. The scene offers suffering, but it is suffering aestheticised through sublime solitude. Even at the brink of collapse, the Narrator frames the experience in language of exhilaration rather than deprivation. The Explorer describes the pleasure of being alone, lost, and unknown, finding intoxication in solitude (*la joie d'être là / seule / perdue / inconnue / l'ivresse de la solitude*), while the Narrator evokes a profound solitude in which joy, a sense of being lost, and infinite bliss converge, leaving desire behind

(*tout au fond la joie seule / perdue / vous berce / béatitude infinie / tout au fond / laisse sans désir*). Rather than signalling terror or despair, physical extremity becomes the condition through which heightened perception and interior transformation are achieved. The result is not a theatre of victimisation but a theatre of endurance, where hardship affirms exceptionality rather than exposing harm. Yet the opera does not entirely erase the risks of this framing. Moments of physical exhaustion, disorientation, and near-collapse intermittently puncture the language of transcendence, reminding the audience that the narrative of heroic endurance is nonetheless enacted through a materially vulnerable body.

The final scenes draw these tensions into focus. Alexandra's covert entrance into Lhasa is staged as a moment of visual splendour: chanting monks, projected images, voices merging in exaltation. Her success rests on her capacity to remain unseen while seeing everything. She becomes the ultimate observer, observing a sacred city precisely because she can disappear within the visual field. This configuration makes the ethics of looking inseparable from the politics of invisibility. The opera's compression of history, geography, and political context enables philosophical intensity, but it also risks flattening complex colonial and religious encounters into symbolic shorthand for personal revelation.

The opera closes with ambivalence rather than resolution. Alexandra imagines an elemental existence of shelter, sustenance, and peace—"a cave up there, a wooden bowl, peace over all of it" (*une caverne là-haut, une écuelle de bois, paix sur tout cela*) (XVI 163; 395–398). This final vision offers neither triumph nor condemnation. Her final phrase gestures toward epistemic instability. It expresses the inclination "to doubt nothing, and to doubt everything" (*on se sent portée à ne douter de rien, et à douter de tout*) (XVI 178; 427–430). This unresolved tension becomes the opera's ethical condition. Rather than asking the audience to admire or

reject its heroine outright, the work exposes a different danger in operatic looking, namely the seductions of identification with the exceptional woman whose freedom obscures the unequal conditions that made it possible. The opera thus withholds moral clarity, compelling spectators to inhabit the discomfort between admiration and critique.

Ultimately, *Alexandra* functions as a crucial contrast within the chapter. Rather than rendering women's pain visible, the opera exposes a different ethical problem, namely the ease with which autonomy can slide into entitlement and the privileges that make looking, movement, and transcendence possible. By inviting the audience to "see the seer," the opera reframes spectatorship as a site of responsibility, insisting that looking—whether at suffering, at cultures, or at the self—is never neutral but always entangled in histories of power, privilege, and desire.

Chapter 3 Conclusion – The Ethics of Looking Reimagined

Across these seven operas, the gaze emerges as a shifting set of ethical relations rather than a single aesthetic device, shaping how women are made visible, made legible, or made to disappear. Each work probes the audience's relationship to watching from a different angle, showing that acts of attention are never merely optical but socially and historically charged: *Filumena* reveals how collective scrutiny hardens into judgment; *Inês* exposes the seductions and dangers of mythic recognition; *Oksana G.* confronts the voyeuristic risks of staging gendered violence; *Lillian Alling* frames endurance itself as a spectacle capable of producing narrative meaning; *Regina* demands attention to the violence of archival non-looking; *Shanawdithit* uncovers colonial regimes that render Indigenous women simultaneously hyper-visible and structurally erased; and *Alexandra* inverts the dynamic altogether by positioning a woman not as

the object of looking but as its agent, exercising vision as a form of power rather than being subjected to it.

Taken together, these operas insist that the ethics of looking cannot be reduced to whether harm is shown or withheld. Instead, they reveal viewing as a practice conditioned by power: who is permitted to see, who is subjected to scrutiny, who is rendered invisible, and who controls the frame through which meaning is produced. Looking operates within historical, cultural, and institutional conditions, shaped by structures of patriarchy and colonialism, by experiences of migration and trauma, and by the archival practices that shape which stories endure. While these works expose the long history of aesthetic practices that have transformed women's suffering into beauty, they also imagine new modes of attention that resist this inheritance.

From this perspective, the contemporary operas examined in this chapter do more than critique operatic convention. They also gesture towards alternative ways of witnessing. Some operas require us to remain with discomfort, refusing catharsis or narrative closure. Others foreground listening alongside or in place of looking, suggesting that memory may be held more ethically in sound than in images. Still others render seeing itself unstable, treating the act of watching as a site of risk where desire, mastery, and identification must be interrogated rather than assumed. What emerges is a shared demand for critical attention and an awareness that reception is never separate from the structures it observes.

These concerns can be situated within broader developments in contemporary opera and performance, including documentary, testimonial, and archival practices in which the representation of violence, particularly gendered violence, places heightened ethical demands on the spectator. In such contexts, the staging of suffering can resist aesthetic containment and

instead foreground the conditions under which it is seen, heard, and interpreted, reframing spectatorship as a site of responsibility rather than a mode of passive reception (Cormier 2024; Fitzpatrick 2018). Read alongside longer-standing concerns with operatic mediation, embodiment, and the redistribution of attention away from spectacle (Abbate 1991; Hutcheon and Hutcheon 1996), the works examined here extend these trajectories by situating questions of gender, voice, and visibility at the centre of their dramaturgies. Their varied approaches to closure, visibility, and spectatorship reflect a broader concern with the ethics of representation and the limits of aestheticisation in the face of historical and ongoing violence.

This chapter therefore ends with responsibility rather than closure. If the archive has failed to see women like Regina, and if the colonial visual regime has mis-seen women like Shanawdithit, then contemporary audience engagement must be accountable for how it receives, interprets, and transmits these stories. The task extends beyond correcting the record toward cultivating ways of looking that do not replicate the harms of the past. These practices acknowledge absence and fragility, honour what remains, and resist the impulse to convert suffering into narrative certainty.

The theoretical challenge posed by these operas—how to look ethically—extends beyond the theatre. It resonates with broader feminist and decolonial debates about how histories are seen, narrated, and preserved, particularly in relation to archives that have long relied on practices of spectacle, mastery, and exclusion. Feminist spectatorship and visual-culture scholarship alike have demonstrated that looking is structured by relations of power, interpretation, and responsibility (Dolan 2012; Mirzoeff 2011). At the same time, recent work on archives and historical representation cautions that making marginalised lives visible can itself

produce ethical risks when recovery becomes overconfident, aesthetically contained, or detached from the limits of what can be known (Hartman 2019; Azoulay 2019).

Read in this context, the operas considered here insist that representation carries an ongoing ethical obligation not only to what is shown but to what has been overlooked, misremembered, or erased. The labour of spectatorship thus becomes inseparable from the labour of historical responsibility. Participation, in this sense, does not mean correcting the past but receiving these histories with an awareness of their incompleteness and of the spectator's role in how they continue to circulate. To witness these women is not simply to observe them but to participate—unevenly and without guarantee—in the work of ensuring that their stories enter the future with dignity, complexity, and care.

CHAPTER 4 – PRESSURE IN THE JAR: ARIA AND THE CONDITIONS OF VOCAL SPACE

Across much of Western operatic history,[32] the aria has functioned as a formally bounded space in which emotion, vocal artistry, and character identity are brought into focus. In the operatic systems that dominated from the Baroque through the early nineteenth century, the aria operated as a closed musical unit, distinct from recitative and ensemble writing, and was designed to suspend dramatic action in order to dwell on a single affective state. It provided singers with an opportunity for technical display and expressive refinement, while offering audiences a recognisable moment of heightened lyric time. Within this framework, arias were typically positioned as expressive or rhetorical culminations, often concluding scenes or prompting a character's exit, reinforcing their role as containers of interiority rather than engines of narrative change. The standard reference entries in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001), particularly the entries on "Opera" and "Aria" (Brown et al. 2001; Westrup et al. 2001), position the aria less as a vehicle for narrative progression than as a site for the shaping of emotional space. It functions as a form that crystallises response, preserves affect, and renders psychological or ethical tension in musical terms. In this sense, the aria may be understood as a kind of vessel or jar: a structure that intensifies and contains feeling, rendering interiority legible through musical enclosure while simultaneously delimiting the conditions under which that interiority can be expressed.

Over the course of the twentieth century, and especially in contemporary operatic practice, this function has been substantially reconfigured. As distinctions between closed structures and through-composed dramaturgy blurred, the aria ceased to operate as a fixed formal

[32] This overview is necessarily selective and schematic. It does not attempt a comprehensive history of the aria across all operatic traditions but instead outlines dominant functions of the aria within Western art opera as a point of orientation for the analyses that follow.

category and instead came to signify any extended moment of vocal concentration that remains musically and dramatically salient within a larger continuum. Rather than suspending action, modern arias are often embedded within ongoing dramatic flow, functioning as moments of heightened attention rather than interruption. As Lauren Feldman (2017) has observed in her work on the shrinking opera diva, this shift has frequently coincided with a redistribution of vocal centrality, in which women's sustained lyric privilege gives way to ensemble textures, fragmented vocal writing, or dramaturgies that decentre the singular female voice. Such structural changes carry implications not only for musical form but for agency and attention: whose voice commands duration, and whose is absorbed into the collective.

Contemporary Canadian operas extend this reconfiguration further by reworking rather than abandoning the aria's traditional association with sustained lyric privilege. In several works, female characters are granted extended vocal presence, while in others, musical space is fragmented, dispersed across ensemble textures, or constrained to brief, unstable vocal statements. This chapter asks how the traditional chamber of vocal interiority is selectively preserved, reshaped, or withheld: how operas allocate or deny musical space to women and how vocal architecture continues to reproduce or challenge inherited operatic gender norms.

Scholars of opera and feminist musicology have repeatedly identified the aria as a critical site in which vocal privilege, agency, and representation are negotiated. For Clément (1988), the operatic aria functions paradoxically as both elevation and entrapment: women are granted moments of extraordinary vocal prominence precisely at points where the narrative moves toward symbolic or literal undoing, rendering the aria a space in which expressive excess compensates for structural powerlessness. In this sense, the aria becomes the glass of the jar: transparent and radiant yet enclosing, a structure that showcases the diva even as it prepares her

disappearance. Susan McClary (2002) similarly argues that operatic musical structures encode expectations about whose subjectivity is permitted expansion and closure, locating vocal display within broader gendered regimes of listening. Extending these concerns into contemporary operatic dramaturgy, Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon (1996), in *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*, observe that contemporary operatic writing redistributes vocal authority across ensembles and fragmented textures, reconfiguring earlier aria-centred hierarchies while often leaving intact underlying dynamics of attention and visibility. Suzanne Cusick's work on voice and gender—particularly her essay "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music" (1999b)—further sharpens this lens by framing singing not simply as expression but as embodied labour: effortful, disciplined, and culturally coded in gendered terms, while also challenging the assumption that musical experience can be understood apart from the body that produces it.

From a philosophical and performative perspective, Carolyn Abbate (1991), in *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*, draws attention to the voice itself as a fleeting site of agency that emerges only in the moment of performance, suggesting that operatic subjectivity is less a stable possession than an event produced through acts of sounding. This position both aligns with and departs from earlier feminist critiques of the aria. Like Clément and McClary, Abbate recognises that vocal prominence does not necessarily translate into structural power. However, where Clément and McClary emphasise the aria as a site of containment within broader narrative and tonal systems, Abbate relocates agency to the ephemeral present of performance itself, foregrounding the sounding voice as an embodied event that briefly exceeds those structures. Read alongside Cusick's emphasis on vocal labour and the Hutcheons' attention to the redistribution of vocal space in contemporary opera, these

perspectives offer multiple frameworks for understanding how operatic voice is organised, experienced, and allocated rather than a single theory of the aria.

More recent analyses further demonstrate how vocal construction itself participates in the production of female subjectivity. Joy H. Calico's (2019) study of the two versions of Clémence in Kaija Saariaho's *L'amour de loin*, for example, shows how revisions to tessitura and vocal writing can produce substantially different characterisations of the same heroine, leading Calico to describe the two versions as differently "envoiced." Margaret Cormier (2024) and Lisa Fitzpatrick (2018) examine how contemporary works allocate durational vocal space or strategically restrict it, demonstrating that the presence or absence of extended lyric time remains a key mechanism through which operas articulate gendered power. Taken together, these perspectives frame the aria not merely as a formal genre but as an acoustic structure through which authority, interiority, and narrative legitimacy are distributed.

Revisiting the jar metaphor in light of these frameworks can help to bring the distribution of vocal authority into sharper focus. If the aria functions as a musical chamber, the question becomes not only what it contains but whose voices are permitted to resonate within it. Contemporary operas do not simply inherit this vessel; they construct it, fracture it, resist it, or withhold it altogether. The chamber may amplify, but it may also exclude. The question therefore extends beyond who is given an aria to consider what forms of presence become audible or remain structurally unavailable through the allocation of vocal space.

Tracing these patterns through close attention to both text and musical structure—reading music not as an abstract tonal system but as dramaturgical agent shaping space, time, and agency—this chapter evaluates whether the critiques articulated by Clément and McClary regarding the aria as a site of female containment, compensation, or spectacle continue to hold,

and how these concerns intersect with broader feminist accounts of representational constraint advanced by scholars such as Cormier and Fitzpatrick.

To situate this inquiry methodologically, it is also necessary to clarify what this chapter does not attempt. Following Dylan Robinson's critique of hungry listening, I do not approach these operas as aesthetic resources to be consumed, decoded, or mastered, nor do I treat withheld vocal space as a deficiency requiring repair. Rather than extracting coherence from fragmentation or compensating for absence with interpretive fullness, the analysis remains attentive to the conditions under which musical space is granted, restricted, or dispersed. In a related vein, Saidiya Hartman's (2019, 548-550) refusal of "archival gratitude" cautions against framing recovery as rescue. Where these operas withhold lyric expansion, fracture duration, or disperse subjectivity, I resist the impulse to restore wholeness or impose narrative closure. The task is not to redeem the jar but to examine how it is built, cracked, or refused and what those structures reveal about the distribution of vocal agency.

This chapter unfolds across five interrelated sections, each organised around a distinct question concerning vocal space, duration, and gendered agency in contemporary opera. Together, they move from the presence of extended aria space to its dissolution, redistribution, and transformation, tracing how vocal architecture continues to mediate power.

The opening section, "The Aria as Chamber: Agency, Compensation, or Pressure Release," revisits the aria as a bounded musical chamber and asks what it accomplishes when granted to female protagonists. Does extended lyric duration function as genuine agency—a space of self-articulation and interior sovereignty—or does it operate compensatorily, offering expressive expansion precisely where narrative power is denied? Alternatively, might the aria serve as a pressure valve within a constraining dramaturgy, releasing affect without altering

structural conditions? This section focuses on *Filumena*, *Inês*, and *Regina*, and evaluates whether sustained vocal privilege produces transformation or merely reinforces containment.

The second section, "The Relational Chamber: Redistribution and Collective Voice," turns to *Shanawdithit*, where the aria does not disappear but cannot stabilise as a self-contained lyrical unit. Rather than consolidating into a solitary chamber of expression, vocal space becomes permeable and distributed across chorus, spirit voices, and overlapping vocal lines. The question is therefore not simply whether the protagonist receives extended vocal duration, but how that duration is structured and shared within a broader sonic field. In *Shanawdithit*, vocal presence does not always gather around a singular lyrical subject but emerges through relational textures in which the individual voice intertwines with collective sound. Through choral layering, distributed textual fragments, and the circulation of Shanawdithit's name across multiple voices, the opera reconfigures the lyric chamber as a communal space of transmission. Vocal authority no longer resides in autonomous enclosure but in a network of voices through which memory and story are carried forward.

The third section, "The Empty Chamber: Denial and Withholding," turns to *Oksana G.*, in which the aria chamber does not form for the protagonist at all. In this opera, the chamber is not merely unstable; it is withheld at the level of vocal allocation. Although the opera bears the name of its central character and follows the trajectory of her suffering, Oksana herself is never granted the extended vocal architecture traditionally associated with operatic subjectivity. Instead, lyrical expansion is redistributed to other characters, most notably the male figures whose arioso passages dominate the opera's reflective musical space. The question therefore shifts from whether women receive vocal duration to what it means when that duration is withheld from the very figure whose story the opera tells. By examining absence as

compositional strategy, this section considers how the refusal of lyric enclosure reshapes the politics of listening, denying the audience the familiar catharsis of the operatic aria and exposing the structural relationship between vocal duration and narrative authority.

The fourth section, "The Revealing Voice: Testimony and Narrative Disclosure," examines moments in which extended vocal space functions less as lyrical expansion than as the emergence of historical truth. The question shifts from whether a protagonist receives an aria to what the voice discloses when it is finally granted sustained duration. Rather than serving primarily as an expressive outlet, vocal space becomes a site of narration, memory, and belated recognition. This section focuses on *Lillian Alling*, where the protagonist is ultimately afforded substantial musical space not to celebrate triumph or articulate interior feeling, but to reveal the past that has remained obscured throughout the opera. In scenes such as the prairie encounter (scene V) and the extended confession (scene XII), Lillian's voice becomes the medium through which the narrative's hidden history emerges. The aria therefore functions less as a chamber of affect than as an acoustic archive: a space in which personal testimony and historical revelation unfold in real time.

The fifth section, "The Witnessing Voice: Doubling and Self-Narration," turns to *Alexandra*, where vocal authority is distributed across two manifestations of the same protagonist. Rather than consolidating into a single lyrical subject, the voice is divided between Alexandra the Narrator and Alexandra the Explorer, creating a layered architecture of speech, song, and memory. The opera therefore reframes vocal space not as a chamber inhabited by one voice but as a dialogue between temporal selves: the reflective voice that recounts experience and the embodied voice that enacts it. In this structure, agency does not emerge through the accumulation of extended lyrical duration but through self-witnessing. Spoken narration, hybrid

speech-song textures, and recurring refrains allow the protagonist to observe, reinterpret, and ultimately inhabit her own journey from multiple temporal perspectives. The result is a dispersed vocal subjectivity in which presence is constructed through doubling rather than singularity.

4.1 The Aria as Chamber: Agency, Compensation, or Pressure Release

4.1 a) *Filumena* – The Storm Arias[33]

Act I – Scene I: First Storm Aria

There will be a storm tonight, I love a storm.
When there is nowhere safe in sight, and nowhere warm.
Yes, I could run to somewhere safe when dark clouds swarm,
but I love, I love a storm!

The wind does a dance with the grass and the trees!
The rain plays a drum, and so does the thunder!
The rivers escape from their walls of stone,
and all of the earth is reeling with wonder!

Along comes a storm to make everything new,
to scatter the lies and leave only what's true!
Along comes the storm with its magical power,
and all of the earth is changed in an hour!

There will be a storm tonight, to wash me clean,
to share the earth and make the heart once more serene.
I would love to live a life the size of storms,
Oh, I love, I love a storm.

[33] Although the composer does not designate them as such, the two songs are commonly referred to as the "Storm arias." For ease of reference, this dissertation distinguishes them as the "first Storm aria" (act I) and the "second Storm aria" (act II). In the audio files, the corresponding tracks are titled "There Will Be a Storm Tonight" and "May God Forgive Him," respectively.

Act II – Scene IX: Second Storm Aria

I thought we shared a dream,
but all we shared was our mistake,
and now our dying.

Another hour, and I will see God's face.
I will ask Him, I will ask Him "What is true? What is true…"
E alora, e alora, Io sarò felice, Mamma,
I will learn what it means to be happy,
inside my heart, inside God's heart,
I will have my own name.

And, although we will live apart now,
I will be with you forever,
in the winter in the springtime,
in the snow, in the rain,
forever Filumena, forever, forever, forever, forever!

There will be a storm tonight… I loved a storm!
When there was nowhere safe in sight, and nowhere warm!
I could have run to somewhere safe, free from all harm, but I loved a storm.
A storm to lift the heart,
a storm that's just for me,
come, storm, and let me fly…
Come, death, and set me free!

To examine how operatic space produces and limits female agency, this chapter begins with two parallel yet divergent moments: *Filumena*'s storm arias in Acts I and II. Positioned at radically different dramatic thresholds, these extended lyric passages trace a trajectory from volitional expansion to retrospective recognition. Read together, they offer not simply a meteorological metaphor, but a sustained meditation on scale, risk, and selfhood. The storm is not something that happens to Filumena; it becomes a condition of being that she actively embraces.

From the outset, the score translates Filumena's aspiration for magnitude into musical motion. The first storm aria begins in *moderato* (♩ = 56), but the tempo accelerates rapidly once

she declares her attraction to the storm. Following the line "I love a storm" (I-I 54; 593–595), the music shifts to *più mosso* (♩ = 92), with the score marked *accelerando poco a poco*, reaching *allegro molto* (♩ = 144) only a few bars later as Filumena begins to describe the storm's elements (see Musical Example 1). The accompaniment erupts into continuous sixteenth-note motion, generating a sustained rhythmic turbulence that carries through to "I would love to live a life the size of storms" (I-I 59; 648–651). At that point, the texture changes: the accompaniment becomes chordal, marked *sforzando piano*, while Filumena sings "A storm to lift the heart. A storm that's just for me" (I-I 60; 660–663). The rhythmic profile shifts again from triplet propulsion in "Come, storm, and let me fly!" (I-I 60; 664–665) to broader quarter- and half-note values in "Come storm, come storm, come storm and set me free" (I-I 60; 666–673). What begins as kinetic acceleration gradually opens into rhythmic breadth, as though the storm itself were expanding the sonic space available to the voice.

The first storm aria opens in the future tense: "There will be a storm tonight" (I-I 54; 583–584). The certainty of 'will' suggests inevitability, yet what follows is not apprehension but desire: "I love a storm" (I-I 54; 585–586). This declaration unfolds alongside a conditional alternative—"I could run to somewhere safe" (I-I 54; 591)—but that possibility remains suspended rather than enacted. Safety is articulated as a grammatical option rather than a realised path. Filumena is not depicted as lacking recourse; rather, she appears to refuse containment.

From there, the aria expands into a lexicon of renewal and exposure. The storm is imagined to "make everything new," "scatter the lies," and "leaves only what's true" (I-I 56–57; 614–618), language that frames it less as destruction than as purification. Nature is rendered as already theatrical: the wind "does a dance," the rain "plays a drum," and the thunder effect merges with the orchestral texture (I-I 55; 599–603). Even before the score intensifies, the text

has established the storm as aesthetic force: “[a]long comes the storm with its magical power, and all of the earth is changed in an hour” (I-I 57; 619–624). Its magnitude extends beyond meteorology and is brought into relation with the human heart when Filumena declares that the storm will “shake the earth and make the heart once more serene” (I-I 58–59; 640–646). The crucial line—“I would love to live a life the size of storms” (I-I 59; 648–651)—clarifies the metaphor’s function, and the storm becomes a figure for scale (see Musical Example 3). Filumena does not articulate a desire for protection, stability, or safety. What she names instead is magnitude. Within an operatic tradition in which women are often circumscribed within domestic, relational, or symbolic confines, such an aspiration resists reduction. If the “killing jar” operates as a metaphor for enclosure, the storm emerges as its counter-image: expansiveness, exposure, and excess.

What is striking, then, is how thinly its alternative is. imagine. The “somewhere safe” (I-I 54; 591) is never described and it also carries no sensory detail, no warmth, and no relational specificity. It seems to exist only as a grammatical possibility. By contrast, the storm is sensorially saturated; kinetic, audible, and embodied. Although safety is linguistically available, it is imaginatively impoverished. In this asymmetry, the aria unsettles the conventional operatic equation of feminine fulfilment with protection or enclosure. Containment is possible, but it is simply not compelling.

The imbalance also clarifies the conditions of her choice. To prefer the storm is not merely to embrace danger, but to privilege scale over security and intensity over preservation. The risk is explicit, yet the alternative feels diminished. The aria thus stages ambition not as hubris but as appetite: a longing for largeness in a world that repeatedly offers reduction.

At the level of pitch organisation[34], this expansion is mirrored in a harmonic field that becomes increasingly fluid as the aria unfolds. At its outset, sustained sonorities and a relatively slow rate of harmonic change provide a provisional ground for Filumena's initial articulation of desire. As the storm gathers momentum, increased chromatic activity and textural density make the pitch organisation progressively less stable, paralleling the acceleration and continuous motion of the accompaniment. Rather than progressing toward a securely established tonal destination, the changing harmonic field participates in the aria's broader movement toward greater expressive breadth.

In this way, the aria does not depend upon teleological harmonic movement for its expressive trajectory, privileging what Carolyn Abbate (1991) terms the phenomenal voice, the immediacy of vocal utterance and embodied presence, over structural resolution. Moments of heightened kinetic energy, particularly in the storm-driven passages, further loosen the sense of stable pitch organisation. Rapid repeating figures and shifting pitch collections emphasise motion, texture, and affect rather than harmonic progression. Near the close, this kinetic energy intensifies as Filumena's repeated invocation, "Come storm," accelerates through *poco stringendo* toward the *Vivo* declaration "set me free!" The sudden eruption of rapid piano figuration heightens this moment without providing a corresponding sense of harmonic arrival. The aria thus functions as a chamber in which musical space expands and contracts without yielding conventional resolution, allowing Filumena's voice to occupy an enlarged expressive field while remaining structurally contained within it.

[34] References to tonal centres throughout this dissertation should be understood as analytical interpretations rather than fixed designations. Particularly where tonal orientation remains ambiguous, the music may admit multiple readings.

Filumena's aria in act II, however, subtly rewrites this grammar. The shift from present to past tense recasts the earlier declaration as retrospection: "I loved a storm" (II-IX 302; 202–203). When Filumena sings: "When there was nowhere safe in sight… I could have run…" (II-IX 303–304; 205–210), the earlier syntactic pattern returns but the conditional now takes on counterfactual weight. The 'could' that once signalled capacity begins to resonate as a belated possibility. And yet the phrase that follows—"but I loved, I loved a storm" (II-IX 304; 211–214)—resists full self-revision. The choice is revisited but it is not disavowed and ambivalence seems to replace the earlier certainty.

Between these mirrored storm refrains, a quieter confession surfaces: "I thought we shared a dream" (II-IX 300; 134–135). The dream remains unnamed, yet it gestures toward the promise of another life, perhaps the future Picariello appeared to extend. If the storm in Act I signified transformation and amplitude, Act II reveals how that expansiveness was entangled with misrecognition: "All we shared was our mistake" (II-IX 300; 135–136). What once seemed like shared ascent resolves into asymmetry. The dream does not simply collapse; it is reclassified.

