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# Masked balls

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In the course of his insightful analysis of Act II of *Un ballo in maschera*, Harold Powers recurs to two critics of earlier generations who hyperbolically describe how, to cite his more measured summary, 'the drama has turned into music as the opera was being composed. The music *is* the drama for an audience habituated to its conventions, its style, its genres'.[1] Powers first quotes Gabriele Baldini, who describes the libretto of *Il trovatore* as 'a phantom libretto, which became completely engulfed by the music and, once the opera was finished, disappeared as an individual entity', and then the earlier Bruno Barilli, in whose view 'the grotesque libretto is only the causal element that provokes the explosion, after which it collapses, annihilated – a confused scattering of rhymes, syllables, babblings – to vanish forever without a trace'.[2] Although Powers and other more recent scholars tend to pay operatic words greater respect, I begin with an invocation of views that might seem anathema to a scholar of texts for the inspiring idea that the text can be 'annihilated' as one moves to another level of the work. In what follows, I intend to annihilate both text and music in order to dissolve to a yet higher level of analysis and to recuperate a specific history in which Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, I maintain, participates.

If the particular history I want to trace has a name, it might be 'queer reception history'.[3] My aim is not to uncover the history of a gay individual of an earlier century, but rather to disclose the obscuring and masking of the specifically homosexual aspects of the central figure on which the opera is based. The Riccardo of the Boston *Un ballo in maschera*, or even the Gustavo of a 'restored' Swedish *Ballo*, or the Gustave of Eugène Scribe and Daniel-François-Esprit Auber's 1833 opera on the same subject, *Gustave III, ou le bal masqué*, share with the historic Swedish king Gustaf III no more than the fate of assassination.[4] We are dealing with fiction, not

[1] Powers, ' "*La dama velata*": Act II of *Un ballo in maschera*', in *Verdi's Middle Period, 1849–1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago, 1997), 273–336, here 294.

[2] Baldini, *The Story of Giuseppe Verdi*, trans. Roger Parker (Cambridge, 1980), 210; and Barilli, *Il paese del melodramma*, ed. Luisa Viola and Luisa Alvellini (Turin, 1985 [1930]), 92; both quoted in Powers, ' "La dama velata" ', 293–4.

[3] Although use of the word 'queer' troubles some scholars for its history of deprecation and its vagueness, others promote it precisely on these accounts. The word aggressively challenges and reverses earlier denigration by active transvaluation, and even more importantly, it refuses to allow itself to be cornered in this or that category. See, for example, Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York, 1996), who finds virtue in the word's very instability. Musicology was one of the first scholarly fields in which the term found a home, as represented by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas, eds., *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York, 1994). See also Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture and Difference* (Cambridge, 1997).

[4] Keeping straight the names of characters (some documentable as having origins in Swedish history) across versions of the 'masked ball' plot in French and Italian, and between the

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history. Of course, many are the transformations 'twixt history and page, stage or screen. While poets and composers are free to choose and invent, there are patterns to their choices, inventions, modifications and silencings, and even at their 'freest' they are subject to larger discursive pressures. A sceptic might object that 'we know the history of homophobia as we do that of misogyny, anti-Semitism, racism, and so forth, so why rehearse it again?' First, I'm not sure we do. Who constitutes 'we', after all? Second, I do not find such silence so easily lifted. Not to become melodramatic even when writing on opera, but the continuing deaths of so many Gustavos, Oscars, Amelias, Arvedsons, Anckarstroems, Silvanos, De Horns and Wartings provide ample reason to interrogate and break such silencing.

A complete excavation of the site of meanings demarcated by *Un ballo in maschera* would involve many temporal horizons, but four primary historical moments are essential: (1) Gustaf's own life (1746-92), during the last twenty-one years of which he ruled Sweden as king; (2) the late 1820s and early 1830s in Paris, the period when Scribe wrote the first 'masked ball' libretto, *Gustave III*, for Auber (première: Paris, 1833); (3) the years (1857-59) during which Verdi was working on *Un ballo in maschera*, set in colonial Boston for its première (Rome, 1859); and (4) the present. This last is essential, because only our contemporary framework can anchor the entire interpretative scheme. It is only from today's perspective that the obscuring of a queer, and specifically homosexual or gay past, becomes visible.

Concealment in this context is a common story. The beautiful Alcibiades who sought manfully to seduce Socrates becomes a woman in the high Middle Ages, in both Latin and vernacular sources;[5] Michelangelo's younger namesake hetero-sexualizes his great-uncle's sonnets before letting them see the light of day in published form in 1623;[6] and (to touch on a plot with an operatic angle) the story of the Roman soldiers, and apparently lovers, Polyeuct and Nearchos is

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changing locales during the genesis of Verdi's opera, presents a challenge. To the extent that distinctions can be made and maintained, I use 'Gustaf' for the historical king, 'Gustave' for the hero of Scribe's libretto and Auber's opera, and 'Gustavo' for the Verdian hero unless I specifically refer to the Boston setting, for which the tenor lead was renamed Riccardo. Of course Verdi himself contentedly accepted the transposition to the Boston setting imposed by the censors well before the opera's première. To the argument that a Verdian 'Gustavo' is a construct and chimera, I say, yes, in a way he is a ghost, 'Riccardo's gay *alter ego*'; or perhaps it is more accurate to call Riccardo 'Gustavo's straight double', the ghost of a ghost. One can, however, at least document Verdi's use of the form 'Gustavo'; see his letter to Somma dated 26 November 1857, cited in Harold Powers, 'The ''Laughing Chorus'' in Contexts', in *Verdi: A Masked Ball (Un ballo in maschera)*, ed. Nicholas John, ENO Guide 40 (London and New York, 1989), 24–5.

[5] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980), 18 and n. 26.

[6] Joseph Cady, 'The ''Masculine Love'' of the ''Princes of Sodom'' ''Practising the Art of Ganymede'' at Henry III's Court: The Homosexuality of Henri III and His *Mignons* in Pierre de L'Estoile's *Mémoires-Journaux*', in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West* ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto, 1996), 123–54, here 145. Cady also instances 'John Benson's parallel bowdlerization of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in his first collected edition of Shakespeare's poems in 1640'.

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heterosexualized by Corneille in *Polyeucte*, and then set to music as a moving love story of married heterosexuals in Donizetti's and Cammarano's *Poliuto* (1838).[7] The process is alive and well today, particularly in popular media. Given the fact that the recent award-winning film *A Beautiful Mind* deals with the life and work of a mathematician who wins an international prize in economics, one might not have thought one was dealing with an entirely 'popular' work. Nonetheless, for its Hollywood treatment, the story as told in Sylvia Nasar's biography of the same name is not only simplified but rendered entirely heterosexual, and monogamous at that. Gone is the pre-marital affair that produced an out-of-wedlock child, gone the significant crushes on and passions for various men, gone of course the arrest for 'indecent exposure' in a men's room in Santa Monica's Palisades Park.[8]

Before I begin, a word about terminology. While there is no anachronism in using modern terms such as 'homosexual' or 'gay' for a figure in 1950s America, the terms sit less easily in connection with earlier historical periods or social formations. Debates about nomenclature and its applicability to the pre-modern notwithstanding, with deliberate simplicity I shall use the terms 'homosexual' or 'gay' to describe Gustaf and other, even earlier pre-modern individuals whose erotic passions were directed primarily at partners of the same gender. The possible pitfalls of this approach have been fiercely debated in the academic arena, with rigorous social constructionists like David Halperin insisting that the use of any single word for all the various manifestations of same-sex desire across history imputes a non-existent biological (and thus universal) sub-strate to homosexual behaviours.[9] But after all, many social formations, categories and institutions vary over time and place, and historians are accustomed to distinguishing between ancient and modern concepts of, say, 'religion' or 'marriage' without employing multiple words to designate the changing construct. Just as the terms 'woman', 'adult' and 'child' enable historians to contrast the lives of, and attitudes towards, earlier members of those various

[7] John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York, 1994), 141–6, esp. 146. Not only is Nearco degraded to second-tenor status as mere friend in Donizetti's opera, and the major interest focused now on the married couple of Poliuto and Paolina, but a reassuringly butch baritone in added to the triangle in the person of Severo, Paolina's former love interest.