Within this altered temporal and emotional frame, the storm's meaning shifts. In act I, it calls toward flight—"Come, storm, and let me fly" (I-I 60; 664–665). In act II, the syntax darkens almost imperceptibly: "Come, death, and set me free" (II-IX 305; 226–227). The parallelism is unmistakable. Storm and death are placed in structural equivalence, as though magnitude and annihilation now occupy the same grammatical space. The desire for transcendence persists, even as the conditions for its realisation appear to narrow.

In this instance, the opera brushes against a familiar operatic pattern in which female excess is resolved through annihilation. One might hear an echo of the structure Clément

identifies (1988), in which the woman who exceeds containment is ultimately silenced. And yet Filumena's trajectory does not settle easily into that schema. She does not renounce her attraction to magnitude; even at the threshold of death, she continues to frame the storm as something chosen rather than imposed. What shifts is not her desire for scale, but the sphere in which that scale can be realised.

The theological turn—"I will see God's face / I will have my own name" (II-IX 299 145–147 and II-IX 301–302; 169–171)—reconfigures the storm's earlier imagery of purification. In Act I, the storm promises to "wash [Filumena] clean" (I-I 58; 637–638) and to "leave only what's true" (I-I 57; 617–618), with cleansing figured as elemental force. In act II, that language is transposed into a register of divine encounter. To "have my own name" (II-IX 301–302; 169–170) suggests a form of recognition unmediated by exchange, contract, or misreading, rather than one grounded in social designation. The site of truth shifts from weather to witness. Where the storm once promised expansion within the world, death perhaps now appears to offer recognition of the self beyond it.

The music of act II scene IX reinforces this shift. Where the earlier storm aria accelerates toward rhythmic turbulence, the final scene unfolds in an atmosphere of restraint. The tempo settles into adagio (♩ = 60) beginning around m. 142, and the dynamic field is dominated by *piano*, *pianissimo*, and even *pianississimo*, frequently marked *dolce*, producing a sustained condition of stillness (see Musical Example 2). Only brief indications of *poco più mosso* (mm. 164, 173, 196) disturb this prevailing calm, momentarily exposing the instability contained beneath the scene's restrained surface. Within this restrained field, the two *forte* markings—on "storm" and "warm" in "I loved a storm" and "when there was nowhere safe in sight and nowhere warm!" (II-IX 203–208)—register as momentary ruptures rather than expansions (see

Musical Example 4). These intensifications do not generate forward motion or reopen the expressive space established in act I; instead, they flare briefly and are immediately reabsorbed into the prevailing softness. The section closes *molto sostenuto* (♩ = 72) around m. 214, punctuated by the delicate entrance of bells, which return again near the end of the scene. The sustained rhythmic agitation of act I has disappeared; in its place, the music sustains a spacious, suspended calm.

The arc, then, is less a movement from optimism to despair than a relocation of aspiration. It moves from expansion-within-life to expansion-beyond-life: the metaphor persists, but its horizon shifts. What the world proves unable to sustain—a life "the size of storms" (I-I 59; 650–651)—is reimagined as possible only through transcendence.

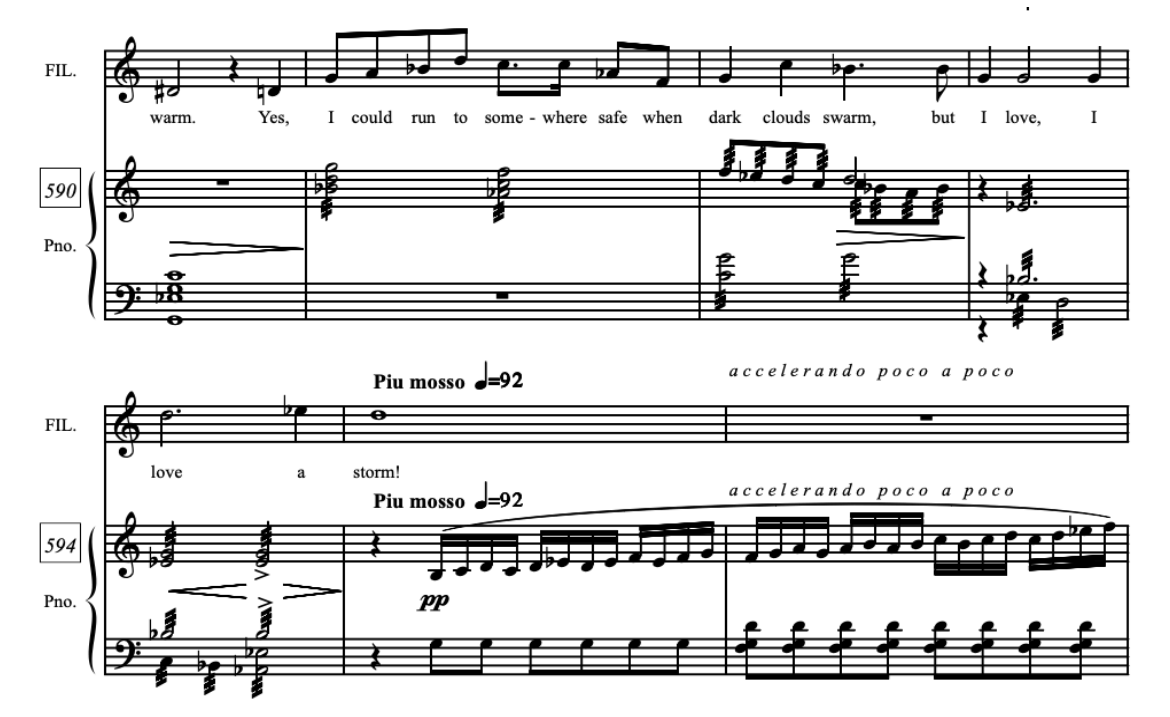
Musically, the contrast between the two storm arias therefore lies less in a movement between clearly differentiated tonal or modal fields than in the different ways musical energy is permitted to develop. In act I, shifts of tempo, increasingly continuous piano figuration, and growing textural density allow the storm music to gather and sustain momentum, creating an expanded expressive field around Filumena's voice. In act II, comparable intensifications repeatedly fail to generate sustained expansion. Brief increases in tempo and dynamics are followed by returns to slower tempi and softer textures, while the recalled storm refrain emerges *piano, dolce* and is interrupted only momentarily by isolated *forte* outbursts. Even the textual return of "come, storm, and let me fly" remains restrained, leading not into the kinetic release of act I but toward the *ritenuto* transformation, "Come, death, and set me free." The second aria thus reconfigures the chamber not as a space in which expressive energy accumulates and expands, but as one in which moments of intensity are repeatedly contained and returned to stillness. Yet the storm also retains the trace of dream. To long for a life "the size of storms" is to

imagine scale beyond one's allotted sphere, to desire amplitude where social and economic structures have repeatedly enforced reduction. In this sense, the storm becomes inseparable from aspiration itself: not fantasy, but enlargement. Act II does not reveal the dream to have been naïve. Rather, it exposes how thoroughly that dream exceeded the frameworks designed to contain Filumena.

The tragedy, then, lies less in her desire than in the conditions that render such enlargement unliveable. The final scene also introduces an unexpected gesture of continuity. Filumena addresses her mother, promising that although they will live apart, she will remain present "in the winter, in the springtime, in the snow, in the rain" (II-IX 302; 176–180). The repetition that follows—"Forever Filumena, forever, forever, forever" (II-IX 302; 180–190)—is striking. At the very moment when the narrative approaches extinction, the text insists on persistence. The phrase may be heard as a fragile assertion of identity against erasure: not simply the survival of memory, but the insistence that her name will endure beyond the life that could not contain it. Filumena does not perish because she desired too much; she perishes because the world offers no durable space for a life of that scale.

Read together, the four musical examples in this section trace a shift from expansion to containment across acts I and II. Examples 1 and 3 (act I) demonstrate how rhythmic acceleration, textural density, and registral expansion generate a progressively enlarged expressive field, culminating in Filumena's articulation of a life "the size of storms." By contrast, Examples 2 and 4 (act II) reveal a reconfigured musical environment: sustained stillness replaces the continuous rhythmic propulsion of act I, while heightened intensity appears only as brief, unsustainable ruptures within an otherwise restrained field. The trajectory is therefore not one of simple reduction, but of reorganisation. Where act I allows the voice to expand within and

against its constraints, act II confines it to a space in which expression persists without the capacity to enlarge. Musical motion, texture, and dynamic profile thus participate directly in the transformation of the aria's chamber from a site of pressured expansion to one of contained persistence.



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Musical Example 1 – *Filumena* (I-I 54–55; 595–600)



Musical Example 2 – *Filumena* (II-IX 300; 142–147)



Musical Example 3 – *Filumena* (I-I 58; 648–654)



Musical Example 4 – *Filumena* (II-IX 303–304; 203–208)

4.1 b) *Inês*

"*Andei sozinha*" (scene II), "*Um lindo jovem*" (scene IV), and "*Um melro cantou*" (scene IX)

In *Filumena*, the storm arias test the aria as chamber under conditions of illusion and confinement. In *Inês*, the three fado-based solos reframe that chamber, and the opera establishes a portable vocal space that travels with its protagonist. Unlike the nineteenth-century court aria—architecturally bounded and socially embedded—this chamber is constituted through musical idiom rather than physical setting. The intimate sound world of fado—guitar-inflected textures, flexible rhythmic sway, and harmonies that tend to circulate rather than drive toward a fixed point of arrival—creates a musical space through which migration, longing, and displacement can be articulated. Within this sonic terrain, vocal presence does not expand outward through orchestral accumulation, as in *Filumena*'s storm arias, but persists within a circulating harmonic field that moves, remembers, and returns. The chamber opened by the fados is therefore not only lyrical but migratory: a culturally inflected space that accompanies the singer rather than contains her. The central question of this chapter thus persists in altered form: when Inês is granted extended vocal duration, does that space function as agency, compensation, or containment? The answer unfolds progressively across the three scenes.

"*Andei sozinha*" (scene II)

Portuguese	**English translation**
Andei sozinha	I walked alone
Numa cidade desconhecida	in an unknown city
Portase rostos encontrei fechadas	I found closed doors and closed faces
Enquanto cismava	While I wondered
P'la noite fora	Throughout the night
Lembreime doamor perdido	I remembered lost love
Andei sozinha	I walked alone
Commedo do escuro	Afraid of the dark
e do p'rigo	and of danger
Commedo de passos	Afraid of footsteps
que não eram seus	that weren't his
Vimparao porto	I came to the port
E no mar revolto	And in the stormy sea
Chorei Lágrimas salgadas	I cried salty tears
Só uma coisa me podia consolar	Only one thing could console me
Vinho, vinho da cor de sangue,	Wine, wine the colour of blood,
O sangue que ele d'rramou por mim,	Oh blood that he shed for me,
Que ele d'rramou por mim.	That he shed for me.

"*Um lindo jovem*" (scene IV)

Portuguese	**English translation**
Um lindo jovem prendeu	A handsome young man held
La la la la la la la	La la la la la la la
Prendeu ummelro en suas mãos	Held the blackbird in his hands
Mas por quanto tempo,	But for how long,
Mas por quanto tempo?	But for how long?
Ela beijou os seus lábios	She kissed his lips
La la la la la la la	La la la la la la la
E, então, voou livre	And then she flew free
Mas por quanto tempo,	But for how long,
Mas por quanto tempo?	But for how long?
Amava voar livre	She loved to fly free
Amava o jovem	She loved the young man
Amava voar livre	She loved to fly free
Mas por quanto tempo,	But for how long,
Mas por quanto tempo?	But for how long?
Um lindo jovem prendeu	A handsome young man held
La la la la la la la	La la la la la la la
Prendeu ummelro en suas mãos,	Held the blackbird in his hands,
Mas por quanto tempo,	But for how long,
Mas por quanto tempo?	But for how long?

"*Um melro cantou*" (scene IX)
Inês with interjections by Maria

Portuguese	**English translation**
Um melro cantou na figueira	A blackbird sang in the fig tree
La la la la la la la	La la la la la la la
Cantou de coração partido	It sang with a broken heart
Mas por quanto tempo,	But for how long,
Mas para quanto tempo?	But for how long?
O melro voou sobre montes e vales	The blackbird flew over hills and valleys
	(Maria: I am the mother of Pedro Carmona)
ou como seamada moresse	Or as if its beloved had died
	(Maria: You have corrupted my son)
Quanto tempo,	How long,
	(Maria: You have poisoned his mind)
Mas por quanto tempo?	But for how long?
	(Maria: You have poisoned his heart!)
Um camponês disoarou	A farmer took aim
	(Maria: Our flesh and blood
	Will not be poisoned)
mas falhou o tiro!	But missed the shot!
O melro cantou, outra vez	The blackbird sang again
A sua canção!	Its song!
	(Maria: Our flesh and blood
	Will not be poisoned by yours)
Quando eu canto, vivo	When I sing, I live
La la la la la la la	La la la la la la la
	(La la la la la la la) mocking Inês
Quando cantou, ela amame	When it sang, she loved me
(Maria: *Mas para quanto tempo)*	(Maria: But for how long)
Mas por quanto tempo,	
(Maria: *Mas por quanto tempo*)	(Maria: But for how long)
Mas por quanto tempo? (together)	But for how long

Inês's first extended vocal space appears at the opening of scene II. She sings alone in a Portuguese nightclub, introduced in the score as "glamourous [sic] in traditional Fadista black" (II 23; 1–3). The narrative action pauses while she performs "*Andei sozinha,*" a fado-inflected song in Portuguese that begins with the line "I walked alone… in an unknown city" (*Andei sozinha… numa cidade desconhecida*) (II 23; 1–4). The music situates her voice within the intimate sound world of fado rather than operatic declamation. Acoustic guitar and pizzicato contrabass establish a lightly articulated accompaniment whose repeated figures circulate beneath the vocal line. Marked "floating" (♩ = 96–100), the opening texture creates harmonic motion without directing that motion toward a decisive cadential goal. In mm. 5–8, the guitar chords shift through intervallic relationships centred on minor thirds, with limited common-tone retention between successive sonorities. Rather than generating functional harmonic progression, this intervallic pattern allows the harmony to move while resisting a clear point of arrival (see Musical Example 5). The resulting sense of circulation supports the scene's suspended dramatic quality: the music remains in motion even as narrative action temporarily gives way to Inês's song.

Within this suspended musical frame, Inês's vocal line unfolds in a restrained, syllabic idiom ,and she begins quietly with "I walked alone" (*andei sozinha*) (II 23; 1–2). The melody remains within a narrow range, shaped by stepwise motion and sustained tones. A gentle rhythmic undulation, created by varied note values within the 6/4 metre, evokes the rhythmic flexibility associated with fado performance, supporting textual clarity without generating strong dramatic propulsion. The line does not strive toward operatic expansion; instead, it remains within the intimacy of confession. As the text extends to "in an unknown city" (*numa cidade desconhecida*) (II 23; 3–5), the ensemble remains sparse and transparent. The guitar continues its

lightly circulating figures while the contrabass punctuates the harmonic field with isolated *pizzicato* tones. The recurring accompaniment pattern creates rhythmic continuity even as the sonorities shift, avoiding a strong sense of harmonic arrival. The music mirrors the thematic content of the text—solitude in an unfamiliar city—through a sonic language that circles rather than advances.

This circularity deepens as the scene unfolds. When the violin enters *colla voce* (m. 9), moving closely with the vocal line in a soft, *legato* counterline, the timbral field expands only slightly, preserving the intimacy of the texture. Even moments of recollection—such as the line "I remembered the lost love" (*lembrei-me do amor perdido*) (II 24; 14–16)—remain within a similar restrained melodic range. Memory is not dramatised through a marked harmonic shift or registral ascent; instead, it seems to linger within a gently circulating harmonic field. The aria thus opens what might be described as a chamber of recollection: a space in which time stretches rather than drives forward.

The refrain-like return of "*Andei sozinha*" reinforces this condition. Each recurrence returns to similar melodic material, flexible rhythmic inflection, and soft dynamics, without developing toward climactic expansion. Even when the text gestures outward toward movement and departure—"I came to the port" (*Vim para o porto*) (II 24–25; 25–27)—the music resists dramatic intensification. The accompaniment remains lightly articulated, and the vocal line continues to hover within the same expressive vocabulary. What emerges is not a passage driven by cadential arrival, but a recurring musical pattern in which solitude and motion coexist.

This sense of suspended motion is reinforced by the scene's pitch organisation. Rather than remaining anchored to a single clearly established tonal centre, the accompaniment moves through changing sonorities organised by recurring intervallic and rhythmic patterns. The

shifting guitar chords heard in measures 5–8 establish this principle early in the fado: the recurring rhythmic and registral gesture is retained while its pitch content changes, producing movement without conventional cadential direction. As the scene unfolds, the familiar guitar figures recur while their pitch content shifts, and later passages become increasingly chromatic. Harmonic change therefore contributes to the music's sense of motion without consistently directing it toward structural arrival. The result is a musical environment in which recurrence and change coexist, aligning with the scene's broader articulation of migratory presence.

A brief *crescendo* later in the scene (m. 34+) slightly enlarges the sonic space around the voice, as the ensemble texture becomes fuller and the vocal line extends across longer tones. The expansion, however, remains carefully contained. The dynamic swell heightens emotional intensity without transforming the scene into operatic spectacle. When the ensemble reaches *forte* at m. 40 and immediately begins to recede, the earlier intimacy returns almost at once. The music contracts back into softness just as Pedro enters (m. 47), ending Inês's solitary vocal space. Rather than establishing a dramatic turning point, the scene creates a temporal condition in which narrative action is suspended. Until Pedro's entrance, there are no interruptions from other characters; the nightclub remains backgrounded, and the opera affords Inês a sustained duration of sound in which her presence unfolds independently of the plot.

In Abbate's (1991) terms, Inês's circumstances remain unchanged at the level of narrative (gnostic) voice—she is still economically and emotionally vulnerable within diasporic space—yet her singing activates the phenomenal voice, occupying time and sound in ways that exceed those conditions. The aria does not describe sovereignty but enacts it, allowing the audience to experience her presence as acoustic fact.

The musical language reinforces this condition of suspended narrative. As the recurring accompaniment patterns and shifting sonorities described above demonstrate, harmonic change produces motion without consistently directing that motion toward cadential arrival. Rhythmic vitality nevertheless keeps the musical surface active, creating a tension between movement and destination. Such circulation resonates with the migratory temporality suggested by the text itself: movement without settlement, presence without permanence. The chamber suspends narrative without transforming it.

The temporal sovereignty established in scene II, where Inês commands duration but not destiny, begins to destabilise in scene IV when the conditions of the fado chamber shift. The musical language remains recognisably the same—guitar-inflected accompaniment, flexible syllabic vocal writing, and harmonic circulation rather than teleological drive—but the expressive logic shifts. Where the earlier fado allowed Inês simply to inhabit duration, the second introduces a question that renders that duration uncertain. The recurring refrain "But for how long?" (*Mas por quanto tempo?*) transforms time from a medium of presence into a source of anxiety. The chamber remains intact, but it now carries the first signs of fragility as its modal field begins to admit the possibility of closure or interruption without yet relinquishing its underlying continuity.

As in the earlier fado, recurring instrumental figures provide the musical framework for Inês's vocal line, but scene IV gives these patterns greater rhythmic momentum. Marked *più mosso* (♩ = 108–112), the opening is animated by continuous lively figuration in the piano and violin, with acoustic guitar and *pizzicato* contrabass adding further rhythmic articulation. The resulting surface is more propulsive than that of scene II, even as repetition continues to organise the music. Scene IV thus intensifies the tension already present in the first fado: musical motion

becomes more insistent, while recurrence continues to shape the boundaries within which that motion unfolds.

This tension becomes more pronounced when the vocal line turns to imagery of flight across the hills. At m. 24, Inês sings "I loved to fly free" (*Amava voar livre*) over a newly established accompaniment pattern that persists beneath successive fragments of the text. The image of flight therefore coincides with a change in musical environment, but not with an escape from repetition itself. Instead, the recurring accompaniment provides a persistent framework within which the vocal line articulates its imagery of freedom. When the earlier carefree material returns at rehearsal B, the contrast becomes particularly pointed: Inês's imagined freedom is articulated within a musical structure that repeatedly returns her to previously established material.

The refrain "*Mas por quanto tempo?*" emerges as the central expressive gesture of the passage. Unlike the more suspended quality of the first fado, scene IV places the refrain within a faster and more rhythmically insistent musical environment. Its recurrence interrupts the imagery of flight with the same unresolved question, so that repetition functions less as repose than as a persistent return. The distinction between the two scenes therefore lies not simply in their shared use of recurring patterns, but in the different expressive force those patterns acquire: scene II suspends Inês within a comparatively floating musical space, while scene IV subjects her imagined freedom to a more insistent cycle of motion and return. The refrain crystallises this tension, repeatedly bringing the question of duration back into the foreground (see Musical Example 6).

Within this environment, the fado chamber itself begins to lose its stability. Inês still occupies an extended lyrical space, but the recurring question "But for how long?" (*Mas por*

quanto tempo?) makes the duration of that space newly precarious. Where scene II allowed the voice to inhabit time with relative security, scene IV repeatedly draws attention to its possible limit. The instability therefore lies less in harmonic displacement than in the erosion of temporal assurance: recurrence no longer simply sustains Inês's presence but continually asks how long that presence can endure. The audience's prior knowledge of the historical legend of Inês de Castro gives that question additional weight, allowing the possibility of interruption to enter a chamber that has not yet been broken.

Inês remains sovereign at the level of the sounding voice, her singing filling the chamber with vitality, sustained by the rhythmic energy of the accompaniment and the warmth of the melodic line. Yet the narrative trajectory unfolds under the pressure of foreknowledge, as the audience already knows that her story will culminate in death. As Abbate (1991) argues, the phenomenal present of the voice collides with the narrative inevitability embedded in the myth, a tension given musical form in the refrain "for how long?" The aria cannot prevent the future that awaits Inês, but it complicates its anticipation: the audience has already inhabited the fullness of her sounding presence. In turn, the vitality of the phenomenal voice resists reducing her to a symbolic victim of historical narrative.

Scene IV thus transforms the fado chamber established earlier. While the space continues to grant duration and presence, that duration now appears fragile. The chamber shelters the voice, but the question that haunts the scene—"for how long?"—reveals the limits of that protection. What emerges is a moment of suspended foreknowledge: the aria neither resolves the anxiety it introduces nor collapses under its weight, sustaining instead the tension between vitality and inevitability, as musical recurrence continues without offering structural escape. It is

precisely this fragility that scene IX brings into focus, testing the chamber under conditions of imminent rupture.

Scene IX returns to the fado chamber under radically altered conditions. By this point in the opera, the audience already carries the weight of the historical legend: Inês will die. The music, however, does not immediately collapse into tragic resignation. Instead, the opening reactivates familiar elements of the earlier fados, including lively instrumental figuration, rhythmic propulsion, and recurring accompaniment patterns, briefly re-establishing the musical environment associated with Inês's earlier vocal space.

The accompaniment again draws on guitar-inflected rhythmic figures and lightly articulated instrumental textures that recall the sonic world of scenes II and IV. The rhythmic motor remains lively, maintaining a sense of propulsion rather than lamentation. Inês's vocal line unfolds above this rhythmic foundation with the same flexible, syllabic phrasing heard earlier. The melody remains largely stepwise and fluid, allowing the text to emerge clearly while preserving the gentle rhythmic sway characteristic of the fado idiom. Harmonic organisation continues to oscillate within a limited tonal field rather than driving toward cadential arrival. As in the earlier scenes, recurring accompaniment patterns sustain a sense of musical motion while also recalling the structures that have previously defined Inês's fado chamber.

The imagery of the text reinforces this sense of movement. Inês sings of hills and of a bird pursued by a farmer's aim, and the melodic line traces these images through light, airborne contours that rise and fall across short phrases. The accompaniment sustains its rhythmic propulsion beneath the voice, reinforcing the impression of movement established by the text. Migration remains the governing metaphor of the chamber, but here the imagery of movement

unfolds within musical patterns that continue to recur rather than carrying Inês toward a new structural destination.

Within this familiar musical environment, the meaning of the chamber shifts. At the centre of the scene, Inês declares "When I sing, I live" (*Quando eu canto, vivo*) (IX 164; 37–38), marked *fortissimo*, "joyful, brazen, fatalistic." In this moment, vocality becomes a condition of being. Singing is no longer merely expressive but a way of existing. The chamber does not simply contain the voice. It becomes the space through which life is articulated.

The outcome of the scene is already known, as the legend of Inês de Castro moves inexorably toward death, yet the singer's body occupies time and sound with unmistakable vitality, as breath, tone, and resonance fill the acoustic space. Drawing on Abbate's (1991) conception of phenomenal presence, aliveness is experienced as physical presence unfolding in real time rather than narrative information, sustained through the continuing act of singing.

The aria stages a collision between two temporalities, one belonging to the narrative trajectory already inscribed by myth and the other to the phenomenal present of the singing voice. The chamber sustains this tension, allowing Inês's sounding presence to persist even as the narrative moves toward the death the audience already anticipates.

The refrain "*Mas por quanto tempo?*" returns once more, echoing the anxiety first introduced in scene IV. Here, however, the question acquires greater urgency from its changed dramatic context. What previously introduced uncertainty into the duration of Inês's vocal space now sounds against the immediate presence of the threat that will end it. The refrain therefore retains its function as a question of duration, but the conditions surrounding that question have changed: what was anticipated in scene IV has become imminent in scene IX.

Maria's entrance introduces a contrasting vocal presence into the fado chamber. Entering around m. 13 and joining Inês vocally soon afterward, she begins to occupy a space that had previously belonged primarily to Inês. Her vocal writing is more declamatory and rhythmically grounded than the flexible phrasing associated with Inês's fado idiom. For the first time across the three fados, the chamber is no longer occupied by a single vocal perspective. Inês's lyrical line and Maria's more direct declamation coexist within the same musical space, destabilising the chamber from within before the final rupture occurs.

Maria fires the fatal shot immediately following the final iteration of the question. The aria does not reach a point of musical completion; rather, Inês's vocal presence is abruptly severed by an external force. The interruption gives the refrain's recurring question, "*Mas por quanto tempo?*", its final and most literal answer: the duration of Inês's sounding presence is determined not by the completion of her song but by the violence that ends it. The chamber that has sustained her voice across the three fados is therefore broken not through musical resolution but through dramatic rupture (see Musical Example 7).

The distinction between completion and interruption is crucial. In *Filumena*, the final storm aria progressively contains the musical energy associated with the earlier scene, returning moments of intensity to stillness. In *Inês*, by contrast, the sounding voice is terminated through dramatic rupture. The fado chamber that has sustained Inês's presence across the three scenes remains viable until an external act of violence breaks it. Her declaration "When I sing, I live" (*Quando eu canto, vivo*) gives this rupture particular force: if singing has become a condition of being, silencing the voice becomes inseparable from the violence enacted upon the woman who produces it. The chamber does not gradually relinquish Inês through musical resolution. It is forcibly broken.