[8] Sylvia Nasar, *A Beautiful Mind: A Biography of John Forbes Nash, Jr., Winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, 1994* (New York, 1998), esp. 184–9. Current scuttlebut circulates that homosexuality was itself one of the multiple blots on Nash's scutcheon that damaged the film's prospects for Academy Awards, even costing Crowe the 'Best Actor' award. I cite this intentionally as 'gossip', for earlier circuits of gossip will play a role in this article. In a striking parallel with the codes for homosexuality I discover in Scribe's libretto for *Gustave III*, the film creates something like a compensatory trace for the effaced homosexuality through the character of Nash's effete graduate school roommate, a sort of counterpart to Scribe's (and Verdi's) Oscar.

[9] See Halperin, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 6 (2000), 87–124, here 124–5; and his 'Forgetting Foucault', *Representations*, 63 (1998), 93–120. The title essay of *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York, 1990) constitutes Halperin's foundational credo. Perhaps the wittiest rebuke to those who over-invest in the purity of 'period' terminology is that of John J. Winkler in *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York and London, 1990): 'The *kinaidos*, to be sure, is not a "homosexual" but neither is he just an ordinary guy who now and then decided to commit a kinaidic act' (45).

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classes with the lives of and attitudes towards contemporary members of the same classes, so there are massive differences in the lives of, and attitudes towards, early modern and contemporary individuals who engage in, or desire to engage in, amorous relations with individuals of the same sex.[10]

It is also important that readers understand that there is some kind of cumulative, possibly amplificatory, record of abjection even across such definitional and terminological inconcinnities, a record that is neither more nor less problematic if one employs the words 'queer', 'gay', or 'homosexual'. By saying this I certainly do not mean to simplify, much less reify, a unitary history. On the contrary. The recurrent silencings, the repetition of similar but even slightly different masks and codings I uncover here – variations on a theme, one might call it, in a musical mode – themselves point to a problem with even David Halperin's most recent and more nuanced formulations. It seems to me that, as he had in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, Halperin is still attempting to trace a single arc from a time before the emergence of the homosexual subject to a time after. But history is not one single, unified narrative, and the constructed nature of definitions and terms is the least of the contingencies to which disadvantaged minorities of any sort are subjected. The emergence of something in one place and time does not guarantee that it will be in circulation everywhere, or even in that first place for all time subsequent to its initial emergence. This is particularly true of an abject class, so that any kind of identity, or identification, that is based on deviance from norms is destined to multiple emergences and submergences. Put another way, one can pass the closet door in both directions.

For this reason, anything like a 'history of the closet' would need to be a very complicated affair. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, with her characteristic subtlety and perspicacity, saw that the closet was much more than historical; it was an epistemological category.[11] Indeed, it is historical precisely as an epistemological category. The historian – or archaeologist – of the closet must attempt to account for each subsequent moment's understanding of prior moments. To trace emergences, submergences, recoveries, recollections, invocations, revocations, reinvocations, silences, silencings: this is what I aim to do in my work generally, and in this essay on the small slice of that history represented by Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*.

I should add one last caveat, though I believe it must be obvious. I am not working at the level of Verdi's or Somma's 'intentions', perhaps not even at the level of their consciousness. I am interested in the historical 'work' that the opera does in concert with a much larger group of works across multiple media, genres and historical moments. The type of 'work' I am concerned with here is modern European culture's work of simultaneously policing the boundaries of desire and

[10] Still valuable is Boswell, 'Revolutions, Universals and Sexual Categories', *Salmagundi*, 58–9 (1982–3), 89–113. For a later anti-constructionist riposte, one may consult Stephen O. Murray, 'Homosexual Acts and Selves in Early Modern Europe', *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe* ed. Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma (New York and London, 1989) [=*Journal of Homosexuality*, 16/1–2 (1988)], 457–77.