The effect is devastating precisely because the audience has already experienced the vitality of that voice. The phenomenal presence created by the aria cannot be undone by narrative explanation. What the listener hears in the final moment is not simply the death of a character, but the violent interruption of a sounding body. The chamber collapses through external force rather than internal exhaustion, bringing to an end a musical space that had sustained Inês's presence through recurrence, duration, and expressive vitality.

What appears as instability in scene IV becomes rupture in scene IX. In the earlier scene, the recurring question "for how long?" introduces uncertainty into the duration of Inês's vocal space without breaking it. In scene IX, that uncertainty becomes immediate as Maria's contrasting vocal presence enters and begins to destabilise the chamber from within before the gunshot ultimately terminates it. Initially a gesture of temporal anxiety, the question "for how long?" thus finds its final answer through violent interruption.

Taken together, the three fados trace the gradual destabilisation of the lyric chamber. Across scenes II, IV, and IX, Inês is consistently granted extended vocal duration, linguistic autonomy through the use of Portuguese text, and uninterrupted sonic presence until the final gunshot. The chamber travels with her, culturally rooted in the idiom of fado and sustained by the guitar-inflected textures that accompany her voice. In this configuration, Inês reframes the aria as chamber in a distinctive way. The fado chamber neither compensates for narrative powerlessness nor secures structural agency. Instead, it creates a migratory site of presence in which the voice claims duration and cultural identity, even as the surrounding narrative moves inexorably toward mythic fate. The chamber cannot alter the outcome of the story, but it profoundly alters how that outcome is received. Having inhabited the full vitality of the singing voice, the audience cannot receive the final act of violence as aesthetically neutral. The chamber

does not save Inês, but it allows the silencing of her voice to register as rupture rather than resolution. In doing so, the opera reveals the lyric chamber as a fragile temporal shelter rather than a stable refuge for operatic voice, sustaining presence only until the dramatic action intervenes to close it.



Musical Example 5 – *Inês* (II 23; 1–8)



Musical Example 6 – *Inês* (IV 70; 7–12)



Musical Example 7 – *Inês* (IX 166; 46–57)



Musical Example 7 – *Inês* (IX 166; 46–57) (continued)

4.1 c) *Regina*

"*There is something in me*" (scene V)

There is something in me
There is something in me
There is something in me
I know it
I know it

There is something in me
There is something in me
There is something in me
I know it
I know it

Why would I have this impossible desire, this calling, for no reason at all?
Ah___ x 3

I woke up one day and I knew this was it
And it is
And it is
And it is

Regina approaches the question of sustaining vocal presence under constraint through a historical and musical terrain shaped by memory, archival loss, and retrospective reflection. The focus shifts from how long the chamber can hold before it is severed to what kind of vocal space can emerge when history itself has erased the record of a life. In this way, the chapter's guiding inquiry comes into sharper focus: when women in opera are granted extended vocal space, does that space function as agency, compensation, or containment? Echoing the two operas analysed earlier in this chapter, *Regina* does not offer a climactic aria in the nineteenth-century sense but instead unfolds an arioso whose scale and texture recalibrate what extended vocal presence can mean. In a work marked by archival erasure—papers confiscated, ordination obscured—the voice becomes the medium through which Regina's presence persists, not as documentation but as sound.

At the opening of "There is something in me," marked *arioso* (dotted half = 44), *legato e dolce*, the piano establishes a sustained musical field through gently recurring figuration supported by prolonged bass tones (V 37; 236–245; see Musical Example 8). The slow tempo and sustained sonorities create an atmosphere of restraint, while the recurring piano figures provide continuity beneath the voice. The effect is not propulsion but suspension, as dramatic action recedes and the accompaniment shapes a contained acoustic space in which the voice may dwell.

The vocal line enters softly with the repeated phrase "There is something in me," its successive iterations unfolding through subtle registral and rhythmic variation (V 37; 245–254). The repetition exceeds narrative necessity. Rather than introducing new information, the text lingers, generating time rather than advancing plot. Regina's repeated insistence—"I know it"—emerges not as logical argument but as conviction shaped through sound. The vocal line remains largely within a moderate register, avoiding dramatic leaps or overtly climactic gestures. Instead of projecting outward, it turns inward, grounding certainty in quiet persistence rather than rhetorical declaration.

As the arioso unfolds, dynamic intensity increases and the music expands in texture and vocal shaping, particularly at "this impossible desire, this calling" (V 38; 296–304). The piano texture becomes fuller, while the vocal writing becomes more sustained. This expansion remains measured rather than dramatically transformative. The piano continues to support the unfolding reflection, allowing Regina's experience to intensify without turning the passage into a conventional operatic climax.



Musical Example 8 – *Regina* (V 37; 236–245)

The elongated “Ah” gestures that follow (V 39; 311–338) shift the emphasis further from semantic articulation to sonic presence, as language briefly dissolves into vowel resonance. The voice no longer narrates or justifies but simply sounds, shifting expressive emphasis from text to timbre and from statement to utterance. Across these extended phrases, changes in register and dynamics allow the voice to expand beyond the comparatively restrained declamation that precedes them, while the accompaniment continues to sustain and frame Regina’s vocal presence. The effect is one of expressive intensification without a corresponding shift into dramatic action.

Although Regina's circumstances remain unchanged, shaped by erasure, loss, and absence, her voice occupies time and sound with palpable immediacy, filling the acoustic space through breath, tone, and resonance. The narrative trajectory holds while the phenomenal voice comes forward, so that agency emerges not as structural dominance or narrative reversal but as the act of sounding itself, a brief claiming of time.

The arioso closes with a moment of quiet recognition: "I woke up one day and I knew this was it" (V 39; 339–349). The earlier questioning gives way to affirmation, yet the musical language remains restrained rather than triumphant. Following a *poco ritardando*, the music moves to *meno mosso* (dotted half = 36) for the repeated phrase "And it is," which unfolds over sustained piano sonorities, allowing the vocal line to settle within the acoustic chamber it has created (V 40; 349–357). Rather than culminating in climactic resolution, the passage returns to contemplative suspension. The arioso does not close with rupture but with continued presence.

Dramatically, nothing in Regina's external circumstances changes, and the narrative resumes without reversal. The arioso functions as a site of self-recognition rather than a catalyst for action. The chamber it creates is intimate and bounded, yet it does not operate as compensation in the Clémentian sense, nor does it aestheticise impending destruction or stage spectacle before downfall. Instead, its restraint resists grandiosity. Where Filumena's storm arias pursue expansion through propulsion and scale, and Inês's fados trace a migratory chamber that ultimately fractures under narrative force, Regina offers a different configuration of vocal space, grounded in suspension, interiority, and the persistence of presence within constraint.

Across its span, the arioso traces a trajectory from interior murmur to heightened recognition and back to contemplative affirmation. It neither expands outward nor collapses inward. Instead, it holds. In terms of the question guiding this chapter, Regina's vocal space

operates less as spectacle or compensation than as a chamber of ethical self-articulation: a temporary domain in which the voice claims presence without altering the structures that surround it.

4.2 The Relational Chamber: Redistribution and Collective Voice – *Shanawdithit*

In *Shanawdithit*, the question shifts from whether female protagonists are granted extended vocal duration to how that duration is organised and shared. Vocal space remains audible but no longer consolidates into a singular lyrical subject. Instead, the chamber becomes relational, a distributed sonic environment in which the individual voice is embedded within collective textures and vocal authority emerges through interaction rather than enclosure. The lyric chamber does not disappear but is redistributed across a network of voices, including chorus, spirit figures, supported by layered ensemble textures, through which lyrical authority is dispersed rather than concentrated. Extended solo aria structures are largely absent. Instead, Shanawdithit's voice is situated within a layered sonic environment that binds individual utterance to a communal framework of memory and testimony, so that the protagonist's voice becomes inseparable from the collective voices through which memory is carried across generations.

This redistribution also reshapes the conditions of listening. Attention is no longer directed toward a single foregrounded voice but unfolds across a field of voices that must be heard in relation. The opera invites the audience to listen relationally rather than hierarchically, attending to as a shifting constellation of voices rather than a singular lyrical subject. Such listening resonates with recent discussions in Indigenous music studies, particularly Dylan Robinson's (2020) call to reconsider how musical attention is structured through culturally

specific listening practices rather than universalised Western modes of audition. While *Shanawdithit* does not simply "illustrate" Robinson's framework, its distributed vocal design similarly resists the concentration of authority in a single dominant voice, binding individual expression to collective memory and testimony.

This redistribution of vocal authority first becomes audible within a carefully stratified sonic field. In scene IV, Shanawdithit introduces the central question: "In seven generations, who will remember Shanawdithit?" (IV 76; 111–113). Set within a markedly reduced and quiet texture, the line unfolds in a fragile acoustic space that foregrounds Shanawdithit's voice, allowing it to register as both intimate and exposed (see Musical Example 9). The question is not yet collective; it remains singular, tentative, and acoustically vulnerable.

What follows transforms that vulnerability into a broader sonic field. As the texture expands, distinct vocal groups begin to enter. The Spirit Chorus adds another vocal layer to the texture, while a separate chorus articulates urgent imperatives—"Move! Move! Move!"—alongside conditional warnings: "If we stay they take our land… If we stay they take our children… If we stay they take our tongues" (IV 77–81; 115–149). The escalation is significant: land gives way to children, and children to language, marking a progression from material dispossession to cultural and linguistic erasure. Musically, this expansion is achieved not through a single melodic trajectory but through layering. Each new entrance thickens the texture, redistributing vocal presence across differentiated choral bodies.

The effect is not the replacement of the individual voice by the collective, but its amplification and displacement. The concern articulated by Shanawdithit's initial question reverberates outward, refracted across multiple vocal planes. The chamber becomes relational not by dissolving the individual voice, but by situating it within a network that extends its

temporal reach. The anxiety of erasure is no longer contained within a single utterance; it becomes a shared condition articulated across the ensemble.

Later in scene IV, the focus shifts as the question returns to Shanawdithit's own voice, now transformed by that prior expansion. This transition is marked by reconfiguration rather than rupture. In mm. 202–211, her vocal line unfolds through extended, additive phrasing, beginning with a single word and gradually lengthening—"How / How can / How can I …"— while the score allows *ad lib.* treatment of rhythm, pacing, and dramatic intent (see Musical Example 10). Her question therefore acquires a degree of temporal flexibility even as it remains fragmented, repeatedly beginning and extending the question rather than delivering it as a continuous statement. Around her, repeated "Shht!" sounds distributed across individual parts and the presence of the Spirit Chorus create a layered sonic environment within which her voice unfolds. Where earlier operas in this chapter use extended duration to produce expansion (Filumena) or circulation (Inês), here duration functions as a condition of sustained tension: Shanawdithit's voice persists within an unresolved question, pressing against the limits of what can be secured against disappearance. Duration emerges not through the expansion of an autonomous lyrical voice, but through the interaction between Shanawdithit's fragmented, flexible question and the surrounding vocal field. Her voice persists, but it does so relationally, within a musical space already populated by other voices.

In the final scene of the opera, Shanawdithit hears spirit voices and comes to understand that her time on earth is ending. When she asks, "so soon?" (VII 156; 102–103), the earlier awareness of finitude returns in altered form, but the question of remembrance now begins to receive an answer. Spirit voices and chorus begin to repeat her name—"Shhh … Shhh … Shanawdithit … Shanawdithit"—until she recognises the phenomenon herself: "I hear my name

in spirit mouths" (VII 157; 111). The moment stages a decisive shift toward vocal transmission. Shanawdithit's name no longer sounds only in her own voice; it circulates among surrounding voices, carried across a collective field.

This transformation is articulated most clearly through Kwe's intervention. Addressing Shanawdithit as "Mother," Kwe reframes lineage not as biological continuity but as relational transmission. Where Shanawdithit understands herself as the end of a lineage, Kwe introduces an alternative logic: "Just as your mother is in you, so are you in me" (see Musical Example 11). Shanawdithit's identity is no longer anchored in continuity of lineage but in relation, carried forward through those who receive, remember, and retell. Musically, this shift is realised through the redistribution of the vocal line, as Kwe's words extend Shanawdithit's voice beyond the limits of individual life into a transgenerational field.

As the scene unfolds, this relational model expands into a broader collective articulation. The chorus takes up and amplifies the logic introduced by Kwe, transforming individual memory into shared transmission. Stories "float like seedlings on the wind / Carried 'cross the land" (VII 158; 132–134), moving across communities and across time. What begins as a fragile question—who will remember?—is reconfigured as a process of continual transmission, as stories are retold, absorbed, and carried forward within other voices. Vocal presence thus becomes inseparable from the act of carrying forward.

In this instance, phenomenal presence persists even as the narrative subject recedes because vocal sound continues to occupy the present tense of performance through repetition and transmission across voices. The choral affirmation that these stories will endure extends this logic beyond the present moment, gesturing toward what theatre and performance scholar Jill Dolan (2012) describes as the utopian performative, a theatrical instance in which performance

imagines a collective future otherwise foreclosed by historical conditions. In *Shanawdithit*, however, futurity is enacted through vocal transmission rather than projected as abstraction. The voice is carried through relation rather than overcoming erasure.

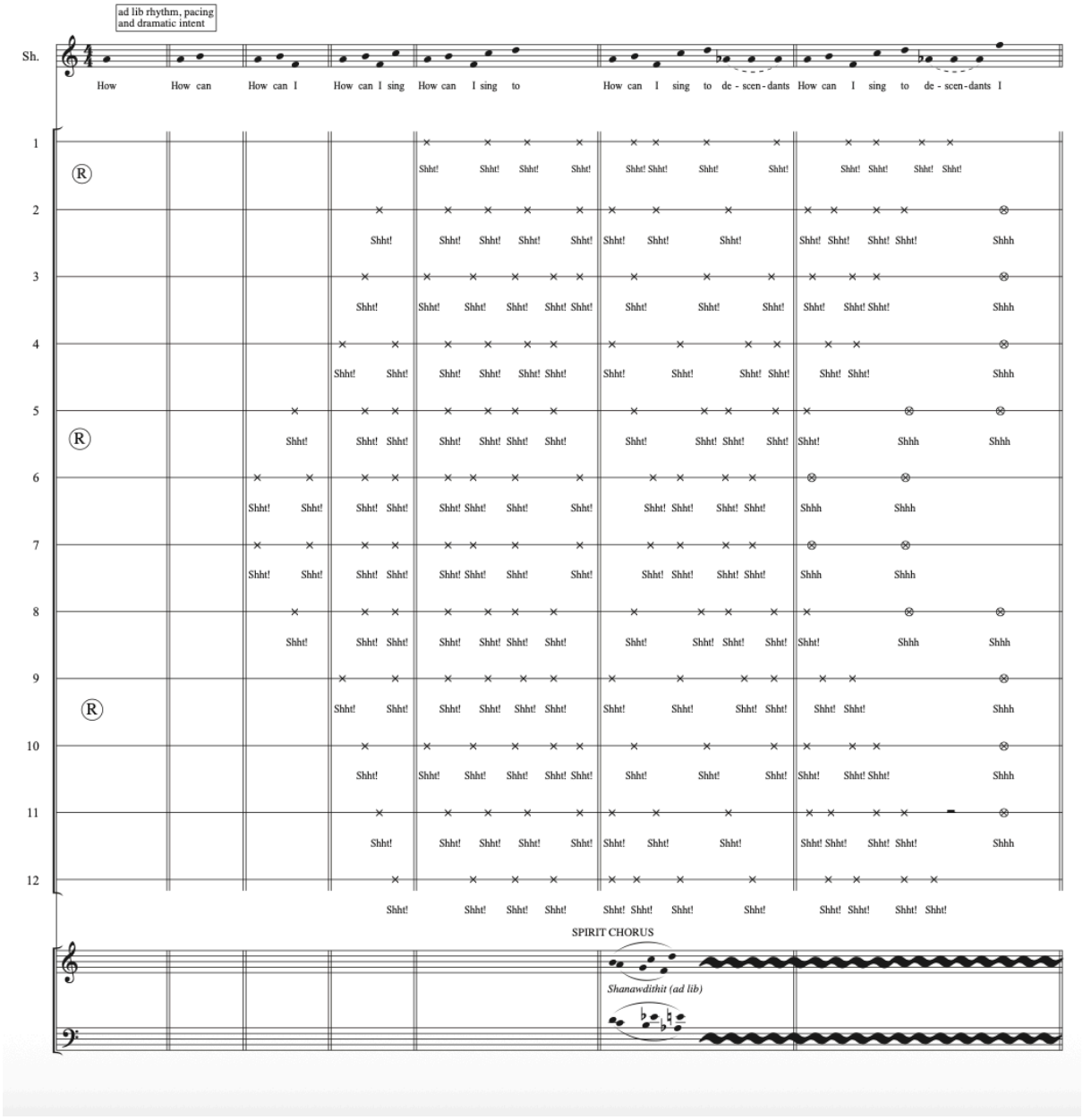
This transformation leaves the autonomy of the lyric subject unresolved, as Shanawdithit does not regain control over her narrative and the opera does not offer a conventional form of resolution. Instead, the threat of erasure is answered through reconfiguration. Voice is sustained through circulation across bodies, voices, and generations rather than preserved through stability or singular continuity. What exceeds the bounds of individual life is carried forward through relation.

Shanawdithit thus redefines the function of the lyric chamber. The chamber remains but no longer encloses a single voice. It becomes a relational space in which vocal presence is shared, circulated, and extended across temporal boundaries rather than a site of compensation or deferred agency. Voice comes to be carried across time rather than simply occupying it.

This transformation also reshapes the position of the listener. In *Shanawdithit*, listening becomes participatory, and the repetition of her name enacts remembrance rather than merely representing it. By hearing Shanawdithit's name taken up and repeated across voices, the audience is positioned as a witness to the act of transmission the opera stages. The relational chamber in *Shanawdithit* thus does more than redistribute vocal space. It redefines the ontology of operatic voice, asking whether voice can survive beyond the conditions that threaten to erase it. The answer it offers is continuity through relation rather than preservation or resolution: a voice sustained by being taken up, repeated, and carried across generations.



Musical Example 9 – *Shanawdithit* (IV 76; 111–113)



Musical Example 10 – *Shanawdithit* (IV 87; 202–211)



Musical Example 11 – *Shanawdithit* (VII 157–158; 124–132)

4.3 The Empty Chamber: Denial and Withholding – *Oksana G.*

In *Oksana G.*, the question shifts again as the lyric chamber is no longer expanded or redistributed but structurally withheld. The chamber disappears as a stable site of vocal presence, and the protagonist is not granted an extended lyrical space in which to inhabit her voice. Oksana never receives a sustained aria in which narrative time suspends and expressive agency consolidates. Instead, her vocal presence remains fragmented and interrupted, frequently embedded within larger dramatic and musical textures rather than separated into an autonomous lyrical space. The section therefore considers what it means when the musical space traditionally associated with operatic subjectivity is denied and how the absence of the chamber reshapes the conditions under which voice can be heard.

Despite bearing her name, *Oksana G.* withholds from its central character the kinds of sustained musical authorship traditionally associated with the operatic protagonist. Oksana is present in nearly every scene, and her suffering drives the plot, yet she is not granted an aria, a monologue, or any comparable extended moment of solo subjective space. She is remembered, sung about, and mourned but only intermittently allowed to occupy an autonomous lyrical space of her own. Where opera has historically offered its heroines moments of musical interiority—arias through which emotion, memory, and resistance unfold across extended lyrical time—*Oksana G.* withholds that form from its protagonist.

The score reinforces this imbalance through the distribution of vocal space across the opera's characters. While Oksana's vocal writing is frequently brief, syllabic, and emotionally contained, the most prominent moments of lyrical expansion in the second act are distributed among the male leads. In act II, scene IV, Konstantin receives an extended solo passage in which he reflects on his "sick heart and soul" (II-IV 261; 1421–1422). Set at a steady *andante* tempo (♩

= 100), with his entrance marked *fortissimo*, the passage allows his vocal line to unfold across sustained phrases, with rhetorical pauses that create space around his vocal expression. The effect is striking: Konstantin receives sustained musical attention as well as room for reflection. His voice therefore occupies a form of lyric chamber, inviting the audience to dwell within his subjectivity even as his actions reveal manipulation and coercion.

Father Alexander is similarly afforded moments of expanded vocal presence. In act II, scene V, his prayer unfolds within a sparse texture, beginning *mezzo piano* and "determined" with the appeal, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace" (II-V 310; 1650–1654), before asking for help to "see the light in the darkness" (II-V 311; 1656–1657). The subdued accompaniment and sustained sonorities create a comparatively spacious musical field in which his reflection can unfold without interruption. Though brief, the passage grants him a distinct moment of interiority in which his emotional and spiritual concerns become musically audible. A later passage, in act II, scene IX, extends this reflective space considerably. Here Alexander moves from acknowledging his limitations—"I'm just a priest with a soft heart" (II-IX 368; 1938–1940)—to imagining concrete possibilities for change, including raising money for "a safe house for women" and helping them return to school, "free to dream" (II-IX 370–371; 1956–1964). As his thought develops, the vocal writing continues across an extended span, allowing his reflection to move from uncertainty toward increasingly assertive resolve. These moments position Father Alexander's internal conflict as musically significant, granting him a reflective interiority that is largely withheld from the opera's protagonist.

Against this backdrop of male lyric expansion, Oksana's vocal writing remains markedly constrained. Her lines rarely extend beyond short, fragmented statements. Even in moments of emotional intensity—when she decides to return to Ukraine or when she asserts that she will

complete her education and come back to help her community—the music avoids sustained melodic arcs. Instead, her voice unfolds in brief, discontinuous statements without the extended lyrical space afforded to Konstantin and Father Alexander (see Musical Examples 12a and 12b).

This structural imbalance becomes most visible in the opera's final scene. As Oksana approaches death, the musical texture remains markedly restrained, with sustained strings and delicate harp and electric-guitar gestures surrounding the voice. Her vocal line emerges only intermittently, articulated through short phrases separated by rests. The musical material offers no sustained lyrical expansion that might transform the moment into a traditional death aria. The notation itself encodes disintegration through short durations, broken phrases, and extended silences that repeatedly interrupt the vocal line, leaving her voice suspended at the edge of silence.

Even her final plea—"Do not forget my name"—is delivered without the musical amplification that opera typically grants to such moments. The line appears quietly within the texture, without opening into an extended lyrical statement or prompting orchestral expansion. Although Father Alexander answers her plea, the music does not transform it into a climactic vocal culmination. In place of the expansive lyricism familiar from the operatic tradition, the scene remains in a state of quiet fragmentation (see Musical Example 13).

In this respect, the opera reverses one of the most persistent conventions of the operatic repertoire, in which the dying heroine achieves her greatest vocal splendour at the moment of death. *Oksana G*. refuses this pattern because Oksana is not granted the compensatory transcendence of an operatic death aria and instead remains vocally fragile, fragmented, and structurally constrained until the very end.

The absence of an aria holds structural significance rather than simply reflecting an absence of lyrical opportunity. In much of the operatic canon, vocal duration often serves as a marker of narrative authority, with the character who sings longest occupying the musical centre of attention. By withholding that duration from its protagonist while extending it to male characters, *Oksana G*. reconfigures the relationship between lyrical expansion and operatic subjecthood.

This redistribution of musical space also carries ethical implications for spectatorship. Without the stabilising frame of the aria, the audience is denied a sustained moment of lyrical identification that often accompanies operatic suffering. There is no suspended chamber in which the listener may dwell within the protagonist's voice. Instead, the music maintains a condition of instability and interruption that withholds the consolations of operatic catharsis.

The empty chamber thus becomes legible not simply as absence but as a form of musical refusal. Instead of transforming trauma into aestheticised vocal beauty, the opera preserves the fracture and incompleteness of Oksana's experience within the musical structure itself. Although she remains central to the narrative, she is not granted the musical space through which operatic subjectivity is typically articulated. Rather than functioning as an incidental limitation, this withholding shapes the opera's broader reconfiguration of operatic protagonism, exposing the fragile relationship between voice, authority, and narrative recognition.



Musical Example 12a – *Oksana G.* (II-V 288; 1538–1543)

(Excerpt from full score)



Musical Example 12b – *Oksana G.* (II-V 304; 1616–1619)

(Excerpt from full score)



Musical Example 13 – *Oksana G.* (II-X 430; 2280–2287)

(Excerpt from full score)



Musical Example 13 – *Oksana G.* (II-X 430; 2280–2287) (continued)

4.4 The Revealing Voice: Testimony and Narrative Disclosure – *Lillian Alling*

The preceding sections examine how vocal space can expand, redistribute, or be withheld. *Lillian Alling* introduces a further configuration of vocal space in which extended vocal duration moves from sustained perception toward narrative disclosure. Across this trajectory, the voice unfolds across an unbounded acoustic environment rather than occupying one of the bounded or restricted vocal spaces examined above.

Scene V makes this configuration audible in practice. Lillian's voice is granted extended musical duration, yet this duration does not take the form of an operatic aria. Instead, the music unfolds as an encounter with landscape, and the vocal line emerges as a mode of attention to the environment rather than expressive declaration. From its opening, the score situates sound before subject: birdsong effects, sustained vocal vowels, and undulating piano textures establish a diffuse sonic environment in which no single line assumes dominance (see Musical Example 14). Following the *poco meno mosso* at m. 19, Lillian's entrance at m. 22 is characterised by a sense of wonderment: "The land is large and smooth and green" (V 77; 22–24). Her voice begins within an acoustic field already in motion rather than initiating it.

The passage avoids a clearly articulated sense of tonal direction, remaining suspended without perceptible bass-directed propulsion or clear cadential articulation. Even when Lillian's voice enters, the music does not establish a strongly goal-oriented sense of progression. The accompaniment changes in texture, register, and intensity as the passage develops, but much of its momentum is generated through recurring patterns rather than bass-directed motion. This becomes particularly apparent as Lillian moves from her initial perception of the landscape through descriptions of its quiet and openness. The score does not remain static: changes in tempo (*poco stringendo*, *con moto*, *più mosso*), dynamics, and accompaniment patterns gradually

increase the music's sense of movement and intensity. Yet these changes generate movement without immediately directing the passage toward closure. Lillian's vocal writing similarly develops through predominantly syllabic, relatively contained phrases rather than a single climactically shaped melodic span. The result is not stasis but sustained movement through an open musical field, in which duration allows perception to accumulate.

Similar forms of suspension and non-teleological motion recur across several of the contemporary operas examined in this dissertation; however, their dramaturgical meanings emerge through local context rather than through musical structure alone. Here, the combination of openness and accumulating musical activity allows vitality to be experienced as ongoing presence rather than narrative progression. Rather than moving toward a climactic point or formal closure, Lillian's extended vocal duration gives successive perceptions of the landscape time to unfold. The result is a musical field that remains open, without enclosure or a strongly articulated sense of destination.

In this sense, the scene articulates a distinct configuration of vocal space within the chapter. Lillian's voice does not gather within a chamber but moves through an open acoustic field. The music situates the voice within its surroundings rather than framing it as separate from them. The scene creates a relational acoustic environment in which voice and landscape emerge together. Whereas earlier operas locate female subjectivity within or against a bounded lyrical space, *Lillian Alling* allows subjectivity to emerge through relation to landscape.

This relational structure becomes more pronounced as the scene unfolds. When Lillian repeats "mile after mile" (mm. 69–73), the repetition of both text and piano figuration gives musical form to the continuity of her journey, reinforcing a sense of endurance without destination (see Musical Example 15). That continuity is interrupted at m. 74, when Lillian stops

to build a fire as twilight falls. The texture shifts markedly, as the preceding figuration gives way to more sustained sonorities and a brief *poco ritardando* (see Musical Example 16). The effect is one of temporary grounding rather than closure: the forward motion of the preceding passage is briefly suspended, creating a temporal plateau in which perception turns inward.

From this point onward, the musical environment becomes less settled as Lillian's thoughts turn toward Jozef and the past. The accompaniment becomes increasingly active and changeable, while her vocal writing moves from sustained observation toward more insistent declaration. As Jozef enters her account, Lillian's determination acquires a new intensity—"I will find him, no matter how hard the journey, I will find him, no matter how far" (V 84; 106–113)—and is reinforced by the increasingly active piano writing. When Lillian begins to "see" past events in the fire, the landscape of the present begins to give way to recollection. Time becomes layered rather than linear as memory interrupts the present without fully displacing it. The earlier openness of the landscape gives way to a more volatile interior space in which perception and recollection coexist.

The scene eventually regains a greater sense of musical stability without necessitating closure. This return marks reorientation rather than resolution. Having moved from perception to suspension to memory, Lillian emerges with renewed direction. In this context, extended vocal duration traces a trajectory rather than functioning as lyrical expansion or expressive overflow. The voice moves through shifting musical environments that register changes in perception, temporality, and intention.

In this sense, scene V offers a striking reconfiguration of operatic vocal space. The extended duration granted to Lillian is clear, yet it does not produce the architectural enclosure of an aria. Instead, it allows the voice to inhabit and traverse the landscape. Within the Canadian

corpus examined here, this configuration is particularly suggestive: the voice does not dominate its surroundings but listens within them, moving through a space that is expansive, unbounded, and resistant to containment. This does not imply a uniquely Canadian musical language. Rather, within this corpus, landscape functions less as a backdrop than as a relational presence, reflecting a recurring concern with mobility, place, and the ethical negotiation of human relationships with the environment. The music situates the subject within the environment rather than elevating her above it. Voice becomes a site of relation rather than control.

Unlike the operas studied in the preceding sections, *Lillian Alling* organises its protagonist's vocal presence around the evolving function of extended vocal space rather than the immediate granting of an aria or the fixed distribution of that space. The perceptual space established in scene V later becomes oriented toward disclosure. Lillian's voice assumes a more explicitly narrative function later in the opera, as the work delays full disclosure until extended musical duration can give shape to the hidden motivations of her journey. In this sense, the opera reframes the aria as a site of narrative disclosure rather than expressive overflow or dramatic suspension, as the voice becomes the vehicle of testimony.

The significance of this vocal capacity emerges in scene XII, where the opera grants Lillian an extended musical passage in which the concealed history of her journey is finally revealed. Unlike the earlier passage, where extended vocal space allows perception and memory to unfold, here it enables Lillian to present a coherent narrative account of the past. Across an expanded span of music, the vocal writing unfolds in a sustained arioso style that prioritises narrative clarity over virtuosic display. The melodic line frequently adopts a speech-inflected contour, hovering between recitative and lyrical expansion, allowing the text to unfold in predominantly syllabic, text-led phrases that carry the weight of storytelling. The

accompaniment remains supportive rather than dominant, creating space around the vocal line so that the words remain clearly audible. Rather than driving toward a strongly articulated musical arrival, the passage sustains continuity across successive phrases, allowing the narration to unfold without being repeatedly divided by pronounced moments of closure. In this way, musical continuity supports the flow of narration, enabling successive phrases to be heard as part of a single extended narrative.

Within this musical framework, the text introduces the opera's central revelation when Lillian declares, "I am not seeking a future. I am seeking the past" (see Musical Example 17). What first appears as wandering comes into focus as a deliberate attempt to reckon with a history shaped by persecution, betrayal, and displacement. Extended vocal space makes this reinterpretation possible. Duration sustains the narrative rather than interrupting it, allowing the act of telling to unfold in real time. The climactic moment emerges through the act of declaration itself: "This is the truth" (see Musical Example 18). The music holds this moment rather than amplifying it through virtuosic expansion or a conventional climactic gesture, giving the declaration the temporal weight needed for its implications to register.

Taken together, scenes V and XII trace a transformation in the function of Lillian's voice. In the earlier scene, the voice opens onto perception and possibility, emerging within a landscape that resists enclosure and directional drive. In scene XII, that same capacity for sustained duration is redirected toward narration, as the voice organises memory rather than articulating perception. Extended vocal time thus becomes the temporal condition through which previously obscured knowledge can be articulated, rather than serving as lyrical expansion or dramatic suspension.

Through this structure, *Lillian Alling* reframes the relationship between voice and knowledge. The protagonist gains authority through the act of telling rather than through spectacular vocal display. The extended passage in scene XII functions as testimony, allowing the voice to reshape the audience's understanding of the narrative by revealing what had remained concealed. The aria therefore becomes an acoustic space of disclosure rather than a chamber of affect. Its duration creates the conditions necessary for that revelation to register. The voice testifies rather than simply expressing.



Musical Example 14 – *Lillian Alling* (V 76–77; 19–24)



Musical Example 14 – *Lillian Alling* (V 76–77; 19–24) (continued)



Musical Example 15 – *Lillian Alling* (V 81–82; 68–73)



Musical Example 16 – *Lillian Alling* (V 82; 73–80)



Musical Example 17 – *Lillian Alling* (XII 262; 65–68)



Musical Example 18 – *Lillian Alling* (XII 267; 72)

4.5 The Witnessing Voice: Doubling and Self-Narration – *Alexandra*

In the previous section, *Lillian Alling* disperses the voice into motion and landscape. *Alexandra*, by contrast, multiplies it. The opera's central dramatic device—the splitting of the protagonist into Alexandra the Explorer and Alexandra the Narrator—creates a dual vocal architecture that reconfigures operatic subjectivity. The work distributes the protagonist across two distinct vocal presences rather than offering a unified lyrical voice through which interiority unfolds. The interaction between these voices shapes the opera's musical and dramatic structure. In this configuration, voice acts as a site of observation, reframing, and witnessing rather than simply expressing experience.

The Narrator and the Explorer, although representing the same character, are sung by two different performers. The Narrator's voice is initially processed with a radio-like distortion and delivered in rhythmically flexible, speech-like declamation, while the Explorer sings fully notated melodic lines. This contrast is both sonic and symbolic, distinguishing a voice of reflection from one of lived experience. The opera thus stages two temporalities simultaneously: the Narrator occupies retrospection, positioned outside the unfolding events, while the Explorer inhabits the immediacy of the journey itself. Voice is therefore split across both timbre and time, separating the act of witnessing from that of enactment.

The result is a layered vocal subjectivity in which Alexandra never exists fully within a single voice. Instead, the protagonist emerges through the interaction of these two registers: one narrating, the other living the events being narrated. Subjectivity is therefore not located in a single vocal line but produced relationally, through the ongoing exchange between them. This doubling reshapes the musical architecture of the work. Rather than consistently consolidating vocal presence into self-contained lyrical forms, the score moves between speech-inflected and

more melodic modes of utterance. Vocal lines frequently hover between speech and song, allowing narration, recollection, and lived experience to occupy different kinds of vocal space. Percussion and shifting instrumental textures contribute to the dramatic environment surrounding these voices rather than simply accompanying them. Extended vocal space is not absent but redistributed across layers of narration and reflection.

This split vocal perspective is already present in the early scene in which Alexandra is denied entry into Lhassa. The guards' refusal—"No foreigner has the right to enter" (*Aucun étranger n'a le droit d'entrer*)—is set to rigidly repetitive musical figures that form a sonic barrier mirroring the political one (see Musical Example 19). The vocal lines move in tightly coordinated, repetitive patterns within a restricted pitch field, while repeated and sustained sonorities reinforce the sense of musical stasis. Rather than generating strong directional motion, the music repeatedly returns to the same gestures and utterances. The effect is circulatory rather than directional, as musical gestures recur rather than developing toward a clear point of arrival, creating a closed sonic field that mirrors the guards' refusal.

Against this static texture, the Explorer's vocal line begins to gather momentum. As she declares: "If I must take a roundabout route…" (*S'il faut prendre des chemins détournés*…), the melody lengthens and expands beyond the previously restricted pitch field (see Musical Example 20). The line moves more freely across the register and assumes a more expansive melodic contour, contrasting with the repetitive vocal writing of the preceding refusal. The relatively sparse surrounding texture leaves this increased vocal mobility exposed, allowing a greater sense of forward movement without producing a strongly articulated arrival. The contrast gives musical shape to the Explorer's determination: where the guards' writing is repetitive and static,

her vocal line becomes increasingly mobile and expansive. Agency is articulated through resistance to stasis rather than through closure.

Even here, the opera resists conventional operatic resolution. The moment unfolds without culminating in a self-contained declaration aria. Instead, the Narrator intervenes, reframing the event retrospectively as the refusal becomes the point at which the idea of reaching Lhassa crystallises into a decision. Action and reflection coexist within the same musical structure as each voice reshapes the meaning of the other. The scene establishes a key principle of the opera: events are not only experienced but reinterpreted through narration.

A later scene further nuances this structure. As Alexandra reflects on the consequences of her decision—"If I hadn't left… if I hadn't given up…" (*Si je n'étais pas partie… si je n'avais pas renoncé…*)—the vocal writing breaks into shorter, reiterative phrases that circle around hypothetical alternatives. The music moves through tentative gestures and repeated figures rather than unfolding in extended lyrical arcs. The succession of spoken and sung fragments creates a sense of suspension, as the passage repeatedly returns to hypothetical alternatives rather than pressing toward a clear point of arrival (see Musical Example 21a).

The imagery of flowing water and turning worlds—"Torrential water runs… the worlds turn…" (*L'eau du torrent coule… les mondes tournent…*)—is mirrored musically by recurring figures that reinforce this sense of circular motion. In Musical Example 21b, the refrain "tourbillon sans fin" ("endless whirlpool") unfolds through recurring melodic gestures rather than developing into an extended lyrical line. The surrounding texture similarly relies on recurrence and rearticulation rather than a strong sense of forward progression. The result is a texture that turns without arriving. In this moment, the voice remains suspended within recursive

thought rather than moving toward clarity or resolution, with the musical repetition enacting the very condition the text describes.

The opera's doubled vocal structure deepens this sense of recursion. Phrases that first appear in one voice frequently re-emerge in the other, creating a network of echoes across the work. Meaning accumulates gradually through repetition and reframing rather than through a single moment of lyrical revelation. The opera thus replaces the traditional operatic model of emotional climax with a structure of recursive emergence, in which subjectivity is distributed across multiple vocal perspectives. Voice operates as a self-referential process rather than a singular expression: it listens to, repeats, and reshapes its own prior utterances.

This recursive logic reaches its most distilled form in the opera's final passages, built around the refrain "Dream, do you see?" (*Rêve, vois-tu*). In this last scene, the two Alexandras exchange the phrase in gently sustained lines that remain contained without unfolding into extended melodic arcs. The refrain returns repeatedly, sometimes sung and sometimes spoken, circulating between the two voices. Beneath this exchange, sustained sonorities create a sense of suspension, while repeated material reinforces continuity without generating a strong sense of propulsion (see Musical Example 22). The music therefore provides a stable field within which the refrain can continue to circulate rather than pressing it toward resolution.

As the passage unfolds, additional voices enter the sonic field. Sustained tones and glissandi in the male chorus broaden the surrounding texture, while subtle shifts in pitch and sonority create a sense of increasing diffusion. Repeating instrumental figures move beneath the vocal lines, softening any sense of linear trajectory. The vocal field broadens as it disperses across a shared acoustic space rather than moving toward culmination. In this configuration, the

voice is distributed across temporal and registral layers rather than belonging to a singular subject, allowing the protagonist to hear, repeat, and reinterpret her own experience.

Crucially, the music avoids a conventional climax. The dynamics gradually diminish, and the refrain continues to recur as the texture thins. The opera thus leaves unresolved the larger question of what drives Alexandra's journey. When Philippe asks the deceptively simple question "Why are you going there?" (*Pourquoi vas-tu là?*), the music offers no definitive explanation. Instead, it returns to the language of dreams. The answer remains deferred rather than stated, sustained within the circulation of the refrain.

Alexandra reconfigures the function of extended vocal space by aligning it with suspension and return rather than resolution. In this work, vocal expansion takes on a different role, as musical duration allows meaning to remain open rather than fixing it to a single explanation. The doubled voice sustains this condition, allowing experience and reflection, action and memory, to unfold simultaneously, each reshaping the other without collapsing into a single perspective. Subjectivity emerges across temporal layers through repetition, echo, and rearticulation rather than consolidating into a unified voice. The recurring refrain that closes the opera, "*Rêve, vois-tu,*" further brings this logic into focus. It passes between the voices, sustained through repetition and sonorities that resist closure. The dream resonates rather than explains, and voice continues to witness the narrative rather than concluding it.



Musical Example 19 – *Alexandra* (III 32; 239–241)



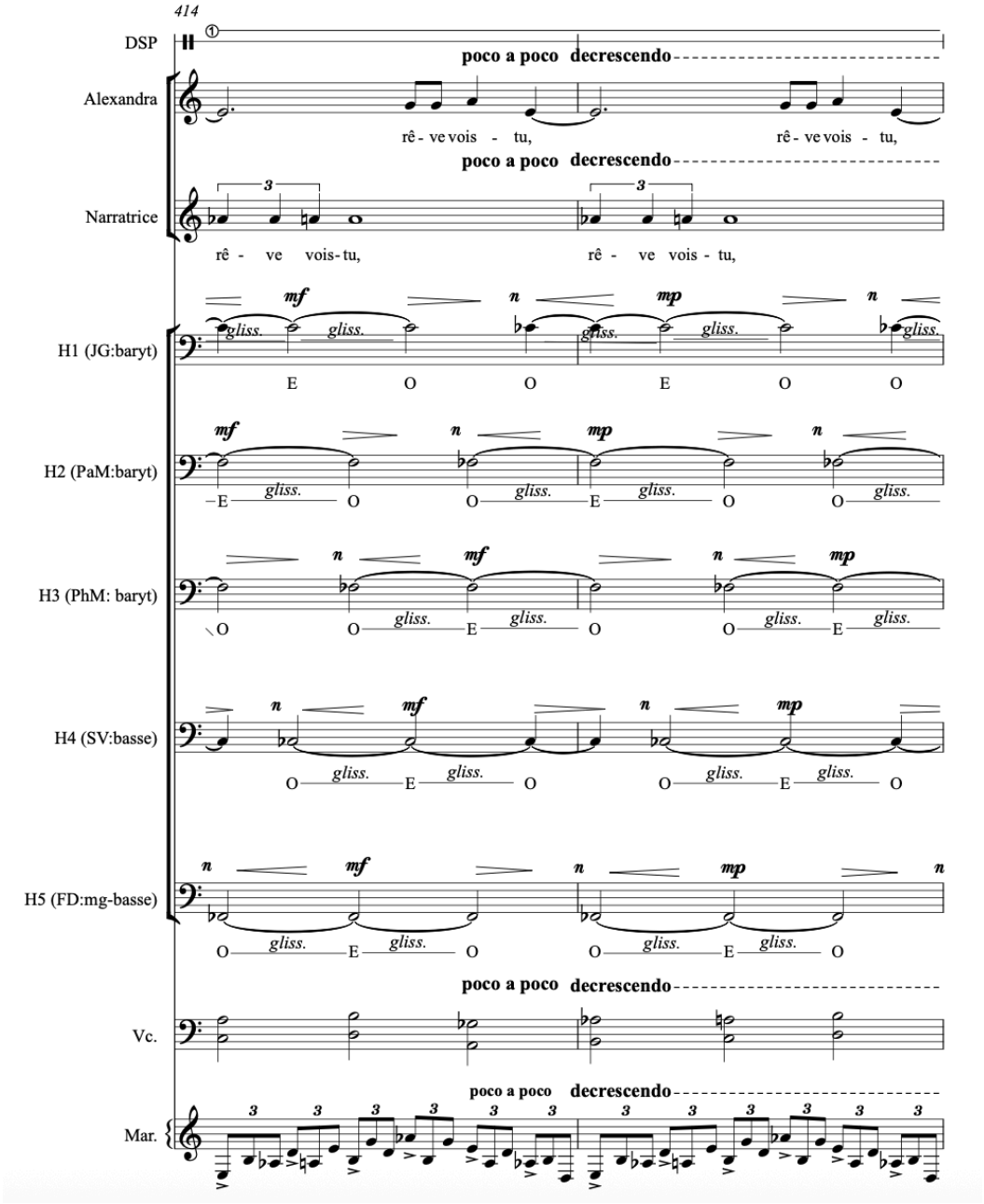
Musical Example 20 – Alexandra (III 35; 254–261)



Musical Example 21a – *Alexandra* (VIII 65; 494+)



Musical Example 21b – *Alexandra* (VIII 67–68; 552–561)



Musical Example 22 – *Alexandra* (XVI 171; 414–415)

Chapter 4 Conclusion – The Reconfigured Chamber

In this chapter, extended vocal space does not consistently function as a vehicle fo agency, compensation, or containment in the traditional sense. Instead, it is variously expanded, redistributed, withheld, and refunctioned, emerging less as a stable aria-centred form than as a shifting structure through which women's voices are sustained, dispersed, interrupted, denied, or brought into presence.

This variability emerges as a set of interrelated transformations in how vocal space operates across the chapter. In *Filumena*, the chamber expands under pressure, allowing the protagonist to occupy a moment of heightened lyrical scale even as the surrounding narrative constrains her. In *Inês*, the chamber becomes migratory and fragile, sustained through the idiom of fado as it travels across scenes before fracturing under narrative violence. *Regina* offers a contrasting configuration, in which vocal space is suspended, as her arioso constructs an interior chamber of reflection that sustains presence without structural transformation. Taken together, these configurations show that extended vocal space may expand, circulate, or suspend, while remaining insufficient to secure narrative agency.

Subsequent configurations shift this relationship by displacing the individual voice as the primary site of meaning. In *Shanawdithit*, vocal space is redistributed across a collective field in which the protagonist's voice becomes inseparable from those that surround it, forming a relational network through which memory is transmitted across generations. In *Oksana G.*, this redistribution takes a more radical form, as the chamber is withheld altogether. The protagonist is denied extended vocal space, while moments of lyrical expansion are granted to male characters, making the absence of an aria legible as refusal and exposing the extent to which vocal duration has functioned as a marker of narrative authority.

While these operas destabilise the relationship between vocal space and agency, *Lillian Alling* redirects it toward disclosure. Extended vocal duration becomes the condition through which narrative truth emerges, as the voice moves from perception to narration and ultimately to testimony. In scene XII, the sustained space given to Lillian allows her to articulate a history that has remained concealed. The aria thus becomes an acoustic space of temporal disclosure through which her account reshapes the audience's understanding of the narrative.

In *Alexandra*, this function becomes layered through doubling and reflexivity. The division of the protagonist into Narrator and Explorer produces a vocal structure in which voice both enacts and reflects on experience, allowing subjectivity to emerge across multiple temporal perspectives. The chamber becomes stratified, accommodating action and reflection within a shared acoustic space. Voice thus witnesses, reframes, and returns to experience, sustaining it through recursive articulation rather than resolving it into a unified narrative.

Taken together, these operas show that extended vocal space operates as a site of negotiation in which presence, absence, relation, and knowledge are continually reconfigured. It functions as a mutable chamber in which vocal presence takes expansive, fragile, collective, withheld, revelatory, and reflexive forms. Its meaning is shaped by the structures that contain it. What unites these configurations is their shared engagement with the conditions under which women's voices are made audible. The "aria" may expand, circulate, suspend, disperse, disappear, disclose, or double, yet in each case its function remains contingent.

This chapter thus reframes the aria as a dynamic and contested architecture through which voice becomes audible, legible, and meaningful. The question is not simply whether a protagonist is given an aria, but what that vocal space make possible: whether it sustains presence without agency, movement without escape, narration without resolution, or testimony

without closure. Extended vocal duration does not in itself guarantee transformation; it reveals the structures that shape what voice can and cannot do within the operatic field. Across these contemporary Canadian operas, voice emerges as situated, contingent, and politically charged, exposing the limits of operatic tradition while opening new possibilities for how women's voices may be heard. The problem is no longer simply that women die singing, but that the conditions under which they are permitted sustain vocal presence remain unstable and determine when, how, and for how long their voices can be heard.

Conclusion

Listening Through the Frame:

Female Voice, Representation, and Resistance in Contemporary Canadian Opera

The point of departure for this dissertation was a seemingly simple question: must the operatic heroine die? The controversy surrounding the 2018 Florentine production of *Carmen*, in which the heroine kills Don José rather than being killed by him, exposed the persistence of an assumption that has long structured the operatic imagination—that the narrative trajectory of a woman's desire culminates in her destruction. Yet, as this study has demonstrated, the question is not only whether women die in opera, but how their lives and deaths are made legible, necessary, or meaningful within the aesthetic, musical, and dramaturgical systems that sustain the genre. The problem is therefore not reducible to plot alone. It resides in the conditions through which opera renders women visible, audible, and ultimately containable.

In turning to twenty-first century Canadian opera, this dissertation has not sought to determine whether these works simply reproduce or reject this inherited fatal grammar. Instead, it has examined how they reconfigure the representational structures through which operatic womanhood is produced. Across the corpus, the question of survival proves inseparable from broader questions of voice, memory, spectatorship, musical form, and movement. These operas do not uniformly abandon the trajectory of suffering or death, nor do they offer a coherent alternative model of liberation. Rather, they intervene in the conditions under which women's lives are staged, heard, and interpreted, shifting attention from narrative outcome toward the systems that organise perception itself. These systems are examined across the dissertation through questions of voice after erasure, archival reconstruction, spectatorship, and vocal space,

revealing containment not as a single operatic convention but as a set of interconnected representational practices.

The metaphor of the "killing jar," introduced at the outset of this study, provides a framework through which these interventions can be understood. Initially invoked to describe the aesthetic containment of women within operatic structures that preserve beauty while ensuring destruction, the jar emerges across this dissertation as neither static nor singular. It is instead a dynamic and adaptive formation, shaped by historical, cultural, and formal pressures that determine how women are brought into view, how they are permitted to speak, and how their trajectories are constrained. The operas engage this enclosure directly. They expose its mechanisms, test its limits, and in some cases reconfigure its internal conditions, making perceptible the structures that have long governed the operatic representation of women.

This metaphor also situates the project within a broader lineage of feminist engagement with operatic representation. Composer Kate Soper (2011) adopts the image to describe female protagonists suspended within conditions of aesthetic containment, while Nicholas Stevens (2017) extends it more explicitly to opera, linking it to the tradition identified by Catherine Clément (1988) of beautiful female suffering. This dissertation builds on these resonances, using the metaphor to examine how contemporary operas both sustain and reconfigure the conditions that preserve and constrain women's voices.

This dissertation develops a conceptual and methodological approach to opera that foregrounds the structural conditions through which representation is produced. It reads across a corpus of works comparatively, tracing recurring patterns while maintaining the integrity of each opera's dramaturgical and musical design. Within this framework, the representation of women emerges through interrelated systems that organise voice, visibility, temporality, and movement.

The study contributes both a set of detailed readings of contemporary Canadian operas and a broader analytical model for understanding how operatic form participates in the construction of gendered experience.

The thread-based framework that structures the dissertation is central to this contribution. The four interpretive threads—voice after erasure, feminist archival practice, the ethics of looking, and the distribution of vocal space—operate as interdependent lenses that bring different aspects of each work into focus. This design allows comparison to function as a mode of clarification: each opera retains its specific artistic logic while participating in a wider field of relations. Across the corpus, these threads reveal recurring tensions that shape how women become audible, visible, and narratively legible, without consolidating those tensions into a single, stable model of operatic womanhood.

The focus on twenty-first century Canadian opera situates these questions within a context in which the pressures of representation are especially acute. Chamber-scale production conditions, public funding structures, ongoing negotiations of colonial and multicultural histories, and increasing cultural attention to gendered violence and testimonial voice shape the operatic landscape from which these works emerge. Within this environment, these works engage operatic tradition directly, reworking its formal and ethical assumptions in ways that both expose its underlying mechanisms and intensify the conditions under which gendered representation continues to be produced.

Across this corpus, voice emerges as a central site through which women's presence is negotiated, extended, and rearticulated. These works repeatedly stage forms of speaking that persist beyond silencing, whether through testimony, memory, repetition, or near-erasure. Voice functions not only as expression but as a mode of survival, allowing characters to articulate the

conditions under which they have been marginalised or erased. At the same time, this persistence remains contingent. Voice is frequently mediated through institutional structures, dependent on acts of recovery, or shaped by the presence of others who listen, translate, or frame its meaning. What becomes audible, therefore, is a form of presence that unfolds within conditions that both enable and constrain its articulation.

The archive provides one of the primary frameworks through which this mediated presence is organised. The operas in this corpus do not treat the archive as a neutral repository of the past; they stage it as an active process of assembly, interpretation, and re-voicing. Documents, drawings, fragments, and traces become the materials through which women's histories are reconstructed and made perceptible. This process carries its own tensions. Recovery does not produce completeness, and the act of bringing the past into the present often exposes the limits of what can be known, restored, or ethically represented. Within this dynamic, opera performs archival labour as an ongoing negotiation, where absence remains present and where the effort to recover a voice coexists with the recognition that some forms of loss cannot be repaired.

These questions of recovery extend into the domain of spectatorship, where the operas actively shape the conditions under which audiences encounter women's suffering. Rather than positioning the gaze as neutral or singular, they construct multiple and often competing modes of looking, ranging from intimate witnessing to institutional scrutiny and from empathetic attention to forms of exposure that risk reproducing harm. Spectatorship becomes a structured experience, organised through dramaturgical pacing, visual framing, and musical emphasis. In this context, to look is to participate in a set of relations that carry ethical weight. The operas sustain these

tensions and render them perceptible, inviting audiences to recognise their own position within the dynamics of attention, interpretation, and response.