[11] *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, 1990).

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reinforcing the inevitability of heterosexuality by masking homosexual identity.[12] We should not forget, however, that while individual operas can do such work via the performance tradition, opera criticism can and should do work, too, and I am setting my work against that of the institutional tradition.

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The life of Gustaf III of Sweden is not so much historical source for Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* as pre-text. Episodes of Gustaf's biography were taken up by Verdi already textualized, in the sense that Verdi's librettist Antonio Somma adapted his libretto from the one Scribe had prepared for Auber more than two decades earlier. Insofar as information is almost always based on narratives of one sort or another, this is a trivial truism. The systematics whereby a private or public person's full life is reduced to 'biography' and processed for presentation in another medium, with 'anecdote' playing the role of go-between at multiple stages, would make a fascinating study, but one that would lead us far afield. I will have reason to mention the role of anecdote and gossip again, and students of opera will appreciate the deformations that history undergoes when it is dramatized for the spoken stage and then put through the operatic mill. At each stage of adaptation, prevailing generic conventions trump all suits.

King Gustaf's entire career need not be adduced here. Gustaf was indeed assassinated at a 'masked ball' at the Royal Opera House – although, in contrast to events in both Scribe's and Somma's libretti, he was not stabbed but shot, and he did not die immediately.[13] The assassin's motive was neither Gustaf's adultery with, or adulterous intentions on, his wife, nor Gustaf's widely known homosexual inclinations and activities, but rather long-simmering political and personal discontent. (In this regard the characters of Tom and Samuel/De Horn and Warting in Auber and Verdi serve as representations of a historical reality; were I to call them Horn and Ribbing, I would name some of Gustaf's actual opponents.) Modern biographers are still rather circumspect about Gustaf's sexual interest in men, and of course, given the mores of eighteenth-century Stockholm, this is not the stuff of official chronicles, so source material is scarce.[14] The very account of how Gustaf

[12] Reference to the concept or phrase 'compulsory heterosexuality' even without quotation marks alludes to the classic article by Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', originally in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry, Selected Prose 1978–1985* (1986), reprinted in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin, eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York and London, 1993), 227–54.

[13] The assassination took place on 16 March 1792, and, as in the two operas, the king had received an anonymous note warning him not to appear at the ball. He lingered almost two weeks before dying.

[14] See, for example, Ronald D. Gerste, *Der Zauberkönig: Gustav III und Schwedens goldene Zeit* (Göttingen, 1996). Despite the recent date, the author of this solid if clearly middle-brow account is only relatively frank, approaching the topic of sexuality only when absolutely necessary, for example, in connection with the problem of Gustaf's successor (138–9). It is interesting how Gerste himself often invokes 'gossip' ('Gerüchte' or 'Klatsch') in this context, calling into question Gustav's paternity of his wife's first-born (139) and

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saw to his line's survival – it involved, in addition to the queen, the physical presence and ambiguous participation of 'chief marshal' Adolf Fredrik Munck – already engages the historian in sifting through all sorts of whispered accounts.[15]

Even before it came to an abrupt end, then, Gustaf's life participated in and perpetuated a discourse of silencing. Perhaps not coincidentally, the first article in the first volume of the Swedish journal *Lambda Nordica* is subtitled 'Silences about Homosexual Relations in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sweden'.[16] Its author, Jonas Liliequist, cites reports that acknowledge (or gossip about) Gustaf's affairs with 'pages, soldiers, and even his own personal physician'.[17] But more important is Liliequist's analysis of the 'politics of silence' – '*tystnadspolitik*' – that embraced and obscured not only Gustaf's activities (which could be accounted for as the indulgences of a libertine court) but the activities of lesser men.