Musical form intensifies these dynamics through the distribution of vocal space. The aria, historically a privileged site of operatic subjectivity, is reconfigured across the corpus in ways that reshape how women's interiority is staged. Extended vocal duration provides moments in which characters occupy sonic space with heightened intensity, allowing for the articulation of desire, memory, or reflection. These moments expand temporal and expressive capacity, yet their effects remain structurally bounded. The presence of extended singing does not necessarily transform narrative conditions, and the relationship between duration and agency remains unstable. Vocal space can function as an opening, a suspension, or a form of containment, depending on how it is framed within the larger musical and dramatic design.

Movement introduces a further layer to these dynamics, extending the question of representation into spatial and temporal domains. Across the operas, women's movement takes multiple forms, including physical travel, displacement, spiritual transition, and transgenerational circulation. Movement expands the field of possibility, enabling encounters, transformations, and acts of refusal. At the same time, it exposes characters to new forms of vulnerability, as mobility is interpreted within social systems that assign meaning to women's movement in ways that can restrict, redirect, or punish it. In this sense, movement operates as both expansion and constraint, shaping how women navigate the conditions of their trajectories.

Taken together, these threads form a conceptual framework for analysing operatic representation across works and contexts. By tracing voice after erasure, feminist archival practice, the ethics of looking, and the distribution of vocal space, this framework makes it possible to examine how gendered experience is produced through operatic form rather than

located solely in narrative or character. Movement runs through these threads as a recurring dramaturgical and representational condition, shaping how women negotiate displacement, visibility, agency, and relation without constituting a separate analytical category in itself. Each thread contributes to the shaping of presence while also revealing the limits within which that presence can unfold. The works discussed in this dissertation bring these dynamics into focus, allowing the conditions that organise representation to emerge with greater clarity. Through this convergence, the study demonstrates that contemporary Canadian opera does not simply revise inherited narratives but reconfigures the conditions through which women become audible, visible, and narratively meaningful.

The analyses developed in this dissertation demonstrate that contemporary Canadian opera engages critically with the inherited structures that have historically governed the representation of women. These works make visible the conditions under which women's voices are produced, mediated, and constrained, bringing into focus the ethical implications of how suffering is staged, heard, and witnessed. Across the corpus, representation becomes a site of interrogation, where operatic form itself participates in exposing the mechanisms through which women are made legible within the genre.

Another pattern that emerges across this corpus concerns the intersection of gender with other forms of identity. Just as Carmen's femininity is inseparable from her construction as a cultural "Other," the protagonists examined in this dissertation are rarely presented as culturally unmarked female figures. Rather, they occupy positions shaped by migration, ethnicity, Indigeneity, religion, colonial history, or geographical displacement. Their gender is consistently articulated through additional forms of difference, suggesting that contemporary Canadian opera frequently imagines female subjectivity through women whose identities are already marked by

multiple forms of social, cultural, or historical distinction. At the same time, these narrative innovations are accompanied by remarkable continuity in vocal casting, with the soprano voice remaining the principal vehicle through which female subjectivity is imagined. Whether this persistence reflects the continued influence of operatic convention, practical casting considerations, or other aesthetic priorities lies beyond the scope of the present study. The relationship between intersecting forms of identity, vocal characterisation, institutional representation, and the persistence of inherited vocal hierarchies invites further study.

Nevertheless, these interventions do not produce a consistent or unified reconfiguration of operatic womanhood. The dynamics of containment that have long structured the genre persist in altered forms, shaping how voice, visibility, and movement are distributed. Moments of extended vocal presence coexist with narrative trajectories that remain constrained; acts of archival recovery unfold alongside the persistence of absence; and forms of ethical witnessing operate within aesthetic frameworks that continue to rely on the representation of suffering. This unevenness is not a contradiction to be resolved but one of the conclusions that emerges from this study: contemporary Canadian opera neither simply inherits nor fully escapes the structures it interrogates. These operas therefore register transformation unevenly, producing spaces of resistance that remain entangled with the structures they seek to expose.

This unevenness is not simply a limitation of the works themselves, but a reflection of the broader conditions within which opera continues to operate as an art form. The aestheticisation of suffering, identified by Clément as central to opera's historical power, continues to shape how female experience is rendered meaningful. Even as contemporary works seek to reframe or critique this dynamic, they remain implicated in the traditions and expectations that organise

operatic expression. The result is a field of tension in which critique and participation coexist, and in which the effort to expose structures of containment can also risk reproducing them.

The structures of containment explored throughout this dissertation may not end with representation. Although American musicologist Anna Valcour's recent study focuses specifically on sexual misconduct within the opera industry, she concludes more broadly that meaningful change requires attention to the gendered structures of power and institutional authority that operate beyond the stage itself (Valcour 2025). There are indications that some of these structures are changing. Opera America reported that women's representation in leadership positions among its member companies rose from 36 percent in 2015 to 46 percent in 2019, although women remained markedly underrepresented at the largest companies (Opera America 2020b). These developments suggest both measurable progress and the persistence of institutional hierarchies through which authority remains unevenly distributed. The institutional pathways through which contemporary Canadian operas are commissioned, staged, revived, and circulated may themselves shape which stories enter the operatic imagination and which remain at its margins.

Programming decisions necessarily reflect a complex interplay of artistic vision, institutional priorities, economic realities, and audience expectations, all of which influence the conditions under which new works can circulate and endure. The sustained development of the Canadian operatic repertoire depends not only on the commissioning of new works but also on the conditions that allow those works to move beyond their original production contexts and enter the living repertoire.

Musical form may itself play a role in this process. Historically, self-contained arias have allowed portions of operas to circulate independently, offering singers opportunities for vocal

and dramatic display while extending a work's presence into recital, pedagogical, recording, and audition contexts. A few of the operas examined in this dissertation resist or substantially reconfigure this model, distributing vocal expression across more continuous or dramatically integrated structures. This raises the question of whether the relative absence of extractable vocal numbers might also affect a work's capacity to circulate beyond its original production, attract performers to particular roles, or acquire familiarity through repeated encounters. As American musicologist Monica Hershberger (2025) observes, performers have at times played an important role in sustaining operatic works; she points to the advocacy of sopranos Phyllis Curtin and Beverly Sills as important to the enduring presence of Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* and Douglas Moore's *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, respectively. Such a possibility does not suggest a need to return to conventional aria structures but points instead to the ways musical form may participate in the processes through which operas acquire an afterlife. While the present study does not examine these questions of circulation directly, these institutional pathways may shape not only how women's stories are represented but also which operas receive the repeated performances through which works become embedded in artistic practice and cultural memory. The relationship between musical form, institutional circulation, and operatic afterlife offers an important avenue for future research.

The tension between artistic licence and historical responsibility further complicates these dynamics. Six of the seven works in this corpus draw on real women whose lives are only partially documented or whose historical transmission has been shaped by archival erasure. In reassembling these histories through fiction, metaphor, and voice, the operas produce compelling dramatic narratives while also raising ethical questions. *Lillian Alling*, in particular, exemplifies

this complexity.[35] The opera invents a backstory of abandonment and vengeance that departs significantly from the archival record, transforming a sparsely documented journey into a mythic narrative of loss and pursuit. This reconfiguration generates expressive and theatrical force, yet it also invites reflection on what is gained—and what is at risk—when historical women are reimagined in operatic form. As these works recover and amplify female voices, they also participate in acts of re-authorship that may reshape, displace, or overwrite the lives they invoke. Future research might further examine the boundary between testimony and appropriation and the responsibilities that arise when historical women are adapted for the operatic stage.

Within this context of archival recovery, historical reimagining, and representational tension, the central claim of this dissertation can be clarified with greater precision. The operas do not dismantle the structures that have historically contained women within operatic representation. Rather, they engage those structures directly, reworking their formal and dramaturgical assumptions while exposing how women's voice are made audible. They render these mechanisms perceptible, test their limits, and in some cases reconfigure the terms under which they operate. Through this process, the boundaries of the "killing jar" become recognisable as constructed rather than naturalised or inevitable features of the genre. It is within this shift in perception that the possibility of alternative configurations begins to emerge.

The scope of this dissertation is defined by a set of methodological and practical parameters that shape both its focus and its boundaries. The selection of seven operas with female eponymous protagonists provides a framework that enables sustained comparative

[35] The historical Lillian Alling was a European migrant who, in the late 1920s, travelled largely on foot across North America in an apparent attempt to return to Europe via Alaska and Siberia. She left few records and resisted publicity, leaving much of her life and motivations uncertain. The opera substantially reimagines this fragmentary history, transforming her journey into one driven by betrayal, familial loss, vengeance, and eventual reconciliation. Although the work does not present itself as biography, the distance between the historical record and its fictional narrative is significant, particularly given how little is known about Alling herself.

analysis while delimiting the field of inquiry. This focus foregrounds works in which women are positioned as explicit narrative centres, making it possible to trace how operatic structures engage directly with female subjectivity. At the same time, it leaves aside a broader range of operatic representation, including non-eponymous female characters, ensemble-driven works, and operas in which gender operates through less overt dramaturgical configurations. These areas remain essential to a fuller understanding of how women are represented across contemporary opera and suggest the need for further study beyond the parameters established here.

The corpus is also shaped by the uneven availability of primary materials, particularly in relation to performance documentation. While some operas in this study are supported by full video recordings and archival resources, others are accessible primarily through scores, libretti, and partial documentation, some of which were made available through the generosity of composers who shared materials from their personal collections. This unevenness reflects not an absence of artistic significance but the material conditions of contemporary operatic production, in which recording and preservation of performances are often constrained by financial limitations and resource allocation. As a result, the visibility of operatic works—and, by extension, the legibility of the women they stage—is conditioned by what is preserved, recorded, and made accessible. Developments in recording technologies and digital dissemination may offer expanded possibilities for documentation and access, particularly in contexts where financial support for large-scale preservation remains limited. Future research might build on these possibilities through performance-based analysis that engages more fully with embodiment, staging, and reception in both live and mediated contexts.

Questions of authorship and institutional context open a further avenue for investigation. These operas are shaped not only by their narratives and musical structures but by the conditions under which they are commissioned, produced, and circulated. Access to compositional opportunities, librettist collaborations, and production resources continues to influence whose stories are told and how they are framed. The gendered dimensions of this access remain significant. As indicated in the introduction, historical data from 1866 to 1999 indicate that only a small number of operas in Canada were composed by women, an imbalance that continues to shape the field. Within the present corpus, the predominance of male creative teams further underscores the question of who writes for women and how female experience is mediated through these structures. A more sustained examination of commissioning practices, funding structures, and the distribution of creative authority within opera companies would deepen understanding of how gendered representation is produced at an institutional level.

At the same time, initiatives are emerging that seek to address these structural imbalances directly. In the United States, Opera America's Opera Grants for Women Composers programme has provided targeted support for the development and commissioning of operas by women (Opera America 2022), while Canadian initiatives such as the Université de Montréal's Chair in Opera Creation similarly point toward growing institutional attention to questions of access, creative development, and representation (see Appendix 14). Such programmes suggest that the structures shaping who is able to create opera are not immutable, even as their longer-term effects on repertoire and representation remain to be seen.

Funding models may be particularly important to such an inquiry. Opera and lyric companies frequently operate within significant financial constraints, and when public or institutional support is tied to annual operations, financial stability, or demonstrated outcomes,

the risks associated with producing new or unfamiliar repertoire may influence programming decisions. This relationship warrants further study rather than an assumption of causality. Nevertheless, the scarcity of both performances and surviving performance documentation encountered in the course of this research points to a potentially circular problem: without sufficient support, Canadian operas may receive few productions; without productions, works have limited opportunities to develop audiences, enter the repertoire, or generate the documentation necessary for their continued study and revival. Building a sustainable Canadian operatic repertoire therefore requires attention not only to the creation of new works but also to the material conditions that allow them to be performed, documented, revisited, and ultimately sustained. Such work would complement the present study by situating its analytical findings within the material conditions that enable and constrain operatic creation.

The engagement with Indigenous histories and narratives within the corpus, particularly in works such as *Shanawdithit*, also points toward the importance of expanding critical frameworks that address questions of authorship, sovereignty, and cultural authority. While this dissertation considers how these operas negotiate representation and archival recovery, further research led by Indigenous scholars and practitioners is essential to understanding how opera can function within, alongside, or in tension with Indigenous knowledge systems and artistic practices. This direction invites a rethinking of opera not only as a site of representation but as a space of cultural negotiation in which questions of voice, ownership, and responsibility remain central.

In addition, the ethical questions that emerge throughout this dissertation—particularly those concerning spectatorship, representation, and the staging of suffering—suggest the importance of continued attention to audience reception and interpretive practice. How audiences

engage with these works, how meaning is shaped in performance, and how ethical responses are cultivated or resisted remain beyond the scope of this study. Future research might draw on methodologies from performance studies, audience research, and affect theory to explore how operatic meaning is experienced in real time and how the conditions of listening and looking continue to evolve in contemporary contexts.

Across these analyses, the "killing jar" emerges less as a fixed structure than as a way of understanding the conditions that shape women's operatic presence. Its boundaries are produced through the allocation and restriction of voice, the terms of visibility and recognition, the persistence or recovery of memory, and the possibilities and constraints of movement. Each opera negotiates these conditions differently, revealing containment as neither stable nor uniform but continually produced, challenged, and reconfigured. In doing so, the works shift the terms under which operatic womanhood can be understood, not by replacing one model with another, but by rendering the processes of containment and articulation newly visible.

Within the corpus, these dynamics take distinct forms. In *Filumena*, expanded vocal space intensifies presence without altering the conditions that lead to execution. In *Inês*, the fado-inflected chamber sustains voice through repetition while binding the protagonist to a mythic structure that culminates in death. *Regina* relocates voice within the archive, where testimony emerges through acts of ethical listening rather than narrative resolution. *Shanawdithit* redistributes vocal authority across collective and transgenerational lines, transforming the individual voice into relational transmission. In *Oksana G.*, the near absence of extended vocal space reframes protagonism through withholding, while *Lillian Alling* disperses vocal presence across landscape and motion. In *Alexandra*, recursive self-narration stages voice and movement through doubled temporalities. Read together, these works demonstrate that the reconfiguration

of operatic womanhood unfolds through the structural conditions that determine how voice, visibility, and movement are organised and sustained.

These shifts in representation carry ethical implications that extend beyond the operatic stage. To recognise the structures that organise representation is also to recognise the responsibilities that accompany acts of listening and looking. Rather than resolving the tensions they expose, the operas sustain them, asking audiences to remain attentive to the conditions under which voice emerges and is received. Within this framework, listening becomes a form of engagement that exceeds aesthetic appreciation, requiring a mode of attention that acknowledges presence and limitation, articulation and absence.

This dissertation therefore concludes without closure. Contemporary Canadian opera does not break the killing jar; the works examined here expose its boundaries, test its pressures, and, in different ways, begin to reconfigure the conditions it imposes. Those pressures remain, but they become perceptible in ways that alter how they can be experienced, understood, and perhaps resisted. This possibility recalls Ellie M. Hisama's (2001) argument that attending to identity and social context can open new ways of hearing and understanding musical works. It also returns to Koskoff's (1989) insistence that musical practices remain embedded within the social structures that shape them. In the operas examined here, such attention makes audible dimensions of representation that might otherwise remain obscured: the distribution and withholding of voice, the pressures of repetition and interruption, and the ways musical structures participate in broader histories of gender, power, and cultural memory. Within these recognised constraints, other configurations begin to take shape, still contingent and partial, but suggestive of possibilities that the inherited structures of the genre do not entirely foreclose. What emerges, then, is less a resolution than an invitation to continue attending to these sites of

pressure and articulation, where the conditions of representation become most visible and where different ways of hearing and of being heard may begin to emerge.

Perhaps the final gesture of this study should return to the women whose voices have shaped it: to Alexandra, Filumena, Inês, Lillian, Oksana, Regina, and Shanawdithit. Across these works, each woman emerges through a different condition of audibility and presence; her voice may be sustained, interrupted, recovered, withheld, or carried forward by others. Their voices resist being gathered into a single account of operatic womanhood, just as their stories resist a single narrative of progress or transformation. What remains instead is their persistence: in quotation and repetition, in breath and gesture, in memory and transmission, and in the quiet space before the frame closes.

In a context marked by ongoing historical erasure and uneven acts of remembrance, these operas remind us that listening is never passive. At its most attentive, it becomes a form of engagement, accountability, and responsibility. Listening cannot dismantle the frame, but it can make its contours, pressures, and openings perceptible, allowing us to recognise where other possibilities might begin. The killing jar may remain, then, but listening changes how we encounter its boundaries and the voices that persist within and beyond them. These voices ask to be heard: through genre, through history, and through us.

Appendix 1

Opera Synopses

Alexandra follows explorer Alexandra David-Néel through a series of journeys toward Lhasa, presenting her simultaneously as a younger Explorer undertaking the journeys and an older Narrator recalling them. Alexandra repeatedly leaves conventional domestic and social life behind to travel with her companion Yongden, despite difficult terrain, dangerous weather, limited supplies, and repeated efforts by soldiers to prevent them from entering Tibet. After being turned back more than once, Alexandra and Yongden undertake a final covert journey disguised as Tibetan pilgrims. They endure freezing temperatures, hunger, storms, and exhaustion before eventually reaching Lhasa, where they live disguised as locals and visit its temples and the Potala terraces. The opera closes with Alexandra reading a letter from her husband Philippe questioning the purpose of her travels; she responds affectionately but does not provide an answer.

Filumena follows Italian immigrant Filumena Costanzo from her marriage to Charlie Lassandro in Crowsnest Pass through her involvement with bootlegger Emilio Picariello and his son Steve. At her wedding, Filumena is pressured to abandon her Italian name and language, and in the years that follow she becomes involved in Picariello's cross-border bootlegging operation while developing a relationship with Steve. After Steve is reported shot during a bootlegging run, Picariello sets out to confront Constable Lawson, with Filumena following him. During the confrontation, Lawson is shot and killed, and Filumena and Picariello flee. Conflicting accounts of the shooting follow, and both are convicted. In prison, Filumena refuses pressure to assume

responsibility in order to save Picariello. On death row, she accepts shared responsibility, seeks forgiveness, reclaims her name, and prepares for her execution.

Inês centres on Pedro Carmona, a Portuguese army deserter living in Toronto with his wife Constanza, and his relationship with Inês, a fado singer he meets at a Portuguese nightclub. Pedro and Inês become increasingly involved as their conversations and performances invoke the medieval story of Pedro and Inês de Castro. When Inês becomes pregnant, Pedro's relationship with Constanza and his conflict with his parents intensify. Pedro's mother, Maria, confronts Inês over the family's honour and shoots and kills her. Pedro subsequently receives Inês's body and summons his family to a cathedral, where he conducts a ritual in which he crowns Inês as queen and compels his family to drink wine mixed with her blood. Pedro then ends his life, and Inês reappears as an apparition at the opera's conclusion.

Lillian Alling begins in British Columbia in 1980, as Irene MacDonald tells her son Jimmy the story of Lillian Alling, a young Russian woman who travelled across North America decades earlier. Arriving at Ellis Island, Lillian searches for Jozef Lazinsky, a man who had promised to marry her, and learns that he has travelled west. She follows his trail across the United States and into Canada, travelling largely alone and enduring hunger, imprisonment, and the dangers of the wilderness. Along the way she meets telegraph operator Scotty MacDonald, who repeatedly offers her help and eventually follows her north. Lillian finally finds Jozef and confronts him over his betrayal of her family; during the ensuing struggle, she shoots him with his rifle, and Scotty conceals his body and the weapon. Scotty then offers Lillian a new life and the name

Irene MacDonald. In 1980, Jimmy realises that the woman telling him Lillian's story is Lillian herself and learns about the past his mother had concealed from him.

Oksana follows a young Ukrainian woman who leaves her home in Kostychany after Konstantin offers her and her friend Nataliya well-paid cleaning work abroad. Instead, the women are trafficked through several countries and subjected to captivity and violence. Oksana eventually escapes and reaches a refugee shelter in Brindisi, Italy, where Father Alexander and other residents help her recover and contact her family. As Oksana prepares to return to Ukraine, Konstantin tracks her to the shelter and attempts to regain control over her. After an earlier confrontation forces him to flee, he returns while Father Alexander is away. Oksana resists him, and both are fatally wounded in the struggle. Father Alexander returns before Oksana dies, and she asks him to remember her name. In Ukraine, her family is still awaiting her return when Father Alexander telephones from Italy.

Regina moves between the life of Regina Jonas and the archival research of Anna in Berlin in 1991. In scenes from Regina's past, she pursues her determination to become a rabbi despite being told that women cannot hold the position and despite concerns from her mother. She is ordained in 1935 and continues her work until the Nazi persecution of Jews increasingly restricts her life. In 1942, Regina and her mother are ordered by the Gestapo to register their belongings, leave their home, and surrender their possessions, including Regina's papers. In the present, Anna searches through archival boxes while contending with her father's dismissive attitude toward her research. As Regina fears that she and her work have been erased, Anna continues

searching until she finds evidence of her, bringing the two women together across the opera's different time periods.

Shanawdithit follows Shanawdithit, initially called Nancy April, a Beothuk woman living in Newfoundland under the care of Scottish explorer William Cormack. Shanawdithit rejects the name Nancy April, while Cormack records her language, memories, drawings, and knowledge of Beothuk life. Through her recollections, she recounts the capture and death of her aunt Demasduit and the violence, disease, starvation, and displacement experienced by the Beothuk people. Cormack presents Shanawdithit's maps and drawings to the Beothuk Institute, whose members dismiss much of what he presents, and later appeals unsuccessfully for financial assistance as her health deteriorates. As Shanawdithit approaches death, Cormack leaves, and she remains alone. Kwe and the Spirit Chorus then call to her, telling her that her stories will continue through future generations. The opera concludes with Kwe declaring, "These are the descendants of Shanawdithit," as the chorus repeats Shanawdithit's name.

APPENDIX 2

Alexandra

2a. Characters and Relationships

Character	Role / Relationships	Voice Type
Narrator	Older Alexandra Reflects on her past self	Soprano
Explorer	Younger Alexandra Protagonist of the journey	Coloratura soprano
Yongden (Arthur)	Alexandra's travelling companion	Tenor
Philippe	Alexandra's husband	Not physically present in the opera
Chorus of Monks	Monks in Lhasa	Bass-baritone (2) Bass (1) Mega-bass (1)

Alexandra

2b. Scene-by-Scene Summary

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene I	Undisclosed locations, possibly Alexandra's home	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer	The opera opens in near-darkness as the Narrator introduces the duality of resistance and renunciation. The Narrator and Explorer appear simultaneously, one reflecting and the other acting. The Explorer writes to her husband, expressing affection, creative frustration, and financial need as she prepares for her first expedition.
Scene II	Frontier landscape First expedition	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden • Workers	The stage expands to show three temporal planes. The Explorer and Narrator speak in unison about preferring to die on the road rather than live with regret. As the journey begins, their lines overlap, describing the rhythm and vastness of the landscape and a sense of boundless motion.
Scene III	Tibetan border encampment	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden • Soldiers	The group trades with villagers, and Arthur (Yongden) jokes that Alexandra is a hundred years old to secure supplies. Soldiers intervene and deny them passage into Tibet. Defiant, the Explorer vows to cross disguised as a Tibetan. The Narrator recalls this as the moment when her determination to reach Lhasa became fixed.
Scene IV	Paris	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer	In Paris, the Explorer expresses alienation from society, frustrated by shallow conversation and domestic expectations. The Narrator echoes her sense of loss and fear of repeating her parents' loveless marriage. The scene ends with the Explorer's sudden decision to leave again.
Scene V	Mountain path Second expedition	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden	The Explorer and Yongden begin a smaller, more perilous journey toward Lhasa, choosing a little-used route and travelling with minimal supplies. Yongden reflects on the sense of being on the threshold of discovery.
Scene VI	Mountain clearing at night	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden	The Explorer and Yongden rest in a mountain clearing at night. The Explorer vividly describes the surrounding landscape, recalling its scents and atmosphere.

Alexandra

2b. Scene-by-Scene Summary (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene VII	Bridge over ravine	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden • Soldiers	The Explorer and Yongden attempt to cross a fragile bridge but are stopped by soldiers and turned away. The Narrator recalls being escorted through villages under watchful eyes, while the Explorer swears not to return home until she has succeeded.
Scene VIII	Interior, temporary shelter	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer	Alone, the Explorer sorts through her belongings and finds a kimono, prompting a moment of self-reflection and vulnerability. She questions her strength before regaining her resolve. The scene ends with both Alexandras expressing quiet affirmation before continuing onward.
Scene IX	Tibetan highlands, camp preparation	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden	The Explorer and Yongden plan a final covert journey to Lhasa, disguising themselves as Tibetan pilgrims to avoid detection. Despite Yongden's fear, their voices merge in shared determination.
Scene X	Open landscape Tibet	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden • Monks	The Alexandras recall the joy of being on the road, their overlapping voices celebrating freedom and purpose. When monks pass nearby, the Explorer and Yongden are forced to hide.
Scene XI	Mountain trail Night crossing	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden	The journey becomes increasingly arduous as the Explorer and Yongden face freezing temperatures, exhaustion, and hostility from villagers. The Narrator recalls their struggle to find shelter amid violent winds and cold, while Yongden supports the Explorer as she nears collapse.
Scene XII	Tibetan border and mountain pass	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden • Farmer	At the Tibetan border, the Explorer and Yongden meet a farmer who warns them of the dangers ahead. Posing as a lama travelling with his elderly mother, Yongden pleads for his help. The Explorer sings of perseverance and finding simplicity in endurance.

Alexandra

2b. Scene-by-Scene Summary (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene XIII–XIV	Snowstorm in mountains	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden	The Explorer insists on searching for the river's source despite the danger, prompting Yongden to accuse her of recklessness. Later, caught in a snowstorm, they wander for six days without food. On Christmas Day, they boil their boots for survival.
Scene XV	Lhasa, Tibet	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer • Yongden • Monks	After a month-long trek, the Explorer and Yongden reach Lhasa, where they live disguised as locals. The Narrator recalls visiting temples and the Potala terraces. Both Alexandras proclaim "Lhasa!" as monks chant in a local dialect.
Scene XVI	Unspecified	• Alexandra Narrator • Alexandra Explorer	The opera closes with Alexandra reading a letter from Philippe questioning her purpose. She replies affectionately but offers no answer. The two Alexandras sing of serenity and detachment, repeating "dream, can you see."

Alexandra

2c. Production Overview and Analytical Materials

Title & Production	Synopsis	Premiere (yyyy-mm-dd)	Composer & Librettist	Subsequent Runs (yyyy-mm-dd)	Scoring	Duration	Analytical Materials
Alexandra By Chant Libres	*Alexandra* follows explorer Alexandra David-Néel as she reflects on her unconventional life and journeys, particularly her travels through Asia and her pursuit of spiritual and personal freedom.	2012-05-15 Usine C Complete run: 2012-05-15 2012-05-16 2012-05-17 2012-05-18 2012-05-19	Zack Settel & Yan Muckle	None	• Live musicians: 5 • Principal singers: 3 • Chorus • Real-time electro-acoustic music	1h	• Score: orchestral (Settel 2012) • Libretto • Video capsules • Performance recording • *My Journey to Lhasa* (David-Néel 2023) • *Lettres à son mari* (David-Néel 2019)

APPENDIX 3

Filumena

3a. Characters and Relationships

Character	Role / Relationships	Voice Type
Filumena (Florence) Costanzo	• Daughter of Mamma and Papa Costanzo • Wife of Charlie Lassandro • Lover of Stefano (Steve) Picariello	Soprano
Charlie Lassandro	• Husband of Filumena • Employee of Emilio Picariello • Colleague of Steve Picariello • Colleague of McAlpine	Baritone
Emilio Picariello	• Father of Stefano • Husband of Maria • Charlie's employer • Mentor to Filumena	Baritone
Stefano (Steve) Picariello	• Son of Emilio and Maria Picariello • Lover of Filumena	Tenor
Maria Picariello	• Wife of Emilio • Mother of Steve	Mezzo-soprano
McAlpine	Charlie's colleague and associate in bootlegging	Tenor
Mamma Costanzo	Filumena's mother	Mezzo-soprano
Papa Costanzo	Filumena's father	Baritone
Constable Lawson	Police officer	Tenor or high baritone

Filumena

3b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act I

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters	Summary
Act I Scene I	Autumn 1915	• Filumena Costanzo • Charlie Lassandro • Mamma Costanzo • Papa Costanzo • Emilio Picariello • Stefano (Steve) Picariello • Constable Lawson • McAlpine • Wedding guests	At her wedding in Crowsnest Pass, Filumena is pressured to renounce her Italian name and language. McAlpine's vulgarity and Picariello's arrival expose cultural tensions. Filumena withdraws and reflects on the storm.
Act I Scene II	Winter Several years later	• Filumena Costanzo • Charlie Lassandro • Emilio Picariello • Constable Lawson • McAlpine • Bootleggers	In Picariello's hotel kitchen, tensions among bootleggers reveal the dangers of their trade. Filumena's calm composure contrasts with the men's recklessness. Picariello, recognising her intelligence, invites her to help smuggle liquor across the border. When Lawson arrives, Filumena defuses his suspicion, asserting quiet control.
Act I Scene III	Early summer The following year	• Filumena Costanzo • Charlie Lassandro • Emilio Picariello • Steve Picariello	In a meadow near the border, Filumena and Steve's playful exchanges turn to affection, suggesting their growing attachment. When Charlie and Picariello arrive, the men's remarks betray suspicion and complicity.
Act I Scene IV	Later that same summer	• Filumena Costanzo • Charlie Lassandro • Emilio Picariello • Steve Picariello • Maria Picariello • McAlpine • Townspeople • Chorus	During Picariello's campaign rally, Filumena defies Charlie and reclaims her identity. Her bond with Steve deepens. Maria confronts Picariello over the suspected affair between Filumena and Steve. Charlie secretly arranges a meeting with Lawson, possibly setting in motion the tragedy to come.

Filumena

3b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act II

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act II Scene V	September 21, 1922	• Filumena Costanzo • Charlie Lassandro • Emilio Picariello • Maria Picariello • McAlpine	As a storm builds, Filumena learns that Steve has joined a bootlegging run. When McAlpine reports Steve's shooting, Maria's grief collides with Picariello's rage, driving him to seek revenge and compelling Filumena to follow. Charlie's estrangement underscores his emotional detachment.
Act II Scene VI	Half an hour later, the same night	• Filumena Costanzo • Emilio Picariello • Constable Lawson • Mrs. Lawson • Lawson's children	In a storm near Coleman, Picariello confronts Lawson while Filumena pleads for restraint. She fires a warning shot, but as she tries to stop Picariello from shooting, the gun discharges and Lawson is killed. Filumena and Picariello escape into the night.
Act II Scene VII	Days, weeks, and months later	• Filumena Costanzo • Charlie Lassandro • Mamma Costanzo • Papa Costanzo • Emilio Picariello • Steve Picariello • Maria Picariello • McAlpine • Crown lawyer • Anglophone chorus • Italian chorus	Following Lawson's death, conflicting testimonies divide the community along cultural lines. Filumena and Picariello give contradictory accounts of the shooting.

Filumena

3b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act II

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act II Scene VIII	November 1922	• Filumena Costanzo • Steve Picariello • Maria Picariello	In her Calgary jail cell, Filumena is visited by Maria and Steve, who urge her to take responsibility to save Picariello's life. Accused of selfishness, she insists on her own account of events, achieving moral clarity despite isolation.
Act II Scene IX	May 1, 1923	• Filumena Costanzo • Emilio Picariello • Prison matron • Priest • Guard	On death row, Filumena and Picariello confront the meaning of their guilt. Filumena accepts shared responsibility and seeks forgiveness, while Picariello maintains that his conviction is unjust and blames others. Alone, Filumena reclaims her name and faces death with serenity, finding freedom in self-recognition.

Filumena

3c. Production Overview and Analytical Materials

Title & Production	Synopsis	Premiere (yyyy-mm-dd)	Composer & Librettist	Performance History (yyyy-mm-dd)	Scoring	Duration	Analytical Materials
Filumena By Calgary Opera & The Banff Centre	*Filumena* follows Italian immigrant Filumena Lassandro (1900-1923), as she is tried and executed for her alleged involvement in the murder of a police officer in Alberta in the 1920s.	2003-02-01 Complete run: 2003-02-01 2003-02-05 2003-02-07 Calgary 2003-08-06 2003-08-08 2003-08-10 Banff Centre 2003 CBC-TV	John Estacio & John Murrell	2005-04-28 2005-04-30 NAC 2005-08-05 Banff Centre 2005-11-26 2005-11-29 2005-12-01 Edmonton Opera 2017 For Canada 150, Calgary 2020 (online) Brott Festival	• Orchestra: full • Solo singing roles: 12 • Chorus: 30-40 •Extras: 11	2h 5min	• Score: orchestral • Libretto • MP3 audio files

APPENDIX 4

Inês

4a. Characters and Relationships

Character	Role / Relationships	Voice Type
Pedro Carmona	• Husband of Constanza • Son of General Carmona and Maria Carmona • Lover of Inês	Tenor
Constanza Carmona	• Wife of Pedro • Daughter-in-law of the General and Maria	Soprano
Inês	• Fadista • Lover of Pedro	Mezzo-soprano
General Carmona	• Pedro's father • Husband of Maria • Military officer	Baritone
Maria Carmona	• Pedro's mother • Wife of the General	Mezzo-soprano

Inês

4b. Scene-by-Scene Summary

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene I	Toronto 1960s	• Pedro Carmona • Constanza Carmona	In a bleak Toronto apartment, Constanza and Pedro's anniversary exposes the disintegration of their marriage and the hardship of immigrant life. Constanza mourns her lost status in Lisbon while Pedro's affection is met with resentment. Their confrontation ends in anger and isolation.
Scene II	Toronto Portuguese nightclub Later that night	• Pedro Carmona • Inês	At a nightclub, Pedro meets Inês, whose fado evokes longing and exile. Their conversation intertwines personal history with the legend of Inês de Castro, blurring the boundaries between myth and reality.
Scene III	Lisbon, Portugal	• General Carmona • Maria Carmona	In Lisbon, Pedro's parents learn that he has gone missing in Angola. Maria prays for his safety while the General maintains composure through a sense of duty. Their joint appeal to the Virgin Mary closes the scene in shared fear and devotion.
Scene IV	Toronto Portuguese nightclub	• Pedro Carmona • Inês	Inês performs a fado about a caged blackbird, singing of captivity and freedom while Pedro watches, captivated. Their dialogue merges myth and reality as they assume the roles of the legendary lovers, revealing Pedro's growing absorption in the story's fatal outcome.
Scene V	Lisbon, Portugal	• General Carmona • Maria Carmona	The General and Maria receive word that Pedro has deserted the army and fled to Canada with his wife. For the General, it is a betrayal of duty; for Maria, proof that her son lives. Their opposing reactions reveal the divide between loyalty to the state and love for family.

Inês

4b. Scene-by-Scene Summary (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene VI	Toronto Late at night	• Pedro Carmona • Inês	In Inês's apartment, Pedro declares his overpowering love while she asserts her independence. Their dialogue alternates between attraction and resistance, but Pedro's insistence dominates, revealing the imbalance in their relationship. The scene ends in an uneasy physical reconciliation.
Scene VII	Toronto Portuguese nightclub Inês's dressing room	• Pedro Carmona • Constanza Carmona • Inês	Constanza, now working as a cleaner, encounters Pedro and confronts him about his infidelity. Their exchange exposes the social and emotional deterioration of their marriage. When Inês enters and announces her pregnancy, the disclosure confirms the breakdown of Pedro and Constanza's marriage.
Scene VIII	Toronto Pedro and Constanza's apartment	• Pedro Carmona • Constanza Carmona • General Carmona • Maria Carmona	Pedro's parents arrive unexpectedly and join Constanza in confronting him about Inês. As duty, faith, and personal conviction clash, Pedro rejects his family's authority and leaves. After his departure, Maria urges the General to act, equating honour with moral duty.
Scene IX	Toronto	• Inês • Maria Carmona	Inês sings of a blackbird's escape and return to flight while Maria confronts her, accusing her of destroying the family's honour. The confrontation escalates until Maria shoots and kills Inês.

Inês

4b. Scene-by-Scene Summary (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene X	Toronto Pedro and Constanza's apartment	• Constanza Carmona • General Carmona • Maria Carmona	Constanza prays for Pedro's redemption. Maria arrives and confesses to killing Inês. The General enters with news that Pedro has received Inês's body and, expressing a desire to repent, has asked his father to gather everyone at the cathedral at midnight. Constanza doubts his sincerity, while Maria insists on faith in her son.
Scene XI	Toronto Cathedral Later that night	• Pedro Carmona • General Carmona • Maria Carmona • Inês (apparition)	In a candlelit cathedral, Pedro conducts a ritual that merges grief, repentance, and myth. He compels his family to drink wine mixed with Inês's blood and reveals her crowned body on the altar. Declaring her queen, he ends his life. Inês reappears transfigured, affirming their eternal bond.

Inês

4c. Production Overview and Analytical Materials

Title & Production	Synopsis	Premiere (yyyy-mm-dd)	Composer & Librettist	Performance History (yyyy-mm-dd)	Scoring	Duration	Analytical Materials
Inês By Queen of Puddings Music Theatre	Based on the fourteenth-century Portuguese legend of Inês de Castro, the opera moves between Lisbon and Toronto in the 1960s. Portuguese army surgeon Pedro Carmona deserts and emigrates to Canada, where his encounter with Inês draws them into a tragic love affair.	2009-02-22 Enwave Theatre Complete run: 2009-02-22 2009-02-25 2009-02-26 2009-02-28	James Rolfe & Paul Bentley	None	• Clarinet/ bass clarinet • Guitar • Piano • Violin • Bass guitar • Soprano • Mezzo / fado singer • Contralto • Baritone • Bass-baritone	1h 5min	• Score: Piano-vocal & orchestral • Program • Mp3 audio files

APPENDIX 5

Lillian Alling

5a. Characters and Relationships

Character	Role / Relationships	Age	Voice type
Lillian Alling Sofia Petrovna Abramova	A solitary woman who sets out on foot from New York to Siberia	20s	Lyric soprano
Irene MacDonald	A modern woman who becomes fascinated by Lillian's story	78	Mezzo-soprano
Scotty MacDonald	A telegraph operator who encounters Lillian along her route	20s	Baritone
Jimmy MacDonald	Irene and Scotty's son	50s	Tenor
Constable Wyman Sergei Lazinsky Jozef Lazinsky	Police officer Brother of Jozef Betrays Lillian and her family	40s 30s 30s	Baritone
Karl	Norwegian immigrant farmer	40s	Bass-baritone
Kristian	Karl's son	20s	Mezzo-soprano
Voice Ensemble	Villagers, officials, travelers, immigrant farmers in North Dakota	Various	SATB chorus
Petya Petrovna Abramova	Lillian's brother	child	Not voiced

Lillian Alling

5b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act I

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act I Scene I	1980 Autumn British Columbia	• Irene MacDonald • Jimmy MacDonald • Lillian Alling	In her remote mountain cabin, Irene prepares to move to the city for medical reasons, helped by her son Jimmy. As they pack, Jimmy discovers a finely carved wooden box containing an old perpetual motion toy. Irene identifies it as belonging to Lillian Alling, a woman she met fifty years earlier. The object triggers her recollection of Lillian's story. As Irene begins to describe her, Lillian appears in memory, young and determined, carrying a suitcase and singing her vow to move forward without looking back.
Act I Scene II	1927 Spring Ellis Island New York	• Lillian Alling	Lillian arrives at Ellis Island among new immigrants. Surrounded by unfamiliar languages and procedures, she hesitates but remains resolute in her quest. Introducing herself in Russian, she declares her name and purpose, marking the beginning of her North American journey.
Act I Scene III	1928 Sergei's Apartment Brooklyn	• Lillian Alling • Sergei Lazinsky • Nora Lazinsky • Lazinsky children	Lillian finds Sergei Lazinsky, Jozef's brother, in Brooklyn. Speaking first in Russian, she insists that Jozef promised to marry her. Sergei doubts her story, claiming Jozef left years ago for North Dakota. His wife, Nora, shows compassion, offering tea and sympathy, but Sergei warns Lillian that Jozef may not want to be found. Lillian refuses to abandon her search, vowing again to fulfil her promise as she heads to North Dakota.

Lillian Alling

5b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act I (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act I Scene IV	Brooklyn Intersection, A few minutes later	• Lillian Alling • Bobby • Brooklyn Boys • Passing Woman	At a street corner, Lillian is mocked by a group of boys singing "Polly from Poughkeepsie," a taunting song about an innocent girl changed by the city. One boy, Bobby, teases her pronunciation as she asks for the library. A passing woman intervenes, glaring at the boys and giving Lillian clear directions, ending their harassment.
Act I Scene V	American Midwest	• Irene MacDonald • Jimmy MacDonald • Lillian Alling • Drifter	On a rural road, Irene narrates Lillian's westward journey to Jimmy. Lillian appears, crossing vast prairies and describing the landscape's quiet openness. Memory interrupts the scene as she recalls her brother Petya and his perpetual motion toy, recalling the trauma that prompted her flight. Regaining composure, Lillian meets a drifter who helps her get to North Dakota. Through gestures, he makes her understand that she can hop on a freight train. As the train approaches, Lillian runs toward it, repeating her refrain, "I open my eyes, I pick up my pack."
Act I Scene VI	Present Day On the Highway	• Irene MacDonald • Jimmy MacDonald	As Jimmy drives, Irene recounts how Lillian travelled by foot, train, and canoe, gathering wild rice to survive along the way. Irene recalls Lillian's refrain ("I open my eyes, I pick up my pack") and momentarily aligns herself with Lillian's determination. Jimmy asks if Lillian made it to North Dakota, prompting Irene to observe, "It didn't turn out exactly like she planned."

Lillian Alling

5b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act I (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act I Scene VII	North Dakota Summer Evening	• Lillian Alling • Karl • Kristian • Norwegian Immigrants	Lillian arrives exhausted at a farmstead in North Dakota during a barn dance. Karl and his son Kristian give her water and help her recover, revealing that Jozef had worked there but left abruptly. Lillian repeats her refrain but Karl reacts bitterly, calling Jozef a thief. Kristian, however, later confides that Jozef spoke of going to Telegraph Creek, British Columbia. Despite warnings that no woman could survive the journey, Lillian insists on continuing there.
Act I Scene VIII	Western Canada Telegraph Trail	• Irene MacDonald • Jimmy MacDonald • Lillian Alling • Scotty MacDonald • Billy • Charlie • Sam • Constable Wyman	Irene narrates Lillian's continued journey north. Lillian endures the wilderness, repeating her refrain of persistence, "I open my eyes, I pick up my pack," while linemen gossip about the mysterious woman travelling along the trail. Starving, Lillian attempts to steal food from Scotty's cabin but is caught. Scotty offers to help her, but she insists on continuing alone. Constable Wyman appears, accuses her of vagrancy, and discovers among her few possessions the perpetual motion device and a pistol. Declaring her a threat, he arrests her. In the present, Jimmy is revealed to be Irene and Scotty MacDonald's son, suggesting that Scotty passed Lillian's story on to Irene.
Act I Scene IX	Near Vancouver Oakalla Prison Farm	• Irene MacDonald • Jimmy MacDonald • Lillian Alling	As Irene continues the story, Jimmy learns that Lillian was imprisoned at Oakalla Prison for vagrancy and possession of an unlicensed firearm. The scene shifts between Irene's narration and prisoners at work, including Lillian. Irene sings of memory and the persistence of the past, while Lillian echoes her refrain of endurance and her determination to find Jozef, linking the two women across time.

Lillian Alling

5b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act II

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act II Scene X	1928 Vancouver Early Spring Waterfront Late Afternoon	• Lillian Alling • Scotty MacDonald	Recently released from prison, Lillian works in a café, where Scotty finds her and again offers to help. She refuses his sympathy and assistance, asserting her independence and repeating, "I have my journey and you have yours." Determined to follow her own path, she insists on continuing alone.
Act II Scene XI	1928 Vancouver Waterfront Morning	• Lillian Alling • Scotty MacDonald	Lillian prepares for work when Scotty returns. He insists that his interest in her is genuine and acknowledges her strength. After he sounds out her name in Morse code, she cautiously invites him to walk with her in Stanley Park on Sunday, marking a measured gesture of trust.
Act II Scene XII	Vancouver Stanley Park	• Lillian Alling • Scotty MacDonald	Lillian and Scotty share a picnic in Stanley Park, where she reflects on freedom while insisting that her journey remains bound to a promise. Scotty initially assumes that this promise concerns her love for Jozef, but Lillian reveals that she is driven instead by his betrayal of her family. Recalling her brother Petya and his perpetual motion toy, she explains that hatred has sustained her journey. Scotty urges her to imagine a future with him beyond revenge and pledges to accompany her. Lillian remains resolute, continuing to speak in the singular: "I will find him."
Act II Scene XIII	British Columbia Telegraph Trail	• Irene MacDonald • Jimmy MacDonald • Lillian Alling • Scotty MacDonald	Irene asks Scotty to stop driving so she can finish telling Lillian's story "out here, where I can pretend we're still in the wilderness." She recounts how Lillian left suddenly one April morning without telling Scotty. When he discovers her departure, he follows her trail in an attempt to catch up with her. The opera shifts into visual scenes depicting Lillian's perilous journey through mountains, rapids, and rockslides. Exhausted but resolute, she presses on, echoing her recurring refrain of persistence.

Lillian Alling

5b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act II (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act II Scene XIV (Part I)	late 1920s Near Telegraph Creek Wilderness	• Lillian Alling • Scotty MacDonald • Jozef Lazinsky	Lillian finds Jozef panning for gold and confronts him by name. He initially denies knowing her until she identifies herself as Sofia Petrovna Abramova. Jozef mocks and attacks her, but Scotty arrives in time to intervene. During the struggle, Lillian seizes Jozef's rifle and shoots him. Scotty conceals the weapon and the body, insisting that they were never there and that they acted together.
Act II Scene XIV (Part II)	1980 Present day	• Irene MacDonald / Lillian Alling • Jimmy MacDonald • Scotty MacDonald	Scotty offers Lillian the possibility of a new life with his mother's name, Irene MacDonald, "a name without sadness." In the present, Jimmy realises that Irene MacDonald is his grandmother's name and that his mother, Irene, must be Lillian Alling. Irene reveals the life she has concealed, marked by betrayal, loss, survival, and love. Jimmy initially recoils but gradually responds with compassion. She gives him the perpetual motion device and repeats her refrain: "I open my eyes, I pick up my pack, I never look back."

Lillian Alling

5c. Production Overview and Analytical Materials

Title & Production	Synopsis	Premiere (yyyy-mm-dd)	Composer & Librettist	Performance History (yyyy-mm-dd)	Scoring	Duration	Analytical Materials
Lillian Alling By Vancouver Opera Association	Lillian Alling follows a Russian immigrant's 1920s journey across North America in search of a man who betrayed her family. The opera is framed decades later through Irene MacDonald's recollections.	2010-10-16 Queen Elizabeth Theatre Complete run: 2010-10-16 2010-10-19 2010-10-21 2010-10-23	John Estacio & John Murrell	2011-08-18 Banff Summer Festival Complete run: 2011-08-18 2011-08-20	• Orchestra: full • Principal singers: 5-8 • Supporting singers: 5-7 • Chorus: SATB	2h 10min	• Score: piano-vocal • Video recordings: partial • YouTube capsules • *Lillian Alling: The Journey Home* (Smith-Josephy 2021)

APPENDIX 6

Oksana G.

6a. Characters and Relationships

Character	Role / Relationships	Age	Voice Type
Oksana	• Trafficked Ukrainian woman	17-18	Coloratura or Lyric Soprano
Konstantin	• Trafficker • Oksana's captor and abuser	28	Dramatic Tenor
Father Alexander	Catholic priest	28	Tenor
Nataliya	• Oksana's best friend • Trafficked Ukrainian woman	18	Dramatic Soprano
Lyuba	• Trafficked woman • Fellow victim of Konstantin	23	Mezzo-soprano
Asa	Psychic figure	50	Mezzo-soprano
Sofiya	Oksana's mother	44	Mezzo-soprano
Yuri	Oksana's father	45	Baritone
Pavlo	Friend of Oksana and Nataliya	17	Light Tenor
Dima and Thug	Konstantin's henchmen	Mid 20s	Baritones
Sister Clara	Works at the Refugee Centre with Father Alexander	45	Mezzo-soprano
Immigration Officer	Bureaucratic authority	35	Bass-baritone
Woman Auctioneer	Oversees sale of women in trafficking scene	30	Mezzo-soprano
Chorus (SSAATTBB)	Refugees, Townspeople		Mixed chorus

Oksana G.

6b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act I

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Prologue	8 November 1979 Kostychany Ukraine Asa's Parlour	• Oksana • Yuri • Sofiya • Asa	Oksana's baptism is followed by a tarot reading in which Asa predicts a journey of walls rising and falling, leading eventually to freedom.
Act I Scene I	27 June 1997 Kostychany Ukraine Town Square	• Oksana • Nataliya • Pavlo • Konstantin	Oksana and her friends Nataliya and Pavlo discuss their hopes for the future. They are approached by Konstantin, who targets Oksana with flattery before offering the two young women well-paid cleaning jobs abroad. Despite her parents' initial reluctance, Oksana persuades them to let her leave, believing the opportunity will transform her life. Before her departure, Sofiya gives Oksana her tarot cards, and the opera establishes its alternating structure between Oksana's experiences away from home and her family's growing anxiety in Kostychany.
Act I Scene II	Romania Forest A few hours later	• Oksana • Konstantin	Konstantin reveals that Nataliya is being sexually assaulted by his accomplices before turning his attention to Oksana. Under the guise of regret, he rapes her, revealing the violence and deception underlying his earlier promises. The scene marks Oksana's irreversible entry into the trafficking network and establishes Konstantin's coercive control over her.
Act I Scene III	July 1997 Kostychany Ukraine Asa's Parlour	• Sofiya • Asa	After three weeks without news of Oksana, Sofiya seeks guidance from Asa. A series of tarot cards suggests suffering, exploitation, and spiritual devastation, leading Asa to conclude that Oksana has been stolen and robbed of her soul. The scene highlights Sofiya's growing guilt and the family's increasing desperation.

Oksana G.

6b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act I (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act I Scene IV	July 1997 Kos, Greece Atlas Bar	• Oksana • Nataliya • Konstantin • Lyuba • Other traffickers	Oksana and Nataliya arrive at a bar where trafficked women are imprisoned and sold. They meet Lyuba, who explains the realities of the trafficking network and offers hope through stories of a refugee shelter in Italy. As Nataliya's condition deteriorates and Oksana resists Konstantin's control, both women endure escalating violence, culminating in Oksana's public auction and gang rape.
Act I Scene V	August 1997 Kostychany, Ukraine Oksana's Family Home	• Yuri • Sofiya • Pavlo	Back in Kostychany, Sofiya and Yuri struggle with grief, guilt, and uncertainty over Oksana's disappearance. Their anguish erupts into mutual accusations before subsiding into silence, reflecting the emotional toll of their daughter's absence.
Act I Scene VI	Late August 1997 Vlorë, Albania Shore of Adriatic Sea	• Oksana • Nataliya • Lyuba • Konstantin • Konstantin's henchmen • Trafficked women	Awaiting transport across the Adriatic, the trafficked women confront despair while Oksana continues to encourage hope and collective resistance. Konstantin rejects Oksana's pleas to spare Nataliya and threatens her family when she refuses his advances. Forced aboard the boat, the women journey toward an uncertain future.

Oksana G.

6b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act II

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act II Scene I	25 September 1997 Brindisi, Italy St. Francis Refugee Shelter	• Oksana • Father Alexander • Clara	Having escaped her captors, Oksana arrives injured at Father Alexander's refugee shelter. There, she reconnects with Lyuba, who has also escaped. Father Alexander insists on offering Oksana refuge despite Clara's growing opposition. Although initially distrustful, Oksana gradually accepts Father Alexander's compassion and agrees to let him contact her parents to tell them where she is.
Act II Scene II	2 October 1997 Kostychany Ukraine Asa's Parlour	• Sofiya • Asa • Pavlo	Sofiya responds to another tarot reading with despair until Pavlo arrives with news that Oksana is alive in Italy. Although relieved by the message from Father Alexander, uncertainty surrounding Nataliya's fate tempers the family's renewed hope.
Act II Scene III	5 October 1997 Brindisi, Italy St. Francis Refugee Shelter Father Alexander's Room	• Oksana • Father Alexander	Haunted by trauma and guilt, Oksana confides in Father Alexander about abandoning Nataliya during her escape. She reveals that she let go of Nataliya's hand in the water so that Nataliya would scream and draw attention to herself. It is unclear whether Nataliya survived or remains within the trafficking network. Oksana struggles with shame and guilt while Father Alexander encourages her to forgive herself and reclaim her sense of agency. Oksana remains convinced that she cannot escape Konstantin's control.

Oksana G.