Public silence and gossip are two sides of the same coin. To establish persuasively that the silencings in the first operatic 'masked ball', Scribe and Auber's *Gustave III, ou le bal masqué*, were knowing, one would need to explore fully the network of gossip that reached from Stockholm to Paris. In his Preface to the libretto, Scribe points to John Brown's gossipy confection *Les Cours du nord* (1818) as a source for some of the information about Gustaf and his court.[18] According to Nicholas John, 'among many telling anecdotes, Brown reports that Gustav ''did not pay homage at the shrine of Venus'' but surrounded himself with ''voluptuous and depraved parasites, such as might be expected to abound in an Asiatic court'' '. As John dryly comments, in adapting Brown's account for the lyric stage, 'Scribe invented a romantic entanglement more appropriate for the Parisian operatic stage'.[19]

Yes, he invented and thereby silenced, but he did not do so without leaving hints in his libretto that can be read as traces of what has been excluded. Comparable coded suggestiveness can be detected in the exotic references and circumlocutions

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speculating about the shortcomings of his marriage: 'Along with the emotional emptiness was added something else. Rumours, particularly lively in the gay circles of the European rococo court, hinted that Gustaf might have been victim of some anatomical handicap . . .' (135; Gerste specualtes phimosis). In the context of 'gay circles', is the evocation of the 'rococo' purely a temporal signifier? And what of the 'connoisseurs of Mediterranean culture' in whose company the monarch took a grand tour of Italy in 1783 (119–20)?

[15] Gerste suggests that Munck himself was clearly (primarily) heterosexual, and imagines his function as that of 'Sexualtherapeut' (139). We shall likely never know exactly what role he played in the queen's impregnation. In royal courts and other noble houses, the sphere of influence of officials titled 'chief stable master' (like 'marshal', or the Latinate 'constable') often extended far beyond the horsebarns.

[16] Jonas Liliequist, 'Staten och ''sodomiten''. Tystnaden kring homosexuella handlingar i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige', *Lambda Nordica*, 1/1-2 (1995), 9–31. I thank AnnMarie Mitchell, Ruth Mazo Karras, and especially John Niles for helping me obtain a copy of this article when Berkeley's Inter-Library Loan office could not, and my colleagues Mary Ann Smart and Wendy Allanbrook for further bibliographic assistance.

[17] Liliequist, 16.

[18] Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago, 1998), 155n. Brown's essay originally appeared in English as *The Northern Courts: Original Memoirs of the Sovereigns of Sweden and Denmark* (London, 1818). I have not yet been able to consult either the English or French versions.

[19] 'Introduction', in *Verdi: A Masked Ball* (see n.4), 7.

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Brown himself employed. These evasions document a perceived need for silence and dramatize the length to which authors will go to maintain that silence; yet, like drapery placed artfully over the midsections of nude statues, the act of covering simultaneously assumes knowledge of what is covered and reinforces the more subtle cultural information that it 'must' be kept silent. I daresay that at a conscious level Brown's readers understood precisely to what 'voluptuous and depraved parasites' referred. By understanding, even vaguely and at a less than fully conscious level what these allusive circumlocutions mean, such readers are willy-nilly recruited as co-conspirators in the structures that enforce and maintain such disapproval.[20] One of the questions it will be interesting to ask of Scribe's libretto is whether its silences and encodings were understood as such by his and Auber's audiences.

A forthcoming book on Balzac by Michael Lucey provides a rich context for this subject matter well beyond the stages of Paris or the pages of novels, one that will be essential in helping us understand the full range of spoken and unspoken pressures that impinged on Scribe, Auber, and their audiences.[21] To mention but one detail that can help us reconstruct the Parisian world in which Gustaf's own story made its operatic debut, Lucey tells of the 'social death' of one Astolphe, Marquis de Custine. On 28 October 1824, said Custine was 'beaten up by a group of guardsmen, with one of whom he had sought a rendezvous'.[22] Rumours about this event circulated widely, not only by word of mouth but in the published press, and Custine lived on with his male companion – he had earlier lost both wife and son to death – in touch with the bohemian world to which Balzac belonged. Scribe's own distance from this world did not mean he was oblivious of it; the notoriety of Custine and his misfortune seems to guarantee that bourgeois distance was a knowing one. My point here is that Custine's beating, as publicized via the rumour mill, constituted 'the space of experience'[23] in which Scribe and his audience lived as much as did the urban innovations of Paris themselves.

To a knowingly unknowing but titillated public, the contemporary Parisian stage presented several works that in similar 'gossipy' and oblique fashion present a historically gay sovereign or gay court in heterosexual guise, a pattern highly relevant to Scribe's libretto. For example, Alexandre Dumas père's *Henri III et Sa Cour* (1829) is set in a court noted for Henri's '*mignons*', but the central sexual intrigue is displaced on to a heterosexual liaison between one of Henri's favourites, the count of Saint-Mégrin, and the wife of the treacherous Duc de Guise, historically Henri III's implacable foe.[24] The count and the duchess discover that their adulterous desires are mutually requited through a visit to the 'astrologer' Cosmo Ruggieri, a

[20] I cannot pass without comment over the gratuitous 'Orientalizing' the word 'Asiatic' enacts. It is odd how Scandinavian debauchery can be mobilized in a campaign to besmirch Asia.

[21] Lucey, *The Misfit of the Family: Balzac and the Social Forms of Sexuality* (Duke University Press, forthcoming).

[22] Lucey, typescript, 89.

[23] Gerhard (see n. 18), 7, borrows the notion of a 'space of experience' from Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

[24] Cady, 'The "Masculine Love" of the "Princes of Sodom" ' (see n. 6), 125, 128, 130.

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character whose function and calling are not unlike that of Verdi's Madame Arvedson (Ulrica). Even within this heterosexualized plot, male-male sexual overtones remain, clustering around the king and particularly the figure of the page Arthur, who fairly swoons over St-Mégrin.[25] Is it merely coincidental that the king himself was planning to hold a masked ball before Guise's machinations forestalled it? It might just be that 'masked balls' had a more specific coding than suggested by Anselm Gerhard, who reads them (as I will discuss in the penultimate paragraph of my essay) in very broad terms indeed.

In another play by Dumas, a travesty page plays a yet larger role as the wife of one of the main characters. This play is none other than *Christine, ou Stockholm, Fontainebleau et Rome*, on which Dumas had been working since 1827 and which premièred in 1830. Christine herself has a place among Scandinavian monarchs about whose sexuality stories circulated, and it seems that she enjoyed a minor vogue in Paris in the late 1820s.[26] A fuller study would engage not only with contemporary dramatic works, but with the vast oeuvre of Scribe, who wrote, among other items, an opera entitled *Alcibiade* (Brussels, 1829). But in the present study I do not pretend to exhaust even his libretto for *Gustave III* nor to have teased out all of its possible hidden, coded meanings.

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*Grand opéra* is famously obsessed with history and fettered to the detailed and accurate representation of historical events. Scribe's libretto for *Gustave III* is no exception: Scribe boasted of his fidelity to history in his Preface, but at the same time, we can assume, he was confronted with interesting problems about how to retell this particular story and what to leave out. Even as Scribe's libretto creates a fiction, it includes some historical facts as well as details that could be understood as signs of Gustave's homosexuality. Somma and Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* shows a tendency to move further and further away from what seem to be hints in Scribe. But where Verdi and Somma cut or denature many of these coded signals, as we shall see, the stubborn trace of same-sex desire remains and a new array of codes takes their place.

One result of Scribe's proudly proclaimed historical accuracy is his retention of the historical Gustaf's dedication to the arts, and specifically to opera. Scribe's conspirators refer mockingly to him in the first scene of Act I as more than a patron

[25] The title page of *Henri III et Sa Cour* indicates that the role of the page Arthur was originally played by a woman, Mlle Despréaux (Alexandre Dumas père, *Théâtre complet*, ed. Fernande Bassan [Paris, 1974], I, 465). *Henri III* gave rise to at least four contemporary parodies, which might reveal the extent to which a more accurate historical subtext was known to the audience (*Théâtre complet*, 452–3).