6b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act II (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act II Scene IV	7 October 1997 Bari, Italy Outside a hotel	• Oksana • Father Alexander • Konstantin • Konstantin's henchmen	Consumed by obsession, Konstantin learns Oksana's whereabouts through his henchmen. He resolves to travel to Brindisi and reclaim her.
Act II Scene V Part 1	15 October 1997 Brindisi, Italy St. Francis Refugee Shelter	• Oksana • Konstantin • Lyuba • Father Alexander	A rare moment of celebration at the shelter is interrupted when Oksana receives a phone call from Konstantin, revealing that he has located her.
Act II Scene V Part 2		• Oksana • Father Alexander	Determined to return home despite the risks, Oksana resolves to tell her parents the truth about her circumstances. She begins to imagine a future beyond her trauma.
Act II Scene V Part 3		• Oksana • Father Alexander • Clara	Father Alexander agrees to help Oksana return to Ukraine while confronting the practical and moral challenges of protecting those in his care.
Act II Scene VI	31 October 1997 Brindisi, Italy St. Francis Refugee Shelter	• Oksana • Konstantin • Father Alexander	Konstantin arrives at the shelter searching for Oksana and provoking a confrontation with Father Alexander in the process. Konstantin offers to buy Oksana, threatens Father Alexander and throws money at him. The police are summoned and Konstantin is forced to flee. Father Alexander later resolves to use Konstantin's money to finance Oksana's return home.
Act II Scene VII	3 November 1997 Kostychany, Ukraine Oksana's Family Home	• Yuri • Sofiya • Pavlo	Oksana's parents receive a letter announcing her return to Ukraine. They eagerly prepare for her arrival. While Sofiya and Yuri celebrate the prospect of reunion, Pavlo quietly wonders whether Nataliya will return as well.

Oksana G.

6b. Scene-by-Scene Summary - Act II (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Act II Scene VIII	7 November 1997 Brindisi, Italy St. Francis Refugee Shelter Father Alexander's Room	• Oksana • Father Alexander	On the eve of her departure, Oksana thanks Father Alexander for restoring her sense of dignity and humanity. As they prepare for her journey home, he gives her money for the trip and breakfast the following morning. He explains that he will not spend the night at the shelter because he is travelling to Giovinazzo to help a woman in trouble. Sensing Oksana's fear about his absence, he gives her a knife for protection.
Act II Scene IX	8 November 1997 1:00 a.m. Giovinazzo, Italy Industrial Area	• Father Alexander • Konstantin • Konstantin's henchmen	As he waits to collect the woman, Father Alexander reflects on Oksana's resilience. He resolves to establish a permanent refuge for trafficked women. His plans are interrupted when Konstantin's henchmen appear in place of the woman and reveal that Konstantin has already gone to Brindisi to find Oksana. They beat Father Alexander but refuse to carry out their orders to kill him because he is a priest.
Act II Scene X	8 November 1997 Around 4:00 a.m. Brindisi, Italy St. Francis Refugee Shelter Father Alexander's Room	• Oksana • Konstantin • Father Alexander	Konstantin confronts Oksana and attempts to reclaim her through manipulation, threats, and declarations of love. When he threatens her again, Oksana feigns compliance, giving her an opportunity to defend herself. Konstantin is fatally wounded, but Oksana is also mortally wounded in the struggle. Father Alexander arrives too late to save her. Oksana dies in his arms after asking him to remember her name and declaring that she has "closed the mouth of a lion."
Epilogue	8 November 1997 Kostychany Ukraine Asa's Parlour	• Yuri • Sofiya • Pavlo	As Oksana's parents wait anxiously for her arrival, Asa draws the Star card and assures Sofiya that Oksana is "coming home." At that moment, Father Alexander telephones from Italy. The opera concludes with Asa contemplating the tarot card she holds in her hands.

Oksana G.

6c. Production Overview and Analytical Materials

Title & Production	Synopsis	Premiere (yyyy-mm-dd)	Composer & Librettist	Performance History (yyyy-mm-dd)	Scoring	Duration	Analytical Materials
Oksana G. By Tapestry Opera	*Oksana G.* recounts the story of a young Ukrainian woman caught in a human trafficking network, alongside Konstantin, her recruiter, and Father Alexander, the Canadian priest who gives her refuge in Brindisi, Italy.	2017-05-24 Imperial Oil Theatre Complete run: 2017-05-24 2017-05-26 2017-05-28 2017-05-30	Aaron Gervais & Colleen Murphy	None	• Principal singers: 5 •Supporting singers: 10 • Orchestra: medium + small percussion section • Chorus: SSAATTBB with short solos	2h	• Score: full orchestra • Video performance • YouTube promotional capsules

APPENDIX 7

Regina

7a. Characters and Relationships

Character	Role / Relationships	Voice Type
Regina Jonas	• Daughter of Mother • Student of Rabbi	Soprano
Anna	• Researcher • Daughter of Father	Soprano
Rabbi	Mentor to Regina	Baritone
Mother (Regina's mother)	Mother to Regina	Alto
Father (Anna's father)	Father to Anna	Bass-baritone

Regina

7b. Scene-by-Scene Summary

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene I	1991 Berlin	• Anna	Anna arrives in Berlin, determined to begin anew. She speaks of leaving her past behind and wanting to become someone different. Her words express resolve and anticipation as she stands on the threshold of change.
Scene II	Present time Berlin archives & Regina's Past	• Regina • Rabbi • Mother	The action shifts to the past, where Regina recounts her aspiration to become a rabbi. She approaches her rabbi with conviction, declaring that she feels called to the work. Although he warns her that women cannot hold such a position, he recognises her knowledge and sincerity. Regina's mother voices concern about her daughter's ambition, urging her to be practical. The exchange contrasts Regina's persistence with the caution of those around her.
Scene III	1935 Present time Berlin archives & Regina's Past	• Regina • Rabbi • Regina's mother • Anna • Anna's father	The scene alternates between archive and memory. Regina reflects that only her memories remain, while Anna begins her archival search amid her father's disapproving voice. Their overlapping lines express doubt and determination. Regina recalls her ordination in 1935, when her mentor recognised her achievement as a rabbi. Pride mingles with uncertainty as the voices of Anna and Regina intertwine. The reappearance of Regina's mother introduces criticism and regret. The scene ends with fatigue and ambiguity.

Regina

7b. Scene-by-Scene Summary (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene IV	1942 Present time Berlin archives & Regina's Past	• Regina • Regina's mother	The scene alternates between archive and memory. Regina, now in the archive, sets down a suitcase of documents. The action recalls 1942, when she and her mother were ordered by the Gestapo to register all their belongings. Regina maintains hope that she might continue her work, but her mother scolds her for thinking about her work at such a time. Regina remembers being forced to leave their home and seeing their possessions, including her papers, confiscated. As the documents are taken, she realises that her identity is being erased.
Scene V	Present time Berlin archives	• Regina	Alone, Regina sings about her life's calling. Through repeated phrases—"There is something in me, I know it"—she affirms that her desire to become a rabbi is genuine and inescapable. The scene expresses conviction and self-recognition through repetition and musical intensity.
Scene VI	1991 Present time Berlin archives	• Regina • Anna • Regina's mother • Anna's father	In the archive, Anna searches through boxes and papers while her father's voice dismisses her work. Regina's unseen voice repeats her refrain about being erased. Anna insists on continuing her search, seeking a chance to recover a story. Regina, nearing despair, says she is ready to give up, while her mother's voice recalls that there was never any chance for her. Anna silences her father, looks up, and "sees" Regina. Their voices join as Regina says "Here I am," and Anna answers "I found her."

Regina

7c. Production Overview and Analytical Materials

Title & Production	Synopsis	Premiere (yyyy-mm-dd)	Composer & Librettist	Performance History (yyyy-mm-dd)	Scoring	Duration	Analytical Materials
Regina By Essential Opera	*Regina* is based on the life of Regina Jonas, the first woman ordained as a rabbi in 1935. After struggling for recognition, Jonas was murdered at Auschwitz, and her legacy remained largely forgotten until the discovery of documents in 1991.	2014-05-14 Heliconian Hall	Elisha Denburg & Maya Rabinovitch	2015-10-08 Sir James Dunn Theatre, Dalhousie University	• Principal singers: 5 • Clarinet in B♭ •Accordion • Piano • Violin	30 min	• Score: piano-vocal • Video performance

APPENDIX 8

Shanawdithit

8a. Characters and Relationships

Character	Role / Relationships	Voice Type
Shanawdithit	Presented as the last known member of the Beothuk people	Soprano
William Cormack	Scottish explorer and ethnographer	Baritone
Kwe	Spirit and voice of Shanawdithit's ancestors and descendants	Mezzo-soprano
John Peyton	English settler involved in Beothuk displacement	Tenor
James Simms	Government official and colonial authority	Bass
Spirit Chorus	Embodies ancestral presence and collective memory	SATB chorus

Shanawdithit

8b. Scene-by-Scene Summary

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene I John Peyton's house		• John Peyton • Shanawdithit • William Cormack	Peyton and Cormack discuss Nancy April (Shanawdithit), a captured Beothuk woman, as though she is not there. They discuss her fate, with Peyton dismissing her as the last survivor of an extinct people and offering her to Cormack. Cormack sees Nancy April as the key to recovering knowledge of the Beothuk and takes her to St. John's to live with him.
Scene II Cormack's house		• Shanawdithit • William Cormack	Shanawdithit reclaims her identity by rejecting the name Nancy April. Cormack seeks to document her language, memories, and artistic knowledge, while her drawings and songs bear witness to the destruction of the Beothuk people.
Scene III The Beothuk Institute	1829	• William Cormack • Beothuk Institute Members	At a Beothuk Institute meeting, Cormack presents Shanawdithit's maps and drawings as vital records of Beothuk history and culture. His audience dismisses both the materials and the people they represent with ridicule and prejudice. Despite his appeals for compassion and recognition of the violence inflicted on the Beothuk people, the gathering rejects his efforts, reinforcing colonial attitudes that deny the value of Shanawdithit's testimony.

Shanawdithit

8b. Scene-by-Scene Summary (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters in the scene	Summary
Scene IV Part I Cormack's House	1829	• Shanawdithit • William Cormack • Mary March (Demasduit) • Chorus	Shanawdithit relives the capture, public display, and eventual death of her aunt Demasduit (Mary March). Through memory and vision, she re-enacts moments of loss and violence. When Cormack downplays Demasduit's suffering, Shanawdithit angrily confronts him, rejecting his claim that she was treated with kindness. She condemns the hypocrisy of the English, reclaiming the word "savage" to expose colonial brutality. Cormack apologises, but Shanawdithit questions whether anyone will remember her after she dies.
Scene IV Part II Cormack's House	1829	• Shanawdithit • William Cormack • Chorus	Cormack silently gathers Shanawdithit's drawings as she resumes sketching. A split chorus contrasts forced displacement with survival. As her strength wanes, Cormack insists that her drawings will preserve her memory, placing the pencil before her. Left alone, Shanawdithit wonders if her story will be heard by future generations. The scene ends with Shanawdithit singing, "How can I sing to descendants I will never have" as she continues to draw.
Scene V Cormack's House	1829	• Shanawdithit • William Cormack	Prompted by her drawings, Shanawdithit recounts the devastating decline of the Beothuk people through memories of violence, disease, starvation, and displacement, insisting to Cormack that their story include not only their deaths but also the richness of the life they once shared. As Cormack struggles to reconcile his compassion with his colonial perspective, Shanawdithit denounces the destruction brought by European settlement, declares herself the last of her people, and rejects the notion that being found has ever brought good.

Shanawdithit

8b. Scene-by-Scene Summary (continued)

Act and Scene	Timeline	Characters	Summary
Scene VI The Beothuk Institute	1829	• William Cormack • James Simms • Beothuk Institute Members	Before the Beothuk Institute, Cormack reports Shanawdithit's failing health and appeals for financial support, arguing that her testimony and knowledge are invaluable historical records. When Simms offers to assume her care, he expresses a colonial worldview that frames the extinction of the Beothuk people as an inevitable consequence of nation-building.
Scene VII Part I Cormack's House	1829	• Shanawdithit • William Cormack	Shanawdithit delivers a reflective soliloquy, repeating, "Out of this world. I will soon walk out of this world," as she faces death. She calls to her family and ancestors, questioning whether her time among the English has estranged her spirit. When Cormack enters to announce his departure, she calmly releases him from the responsibility of her care and gives him a drawing of his house as a keepsake before urging him to go.
Scene VII Part II Cormack's House	1829	• Shanawdithit • Kwe • Spirit Chorus	After Cormack's departure, Shanawdithit reflects on her loneliness and mortality. The Spirit Chorus softly calls her name as Kwe's voice emerges, calling her "Mother." Their exchange offers a sense of continuity as Kwe assures Shanawdithit that her spirit and stories will live on through future generations. Banners are raised as Kwe and the Spirit Chorus proclaim, "The Beothuk will live again." The opera ends as Kwe declares, "These are the descendants of Shanawdithit," with the chorus softly echoing her name into silence.

Shanawdithit

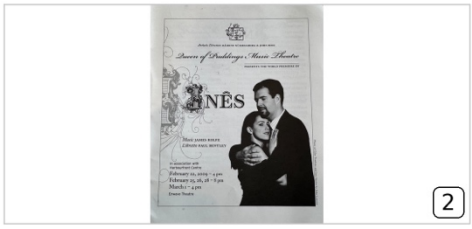
8c. Production Overview and Analytical Materials

Title & Production	Synopsis	Premiere (yyyy-mm-dd)	Composer & Librettist	Performance History (yyyy-mm-dd)	Scoring	Duration	Analytical Materials
Shanawdithit By Tapestry Opera & Opera on the Avalon	Based on the life of Shanawdithit (1801-1829), believed at the time of her death to be the last member of the Beothuk Nation. The opera draws on her final drawings to challenge colonial accounts of Beothuk history.	2019-05-16 Imperial Oil Opera Theatre 2019-05-16 2019-05-21 2019-05-22 2019-05-23 2019-05-25 2019-06-21 St. John's Arts & Culture Centre	Dean Burry & Yvette Nolan	None	• Orchestra: full + expanded percussion • Principal singers: 2 • Supporting singers: 4 • Chorus: Spirit Chorus • Chorus: SATB choir	1h 20min	• Score: full orchestra • YouTube promotional capsules • Opera America panel (2021) • Video performance • Beothuk Institute; Heritage NL; Pittman (NFB, 1982)

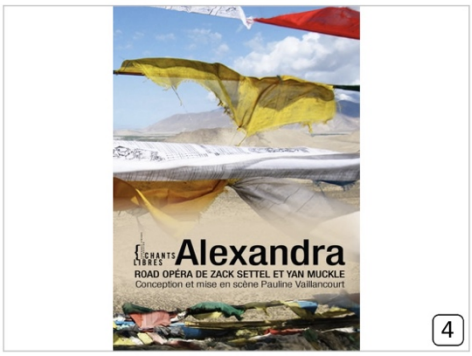
APPENDIX 9

Production Images / Programme Covers











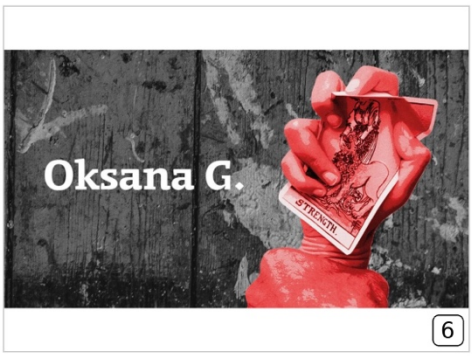




Illustration 1: *Filumena* - Program Cover (Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity n.d.-a)
Illustration 2: *Inês* - Program Cover (Personal Collection)
Illustration 3: *Lillian Alling* - Programme Cover (Banff Centre for Creativity and the Arts n.d.-e)
Illustration 4: *Alexandra* - DVD Cover (Chants Libres n.d.)
Illustration 5: *Regina* - Promotional Material (Essential Opera n.d.)
Illustration 6: *Oksana G.* - Promotional Material (Barczablog 2017a)
Illustration 7: *Shanawdithit* - Program Cover (Personal Collection)

APPENDIX 10

Creative Team Biographies

Paul Bentley (1942–) is a British writer, actor, and librettist. He wrote the libretto for James Rolfe's *Inês*. His career has encompassed theatre and television, and he has contributed to a wide range of dramatic and literary projects (Rolfe n.d.-c) .

Dean Burry (1972–) is a Canadian composer and librettist recognised as a leading figure in children's opera, with works performed throughout North America, Europe, China, and Brazil. His opera *The Brothers Grimm* has been staged more than six hundred times, making it one of the most frequently performed operas of the twenty-first century. A native of Newfoundland and Labrador, Burry developed an early interest in composition and theatre before studying at Mount Allison University, where he combined these interests in his operatic and musical works. His career includes commissions from major institutions such as the Canadian Opera Company, the Canadian Children's Opera Company, and Memorial University, and notable works including *The Hobbit*, *The Scorpions' Sting*, *The Mummers' Masque*, and *Beacon of Light* (Burry n.d.).

Elisha Denburg (1982–) is a Toronto-based composer specialising in vocal and chamber music, with works performed and recorded throughout Canada and the United States. He has collaborated with numerous ensembles, including Access Contemporary Music, TorQ Percussion Quartet, New Music Edmonton, Thin Edge New Music Collective, Blythwood Winds, Ensemble Paramirabo, Esprit Orchestra, and The Bicycle Opera Project. His music has been featured on CBC Radio and on Angela Schwarzkopf's Juno Award-winning album *Detach*. A founding

member and Co-Artistic Director of the Toy Piano Composers since 2008, Denburg has played an active role in the creation and promotion of innovative contemporary music (Denburg n.d.-a).

John Estacio (1966–) studied composition with Glenn Buhr and Peter Hatch at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, before completing a postgraduate degree in composition at the University of British Columbia, where he studied with Stephen Chatman. In 2017, he received the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Distinguished Artist Award. He has held composer residencies with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Calgary Opera, and Pro Coro Canada. His catalogue includes orchestral, operatic, choral, and chamber works that have been performed extensively throughout Canada, North America, and Europe. His opera *Filumena* (John Murrell) received four Betty Mitchell Awards and was commemorated with its own stamp as part of the Canada Post Canadian Opera Stamp Collection. His operas include *Filumena* (2003, libretto by John Murrell), *Frobisher* (2007, libretto by John Murrell), *Ours* (2016, libretto by Robert Chafe), and *Lillian Alling* (2010, libretto by John Murrell). Estacio's music has been widely performed and recorded, earning numerous honours, including multiple SOCAN and JUNO Award nominations (Estacio n.d.-a; Hayes 2011).

Aaron Gervais (1980–) holds a Bachelor of Music (Honours) from the University of Toronto (2005) and a Master of Arts in Composition from the University of California, San Diego (2007). His musical training also includes studies in composition at the Koninklijk Conservatorium in The Hague and Cuban folkloric percussion in Havana. Gervais studied with several influential composers, including Chan Ka Nin, Chinary Ung, Philippe Manoury, and Martijn Padding, whose mentorship helped shape his compositional approach. His works have been commissioned

by leading ensembles, including the Nieuw Ensemble, l'Ensemble contemporain de Montréal, Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, Tapestry New Opera Works, Toca Loca, Continuum, the Knights Orchestra, and the Arditti Quartet, and have been performed throughout Canada, the United States, Europe, and Cuba (Gervais n.d.-a and n.d.-b).

Yan Muckle (1967–2018) was a Canadian writer and librettist who won first prize in the 1991 Radio-Canada Short Story Competition. His literary works include the novel *Le bout de la terre* (1998), as well as the librettos for the operas Alexandra (composer Zack Settel) and Lulu, le chant souterrain (2000, composer Alain Thibault). Through his work as both a novelist and librettist, Muckle made a significant contribution to contemporary Québécois literature and music theatre (Le Vivier 2021; SMCQ n.d.).

John Murrell (1945–2019) earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Southwestern University in Texas in 1968 before moving to Canada in 1969 and settling in Calgary in 1971. He later obtained a teaching diploma in drama from the University of Calgary and became one of Canada's most distinguished playwrights and librettists, recognised for works such as *Waiting for the Parade*, *Farther West*, and *The Faraway Nearby*. Beyond his writing, Murrell played a significant role in Canadian theatre through leadership positions at the Stratford Festival, the Banff Centre, and the Canada Council for the Arts, and was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2003. His artistic contributions also included translations of classical plays and collaborations on ballets, including *Tristan and Isolde* and *Orpheus* for the National Ballet of Canada. His achievements were further recognised with the Walter Carsen Prize (2002), an honorary doctorate from the University of Calgary (2006), and the Governor General's

Performing Arts Award (2008), which inspired the National Film Board's animated short The Real Place (2009) (Coates 2007).

Colleen Murphy (1956–) was born in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec, and raised in Northern Ontario. She is an award-winning Canadian playwright, librettist, and filmmaker, and a two-time recipient of the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama, as well as the Carol Bolt Award for Outstanding Play for The *December Man / L'homme de décembre* and *Pig Girl*. Her other notable works include *The Society for the Destitute Presents Titus Bouffonius*, *I Hope My Heart Burns First*, *The Goodnight Bird*, *Armstrong's War*, *The Piper*, and *Beating Heart Cadaver*. In addition to her writing, Murphy has served as Writer-in-Residence at several Canadian universities and was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada (Murphy n.d.; Playwrights Canada n.d.; Writers Union n.d.).

Yvette Nolan (1961–) is an Algonquin playwright, director, dramaturge, and librettist, born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. From 2003 to 2011, she served as Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts. Her plays include *The Unplugging*, *Annie Mae's Movement*, *The Birds*, and *The Diviners* (co-written with Vern Thiessen). In addition to serving as librettist and co-director of *Shanawdithit*, Nolan wrote the libretto for *Sophia* and directed *Indians on Vacation*. She also co-created *Reasonable Doubt*, a verbatim play developed with Joel Bernbaum and Lancelot Knight that examines relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan and is the author of *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance in Canada* (2015) (Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia 2025).

James Rolfe (1961–) studied composition at the University of Toronto with John Beckwith and later pursued further studies with Jo Kondo in Japan. He is one of Canada's leading composers of opera and vocal music, with a catalogue that also includes orchestral, chamber, and choral works performed throughout Canada, the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. His operas include *Beatrice Chancy* (1998, libretto by George Elliott Clarke), *Elijah's Kite* (2006, libretto by Camyar Chai), *Inês* (2009, libretto by Paul Bentley), and *The Overcoat* (2018, libretto by Morris Panych), all commissioned and premiered by leading Canadian opera companies. Rolfe has received numerous honours, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Jules Léger Prize for New Chamber Music, the Louis Applebaum Composers Award, and the Johanna Metcalf Performing Arts Prize. He is also a composition instructor at the University of Toronto and an active mentor to emerging composers (Rolfe n.d.-b).

Maya Rabinovitch is a director, dramaturg, producer, playwright, and librettist. After studying dramaturgy and collective creation at York University, she founded the Steady State Theatre Project, an organisation dedicated to the development of new plays through collaborative creation and dramaturgy. Her directing work has been presented at festivals including SummerWorks, the Toronto and Edmonton Fringe Festivals, Next Stage Festival, and the Hysteria Festival, and she received NOW Magazine's Outstanding Director award in 2009 and 2010. *Regina* was her first opera libretto (Alumnae Theatre 2024; Essential Opera n.d.-b; The Toronto Theatre Database n.d.).

Zack Settel (1957–) is a prolific composer and the recipient of numerous grants, commissions, invitations, and residencies. As a researcher, he is known for his work in immersive audio and

electroacoustic music. He studied composition at the California Institute of the Arts with Morton Subotnick before working at IRCAM under Pierre Boulez, where he specialised in music production and research. He has held academic positions at McGill University and the Université de Montréal while leading research initiatives in immersive audio at the Société des Arts Technologiques (SAT). His compositions span chamber, studio, film, theatre, and opera, integrating live interactive electroacoustic technologies and mixed-reality environments, and have been performed internationally by ensembles including Ensemble Intercontemporain, Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, and the California Ear Unit. His operas include *L'Enfant des glaces* (2000), based on a concept by Pauline Vaillancourt without a credited librettist, *Pacamambo* (2002, libretto by Wajdi Mouawad), and *Alexandra* (2012, libretto by Yan Muckle) (Chants Libres 2019a; Settel n.d.).

APPENDIX 11

Commissioning and Producing Organisations

The Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (Banff, British Columbia) was founded in 1933 by the University of Alberta with support from the Carnegie Foundation. Originally established as a drama program, the Centre expanded into a multidisciplinary arts institution. After gaining autonomy in 1978, it evolved into an internationally recognised leader in arts, culture, and creative innovation. Renamed the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in 2016, it continues to foster artistic excellence across a wide range of disciplines (Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity n.d.-b, n.d.-c).

Calgary Opera (Calgary, Alberta) was founded in 1972 and is one of Canada's leading professional opera companies. The company typically presents three mainstage productions each season and plays an active role in fostering Canadian operatic creation. In addition to its performance season, Calgary Opera supports the development of new works through its Emerging Artist Development Program and its longstanding commitment to commissioning and premiering Canadian operas. Its initiatives have included workshops, residencies, and full-scale productions by Canadian composers and librettists, contributing significantly to the growth of contemporary opera in Canada (Calgary Opera n.d.-b).

Chants Libres (Montreal, Quebec) was founded in 1990 by soprano Pauline Vaillancourt and is dedicated to advancing contemporary opera through innovative vocal techniques and interdisciplinary collaboration. Since July 2022, the company has been led by mezzo-soprano

Marie-Annick Béliveau, who continues its commitment to research and creation in the operatic field. With nineteen original productions and international tours throughout Europe and the Americas, Chants Libres has established itself as a leading force in multidisciplinary lyric creation. The company also supports emerging artists and operatic innovation through initiatives such as the Oper'Actuel Works In Progress events and research-creation laboratories. Its contributions to contemporary opera have been widely recognised internationally, as have those of its founder. Pauline Vaillancourt has received numerous honours, including the Québec-Flanders Contemporary Music Award, the Victor-Martyn-Lynch-Staunton Award from the Canada Council for the Arts, and Opera America's 2015 Service Award, recognising her twenty-five years as Artistic and General Director of Chants Libres (Chants Libres 2019b; Le Vivier 2021).

Edmonton Opera (Edmonton, Alberta) is a professional opera company founded in 1963. It presents a season of mainstage productions, primarily at the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium, and is recognised for balancing the traditional operatic repertoire with contemporary programming. The company actively supports local artists through chorus and orchestral opportunities, mentorship and apprenticeship programs, and a range of professional development initiatives. Edmonton Opera also engages in community outreach, educational partnerships, and audience development activities that bring opera to schools, families, and underserved communities. Through both its artistic programming and institutional support, the company has made a significant contribution to the operatic landscape of Western Canada while fostering regional talent and artistic innovation (Edmonton Opera n.d.; McIntosh 2013).

Essential Opera (Atlantic Canada) was co-founded in Toronto in 2010 by sopranos Maureen Batt and Erin Bardua. The company supports emerging composers and new compositions, reimagines works from the Western classical canon, and explicitly centres stories by and about women. Since its beginnings as a single-concert project, the company has explored nearly three centuries of repertoire, presenting world premieres by Canadian composers alongside rarely performed works, reinterpretations of canonical repertoire, and works it believes merit greater recognition. Its mandate is informed by a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, with particular attention to employing and supporting artists from communities that have historically been excluded or underrecognised within the field. Essential Opera has also maintained a sustained commitment to new Canadian creation, including a long-term collaboration with composer and librettist Monica Pearce. Several of its projects engage directly with women's experiences and gendered expectations. Through the commissioning and performance of new works, the recovery and reconsideration of existing repertoire, and the centring of women both as creators and subjects, Essential Opera contributes to expanding the voices, experiences, and stories represented within contemporary Canadian opera (Essential Opera n.d.-a).

National Arts Centre (Ottawa, Ontario) was established in 1969 as Canada's premier performing arts centre. It is home to four major artistic disciplines: music, dance, English theatre, and French theatre, as well as the National Arts Centre Orchestra. Through its performance, commissioning, and educational activities, the NAC regularly supports and presents Canadian works across its artistic programs (National Arts Centre n.d.).

Open Ears Festival of Music and Sound (Kitchener, Ontario) was founded in 1998 by Peter Hatch. In collaboration with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, the festival has become a prominent cultural event in Ontario's Waterloo Region. Its programming encompasses a wide range of musical practices, including contemporary classical music, electroacoustic performance, sound installations, and interdisciplinary works, presented in venues ranging from traditional concert halls to unconventional spaces such as abandoned buildings and parkades. The festival also offers workshops, educational events, and community initiatives that encourage public engagement with contemporary sound practices (Open Ears n.d.).

Opera on the Avalon (Newfoundland and Labrador) is a professional opera company dedicated to the creation and production of innovative opera. Blending traditional and contemporary repertoire with a strong emphasis on Canadian stories and voices, the company supports emerging artists, fosters collaborations with diverse creative teams, and engages local communities through performances, workshops, and educational initiatives. In addition to presenting mainstage productions, Opera on the Avalon commissions new works and provides professional training and development opportunities for artists (Opera on the Avalon n.d.).

Queen of Puddings Music Theatre Company (Toronto, Ontario) was founded in 1995 by Dáirine Ní Mheadhra and John Hess. Dedicated to the development and performance of contemporary Canadian opera, the company became known for its innovative chamber productions and commitment to new works. During its nearly two decades of activity, Queen of Puddings premiered several landmark Canadian operas, including *Beatrice Chancy* (James Rolfe

/ George Elliott Clarke) and *The Midnight Court* (Ana Sokolović / Paul Bentley), before concluding its operations in 2013 (Fyffe 2021).

Tapestry Opera (Toronto, Ontario) was founded in 1979 by Wayne Strongman and is dedicated exclusively to the creation and performance of original Canadian opera. Since its founding, the company has produced eighteen full-length world premieres and more than one hundred and sixty opera shorts, making it Canada's largest producer of contemporary opera. Its artistic achievements have also received widespread recognition, earning more than sixty Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations and at least twenty awards (Tapestry Opera 2019a).

Vancouver Opera (Vancouver, British Columbia) was founded in 1958 and is one of Canada's largest opera companies. It has played a significant role in Canada's cultural landscape and is internationally recognised for its high-quality productions, innovative education programs, which have reached more than 1.6 million children, and community initiatives that expand access to opera. The company's touring production of *Elijah's Kite* (2006, composer James Rolfe, libretto by Camyar Chai) is one example of its commitment to educational outreach (Vancouver Opera n.d.-a).

APPENDIX 12

Performance Venues

Alberta Jubilee Auditoria (Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium, Edmonton; Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium, Calgary) were constructed between 1955 and 1957 as twin performing arts venues commemorating Alberta's fiftieth anniversary as a province. Gifted to the people of Alberta, the auditoria opened in 1957 and continue to serve as two of the province's principal performing arts centres. The Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium is located adjacent to the University of Alberta in Edmonton, while the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium is situated beside the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary. Extensive renovations completed in 2005, as part of Alberta's centennial celebrations, enhanced the facilities' acoustics, seating, climate control, accessibility, and technical infrastructure while preserving their historic character. Today, the auditoria host opera, ballet, Broadway productions, concerts, and community events, and serve as home venues for Edmonton Opera, Calgary Opera, and Alberta Ballet (Jubilee Auditorium n.d.).

Eric Harvie Theatre (now the Jenny Belzberg Theatre) (Banff, British Columbia) was originally designed to accommodate just under one thousand patrons. Following extensive renovations, the theatre was renamed the Jenny Belzberg Theatre and its capacity was reduced to approximately six hundred and forty seats, creating a more intimate performance environment. The redevelopment also introduced modern accessibility features, improved acoustics, and enhanced sightlines (Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity n.d.-d).

Enwave Theatre (now the Harbourfront Centre Theatre) (Toronto, Ontario) is a versatile performance venue. Originally constructed in 1926 as an icehouse for storing large blocks of ice used in freight and cold storage, the building was converted into a four hundred and sixteen-seat theatre in 1986. Today, it accommodates a wide range of music, dance, and theatrical performances (Harbourfront Centre n.d.).

Heliconian Hall (Toronto, Ontario) was built in 1876 as a church before later serving as the headquarters of a painters' union. In 1923, the Heliconian Club acquired the building and renamed it Heliconian Hall. Today, it remains an active cultural venue, hosting performances, lectures, and art exhibitions while preserving its historic role as a space dedicated to artistic expression (Heliconian Club n.d.).

Imperial Oil Theatre (Toronto, Ontario) served as the principal rehearsal and performance space in the Canadian Opera Company's first permanent home at 227 Front Street East. The building was originally constructed in 1887–1888 as Consumers Gas Company's Purifying House No. 2 before being purchased by food manufacturer Dalton's in 1967 and by the Canadian Opera Company in 1984. The Imperial Oil Theatre hosted its first performance in 1986 and continued to serve as an important venue for contemporary opera, including the 2019 production of Shanawdithit (Consumers Gas Building Records n.d.; Bradburn 2020).

Queen Elizabeth Theatre (Vancouver, British Columbia) is one of four performing arts venues managed by Vancouver Civic Theatres, alongside the Orpheum, Vancouver Playhouse, and the Annex. Named in honour of Queen Elizabeth II, who attended its inaugural concert in July 1959,

the theatre is one of Vancouver's principal venues for opera, theatre, dance, and concerts. In addition to its main auditorium, the facility includes three salons that accommodate between twenty and two hundred and twenty guests (Vancouver Civic Theatres n.d.-b).

Registry Theatre (Kitchener, Ontario) was constructed between 1938 and 1939 as the Waterloo County Registry Office, a function it served until 1977. The building was subsequently occupied by the Waterloo Regional Police's Kitchener detachment until 1992 before briefly serving as storage for the Curling Hall of Fame. Following an extensive revitalisation, it reopened in January 2001 as the Registry Theatre, a multidisciplinary venue that hosts concerts, lectures, theatrical productions, and other community events (Registry Theatre 2024; Registry Theatre n.d.).

Sir James Dunn Theatre (Halifax, Nova Scotia) is a two hundred-seat proscenium theatre located on the upper level of the Dalhousie Arts Centre at Dalhousie University. The venue hosts a wide range of theatrical, musical, and interdisciplinary performances and serves as an important performance space for both university and professional productions (Theatre Nova Scotia n.d.).

St. John's Arts and Culture Centre (St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador) is a provincial performing arts venue located adjacent to the Memorial University campus. The Centre presents a diverse program of theatre, music, dance, and community performances, serving as one of the province's principal cultural venues (Memorial University of Newfoundland n.d.).

Usine C (Montreal, Quebec) is a multidisciplinary creation and performance centre. The building was originally constructed in 1913 as a factory for Société Alphonse Raymond Limitée, a manufacturer of jams and marinades. In 1995, the avant-garde theatre company Carbone 14, co-founded by Gilles Maheu and Danièle de Fontenay, transformed the industrial space into a cultural venue. Today, Usine C features a flexible four hundred and seventy-seat auditorium and presents contemporary theatre, dance, music, and media arts. In 2020, the venue received funding through the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund to modernise its technical equipment and improve facilities for artists (Usine C n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Canadian Heritage 2020).

APPENDIX 13

Legacy in Media and Literature

Alexandra

Alexandra David-Néel lived an exceptional life that spanned over a century (1868–1969). She was a woman of remarkable versatility, occupying multiple roles as a singer, journalist, feminist, Buddhist, writer, explorer, and, to some extent, philosopher. At a time when societal norms offered women limited opportunities to pursue such endeavours, David-Néel defied convention and undertook daring journeys to some of the most remote regions of the world. The opera *Alexandra* is one of many creative works that explore, celebrate, or reinterpret her life. These include posthumously edited collections of her writings by Marie-Madeleine Peyronnet[36], a television series on explorers (Barillé 1997), a documentary about her life (de Maximy 1992), and a journey retracing her Himalayan expedition, later chronicled in *Himalayas: sur les pas d'Alexandra David-Néel* (Telmon, Peyronnet, and Velter 2010). Additionally, her life has been adapted into theatrical productions (Dupoyet 2003; Lengliney 2010; Zahar 2016), a film (Farges 2012), and even a comic strip (Campoy and Blanchot 2024). Books about her life and travels include *Alexandra David-Néel, vie et voyages: itinéraires géographiques et spirituels* (Désiré-Marchand 2009) and *Alexandra David-Néel, passeur pour notre temps* (Désiré-Marchand and Peyronnet 2018).

[36] Between 1970 and 2018, Marie-Madeleine Peyronnet collaborated on or edited at least twenty posthumous works by David-Néel. The bibliography includes two references under David-Néel.

Filumena

The life and times of Filumena Costanzo have been the subject of books and articles that depict her involvement in bootlegging as well as her subsequent trial and execution. Key sources include *A Dance with Death: Canadian Women on the Gallows, 1754–1954* (Anderson 1997), *Scoundrels and Scallywags: Characters from Alberta's Past* (Brennan 2002), and *Bootlegger's Bride* (Carpenter 1993). Completing this profile is an article titled "The Lady & the Bootlegger" (Chandler 2003–2004), a biographical entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Watson 2003) and in the *Canadian Encyclopedia* (Simonot 2013), as well as an archival record titled "Tragedy in Crowsnest Pass," in the *Provincial Archives of Alberta* (Provincial Archives of Alberta n.d.).

Inês

The tragic story of Inês de Castro has inspired artistic works across various media, including plays such as *Castro* (António Ferreira[37] 1565) and *La Reine morte* (de Montherlant 1942) as well as films such as *Inês de Castro* (Leitão de Barros 1944) and *Pedro e Inês* (António Ferreira 2018).

Lillian Alling

The story of Lillian Alling has been fictionalised numerous times in various media. The accounts include the novel *The Woman Who Walked to Russia* by Cassandra Pybus (2003), a graphic novel, *Lillian the Legend* by Kerry Byrne (2008), and a film, *La piste du télégraphe* directed by Liliane de Kermadec (1994). Most recently, in 2021, Susan Smith-Josephy wrote the book

[37] There are two individuals with the same name in this section: António Ferreira (1528–1569), the author of the play *Castro*, and António Ferreira (1970–), director and producer of the film *Pedro e Inês*.

Lillian Alling: The Journey Home, the most comprehensive and researched account of Lillian Alling thus far.

Oksana

Although *Oksana G.* is not based on a historical individual, its subject matter, human trafficking and the exploitation of vulnerable women, continues to occupy a significant place in contemporary public discourse. In Canada alone, recent headlines underscore the urgency of this issue. Reports have documented the trafficking of international students in Brampton, Ontario, the use of TikTok by smugglers to advertise illegal border crossings, and cross-border concerns raised by American and Canadian officials about trafficking operations between the two countries (Khanna 2024; Fick 2025; Connolly 2024). Government and law enforcement initiatives such as Operation Northern Spotlight, as well as public awareness campaigns led by the FBI and Canadian police, demonstrate an ongoing institutional effort to combat trafficking at national and transnational levels (FBI 2014; Halifax Regional Police 2014; Global News 2024). These examples represent only a small fraction of the sustained media attention the issue receives. While the opera is fictional, it resonates with real-world cases and debates, reflecting the continued entanglement of trafficking with immigration, social inequality, and gendered vulnerability.

Regina

The legacy of Regina Jonas remained largely obscured until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when archival materials in East Germany became accessible. Her story and literary works were (re)discovered by Dr. Katharina von Kellenbach in 1991 in the Gesamtarchiv der deutschen

Juden (General Archive of German Jews). Alongside her article, "God Does Not Oppress Any Human Being: The Life and Thought of Rabbi Regina Jonas" (Kellenbach 1994), other sources about Regina Jonas include the book *Fräulein Rabbiner Jonas: The Story of the First Woman Rabbi* (Klapheck 2004), the documentary *Regina* (Groó 2013), the short film *In the Footsteps of Regina Jonas* (Klapheck 2009; Jewish Women's Archive n.d.-a), a comprehensive profile of Regina Jonas (Jewish Women's Archive n.d.-b), and articles such as "I shall be what I shall be: The Story of Rabbiner Regina Jonas" (Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre n.d.), "Regina Jonas: Pastor and Rabbi in Theresienstadt" by Sarah Eismann (2022) and "Regina Jonas - The First Woman Rabbi" (Klapheck 2024).

Shanawdithit

The story of Shanawdithit has been explored in numerous books, articles, and a documentary, with various online resources further expanding on her legacy. Key publications include *A History and Ethnography of the Beothuk* by Ingeborg Marshall (1996), *Shanawdithit's People: The Archaeology of the Beothuks* by Ralph T. Pastore (1992), and biographical entries in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Pastore and Story n.d.) and the *Canadian Encyclopedia* (Story 2006). Shanawdithit's life has also been explored in shorter works such as Ingeborg Marshall's article "Shanawdithit: The Last of the Beothuk" (1988) and Donald H. Holly Jr.'s "The Beothuk on the Eve of Their Extinction" (2000). A documentary produced by the National Film Board of Canada in 1982, *Shanaditt [sic]: Last of the Beothuks*, was directed by Ken Pittman (National Film Board of Canada 1982). Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador and the Beothuk Institute websites also host resources that discuss Beothuk cultural and spiritual

practices, with references to both Shanawdithit and Demasduit (Beothuk Institute n.d.; Heritage Newfoundland & Labrador 2025).

Recent public discussions surrounding the repatriation and proposed reburial of Beothuk remains further demonstrate that questions of memory, stewardship, and Indigenous authority remain active and contested in the present. Ongoing calls by Indigenous leaders in Newfoundland and Labrador for the respectful reburial of the remains of Nonosabasut and Demasduit underscore the continuing ethical significance of how Beothuk histories are preserved, narrated, and institutionally managed (Cooke 2025).

While these sources offer important historical insights, many were produced within predominantly settler or non-Indigenous frameworks. As such, some interpretations may reflect outdated perspectives or omit Indigenous epistemologies and lived experience. In light of current efforts to decolonise historical narratives and centre Indigenous voices, these materials should be approached critically, recognising both their contributions and their limitations.

APPENDIX 14

Contemporary Initiatives in Gender, Equity, and Representation in Canadian Opera and Classical Music

I. Creation, Performance, and Representation

Opéra Magnolia (formerly Musique 3 Femmes) (Montreal) is a contemporary opera company dedicated to the creation, development, and production of new opera, with a particular history of supporting women and gender-diverse creators and fostering gender-diverse leadership in the operatic field. Until 2022, the organisation administered the biennial Mécénat Musica Prix 3 Femmes, a $50,000 award that supported the creation of eleven original chamber operas by emerging Canadian women-identifying composers and librettists through funding, mentorship, and development opportunities. Its activities have subsequently expanded to include productions, workshops, festivals, and collaborative initiatives devoted to new opera, including the Opera Creation Forum, established with Opéra de Montréal in 2025 to provide emerging composers and librettists with intensive collaborative training and mentorship. Its programming has continued to foreground works by women creators, including *L'hiver attend beaucoup de moi* (Laurence Jobidon / Pascale St-Onge), *Raccoon Opera* (Rebecca Gray / Rachel Gray), *Je suis fille de la fille* (Analía Llugdar / Emné Nasereddine), and *Nanatasis* (Alejandra Odgers / Nicole O'Bomsawin). Through these initiatives, Opéra Magnolia combines the development of new Canadian opera with efforts to expand whose voices, stories, and creative perspectives are represented within contemporary operatic practice (www.operamagnolia.com).

For The Girls Opera (Western Canada) is a not-for-profit organisation that creates performance and professional-development opportunities for emerging female and female-identifying opera singers. Founded in response to the limited opportunities available to developing singers to perform complete roles, the organisation provides artists with full-role rehearsal and performance experience intended to support their transition into professional careers. Its mandate also acknowledges the limitations imposed by opera's historically binary approaches to gender, and the company welcomes trans and non-binary performers alongside its primary focus on female and female-identifying artists. Productions are single-cast, and programming prioritises operas in which female voices constitute the majority, while also promoting and creating opportunities for music by women composers. Through its emphasis on equity, access, mentorship, and substantive performance experience, For The Girls Opera seeks to address structural barriers to participation while creating greater space for female and gender-diverse voices, both as performers and creators, within contemporary operatic practice (www.ftgopera.ca).

Essential Opera (Atlantic Canada) was co-founded in Toronto in 2010 by sopranos Maureen Batt and Erin Bardua. The company supports emerging composers and new compositions, reimagines works from the Western classical canon, and explicitly centres stories by and about women. Since its beginnings as a single-concert project, the company has explored nearly three centuries of repertoire, presenting world premieres by Canadian composers alongside rarely performed works, reinterpretations of canonical repertoire, and works it believes merit greater recognition. Its mandate is informed by a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, with particular attention to employing and supporting artists from communities that have historically

been excluded or underrecognised within the field. Essential Opera has also maintained a sustained commitment to new Canadian creation, including a long-term collaboration with composer and librettist Monica Pearce. Several of its projects engage directly with women's experiences and gendered expectations. Through the commissioning and performance of new works, the recovery and reconsideration of existing repertoire, and the centring of women both as creators and subjects, Essential Opera contributes to expanding the voices, experiences, and stories represented within contemporary Canadian opera (www.essentialopera.com).

Loose Tea Music Theatre (Toronto) was founded in 2013 by director and creator Alaina Viau as an independent opera company dedicated to creating new works and reimagining existing repertoire. Its work challenges inherited operatic conventions, engages with critical social issues, and foregrounds voices and perspectives that have historically been underrepresented within the genre. Its engagement with gender has been particularly visible in projects such as *Carmen #YesAllWomen*, which reframed Bizet's opera through contemporary concerns surrounding gendered violence and the treatment of women on and off the operatic stage, and *Singing Only Softly* (Cecilia Livingston / Monica Pearce), co-commissioned with Opéra Magnolia (formerly Musique 3 Femmes), which drew on censored and redacted passages from Anne Frank's diary to present a more complex representation of her experience and self-understanding. Loose Tea has also supported works by Canadian women composers through projects such as *History by Her*, a triple bill featuring operas by Monica Pearce, Cecilia Livingston, and Ashley Seward. Beyond individual productions, the company has sought to address systemic inequities within opera through inclusive and compassionate creation practices and initiatives such as its BIPOC Composer-Librettist Development Program. Although its mandate extends beyond feminism

specifically, Loose Tea's sustained attention to gendered representation, underrepresented creators, and the institutional structures through which opera is produced positions its work within broader feminist and intersectional efforts to reconsider whose voices are heard, how women are represented, and how opera might be created more equitably (www.alainaviau.com).

La Chaire de recherche du Canada en création d'opéra was established at the Université de Montréal in 2021 and is held by composer Ana Sokolović, with musicologist Zoey Cochran serving as *directrice adjointe*. The Chair brings together research and creative practice with the aim of rethinking opera for the twenty-first century. Working with an interdisciplinary network of researchers, students, artists, and professional partners, Sokolović and Cochran examine the nature of contemporary opera, interdisciplinary and collaborative processes of co-creation, and the possibilities offered by new technologies. Significantly, the Chair's mandate recognises that renewing opera also requires confronting the misogyny and colonialism historically embedded within the genre and developing more inclusive approaches to its creation and practice. In winter 2027, Sokolović and Cochran will launch an international *Formation en création d'opéra*, a three-course programme devoted to libretto writing, dramaturgy, and interdisciplinary operatic creation. Open to participants from a range of artistic backgrounds, including librettists, writers, poets, composers, dramaturges, and performers, the programme combines theoretical study with practical collaborative creation. By integrating questions of inclusion and interdisciplinary practice into the training of emerging opera creators, initiatives such as this may extend well beyond the individual works produced: participants may carry these approaches into their subsequent creative practices, collaborations, and professional communities, contributing over

time to broader changes in how opera is conceived and created, whose stories it tells, and which perspectives it makes possible (www.creationopera.ca).

II. Professional Advancement and Institutional Change

Women in Musical Leadership (WML) (Canada) is a national professional-development programme led by Tapestry Opera in partnership with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and a network of Canadian orchestras and opera companies. Established to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in conducting and musical leadership, the programme provides women and non-binary conductors with intensive training, mentorship, and professional conducting opportunities across Canada. Participants work with established conductors and arts organisations while gaining the podium experience and professional networks necessary to advance into leadership positions. Although the programme extends beyond opera, its relationship with Tapestry Opera and participating opera companies makes it particularly relevant to questions of gender equity within the operatic profession. By addressing who occupies positions of musical authority, WML represents a structural intervention into an area historically dominated by men. Its potential impact therefore extends beyond increasing representation among conductors: greater diversity in musical leadership may also influence programming, hiring, mentorship, institutional culture, and the creative priorities through which opera and other forms of classical music are produced in Canada (www.tapestryopera.com/programs/women-in-musical-leadership).

The Association of Canadian Women Composers (ACWC) (Canada) was founded in 1981 as a national organisation dedicated to supporting and advocating for women and women-identified composers in Canada. Although its mandate encompasses musical composition broadly rather than opera specifically, the organisation provides important historical and institutional context for the participation of women composers in Canadian operatic creation. Through the promotion and dissemination of members' music, support for performances and research, maintenance of archival and informational resources, and advocacy for greater recognition of women's contributions to Canadian music, the ACWC has worked for more than four decades to increase the visibility of composers whose work has historically been underrepresented within established musical institutions and repertoire. Its significance to Canadian opera therefore lies not only in the individual operatic works created by its members, but also in the broader infrastructure of advocacy, visibility, documentation, and professional support that helps enable women composers and their music to enter and remain part of Canada's musical landscape (www.acwc.ca).

III. Research, Documentation, and Accountability

BIPOC Voices (Canada) was founded by Montreal-based musician and educator Rich Coburn and works to address systemic inequities in classical music by increasing the visibility and programming of works by historically underrepresented creators. Of particular relevance to Canadian opera is the *Canadian Operatic Repertoire Report 2023*, developed in collaboration with the Association for Opera in Canada and the Institute for Composer Diversity, with funding from the Canada Council for the Arts. The first report of its kind in Canada, it examines how Canadian opera companies programmed works by female, trans, non-binary, and BIPOC

composers across multiple seasons, establishing a national baseline from which changes in representation can be assessed over time. The project also functions as a practical programming resource by identifying repertoire by equity-seeking composers. In this way, BIPOC Voices complements initiatives that directly support artists and create new works by addressing another dimension of structural change: documenting whose music reaches Canadian stages, making patterns of underrepresentation visible, and providing data and resources that can inform more equitable programming practices in the future (morebipocvoices.com; morebipocvoices.com/opera-report).

IV. Queer, Gender-Expansive, and Intersectional Operatic Practice

OperaQ (Toronto) was founded in 2018 as an independent, project-based opera collective dedicated to amplifying queer and trans voices within the genre. The organisation creates opportunities for queer artists to explore and communicate their own experiences while bringing queer and trans perspectives to both new works and traditional operatic narratives. By creating space for queer and trans artists to exercise greater autonomy over the representation of their identities and experiences, OperaQ challenges conventional assumptions surrounding gender, casting, character, and storytelling within the genre. Although its mandate is not explicitly feminist, its work intersects with feminist concerns surrounding gender, representation, agency, and access, contributing to a broader reconsideration of whose identities and experiences are represented within contemporary Canadian opera (www.operaqto.com).

Opéra Queens (Canada) was founded in 2020 by Artistic Director Mike Fan, who performs in drag as Tanya Smania. The non-profit organisation is based primarily in Montreal and Toronto and presents classical vocal music through drag, gender-bent, and queer approaches to performance. Its work foregrounds LGBTQ+ and IBPOC+ artists and seeks to challenge forms of exclusion historically associated with gender, sexuality, race, physical ability, voice, and body type in classical music. Its activities encompass new commissions as well as reinterpretations of canonical repertoire, including *Tanya's Secret*, a queer reworking of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, and projects exploring questions of race, identity, representation, and women in leadership. The organisation also extends this work beyond performance through initiatives such as the *Opéra Queens Podcast*, which foregrounds queer and IBPOC artists and engages questions of representation, heteronormativity, and colonialism within the operatic canon. While Opéra Queens is more accurately characterised as queer and intersectional than explicitly feminist, its destabilisation of conventional relationships among gender, voice, body, character, and casting intersects significantly with feminist critiques of operatic representation and expands the possibilities for who can perform, embody, and reinterpret opera (www.operaqueens.ca).

FAWN Chamber Creative (Toronto) is an experimental music and opera collective that commissions and develops new Canadian opera while exploring alternative approaches to operatic creation and performance. Led by Artistic Director Amanda Smith, FAWN prioritises cross-disciplinary collaboration and has developed works through devising and collective-creation methods that challenge conventional, hierarchical models of operatic production. Its projects have included *Belladonna*, a queer techno-opera developed through collective creation and centred on self-reflection and the experience of coming to understand one's queerness, and

Cells of Wind, a chamber opera by composer Anna Höstman and poet/librettist Oana Avasilichioaei that explores solitary confinement and centres the inner experiences of women subjected to incarceration. Although FAWN does not define its mandate specifically in feminist terms, its commitment to expanding the voices and perspectives involved in operatic creation, experimenting with collaborative models of authorship, and creating space for queer and women-centred narratives intersects with feminist concerns surrounding representation, agency, creative authority, and the structures through which opera is made. Its work consequently contributes to broader efforts to reconsider not only whose stories contemporary Canadian opera tells, but also who participates in creating them and how that creative process is organised (fawnchambercreative.com).

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