[26] The completion of Dumas' own play on the Swedish queen was delayed by the contemporary production in Paris of two other plays on the same subject, Louis Brault's *Christine de Suède* and Fréderic Soulié's *Christine à Fontainebleau* (both Paris, 1829) (*Théâtre complet*, 439).

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of the arts. He works with the artists and writes verses for opera![27] This predilection was of course unusual among reigning monarchs, and the jibe may be orientated as much towards the king's willingness to function as an artisan as towards his sexuality. Whether in 1833 an 'opera king' would be understood as, or suspected of being, an 'opera queen' remains an open question.[28] Certainly, though, Gustave's interest in the ballet diverges from that imputed to members of the Jockey Club, and the number of references to the Swedish monarch's dealings with and interest in the theatre, augmented in the printed libretto by explanatory notes, almost suggests a parallel to Nero, whose fanaticism for the stage went beyond playwriting to actual performance, for which he was roundly condemned.

Although both the educational background and interests of an increasingly bourgeois public and the use of classical subject matter for opera were in sharp (and related) decline in the 1830s, Scribe's Oscar uses a heavily coded classical reference to characterize Gustave: 'Oh! notre souverain / Dicte comme César, à plus d'un secrétaire' [Like Caesar, our sovereign dictates to more than one secretary].[29] The allusion could be decoded with little specialized knowledge: Gustave is like Caesar in this one capacity, fully described by Oscar. Those in the know, particularly those familiar with classical texts that transmitted ancient court gossip, would recall Suetonius' Caesar, whose facility took a special form. 'Every woman's husband and every man's wife' he was reputed to be, and even if this was the language of political invective, it also became part of the lore attached to Caesar.[30] 'Dictating to more than one secretary' (so I am speculating) would, then, in the context of an explicit comparison with Caesar, be read as bisexuality, and evoke, more broadly, the irregular debauchery of so many of the Caesars, Tiberius, Nero, Caligula, among others.

Of course, once one opens the interpretive gates to anything someone with a 'dirty mind' might make a joke about, there's no closing them. Such a reader – or

[27] De Horn: 'des maîtres de ballets'; Warting: 'Artiste-roi . . . des vers d'opéras'; *Oeuvres complètes d'Eugène Scribe de l'Académie Française. Opéras. Ballets*, vol. III, part 2 (Paris, 1875), 142. It is interesting that the opera Scribe and Auber show Gustave rehearsing is specifically Johann Gottlieb Naumann's *Gustav Vasa* (1786), the great achievement of Swedish opera under Gustaf's patronage. On the historical Gustaf's advocacy of Swedish opera, see *Gustavian Opera: An Interdisciplinary Reader in Swedish Opera, Dance and Theatre 1771–1809*, Royal Swedish Academy of Music 66 (Uppsala, 1991).

[28] A full history of opera's 'gay' coding that would go back before, say, Walt Whitman and Willa Cather is a desideratum. Indeed, while Whitman's love of opera was instrumental in his coming to voice as a poet of many things, among them male–male love, it appears to have been a personal affection and not necessarily already a cultural coding (or so I infer from Gary Schmidgall, *Walt Whitman: A Gay Life* [New York, 1997], 13–68). Pieces of the broader cultural history have begun to emerge, for example, in Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, ed., *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (New York, 1995), especially the contribution in that volume by Mitchell Morris, 'Admiring the Countess Geschwitz' (348–70), and Paul Robinson, 'The Opera Queen: A Voice from the Closet', *this journal*, 6 (1994), 283–91. This note reminds us of the parallel but distinct and divergent connotations of opera for a lesbian sensibility.

[29] I, 2, 144. On the new public and its tastes, see Gerhard (see n. 18), esp. 25–33 and 44–50.

[30] This is of course not all that Suetonius reports about Caesar's unusual habits. See Craig Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York and Oxford, 1999), 139, and index, *s.n.* 'Julius Caesar'.

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viewer – might well arch his or her brow at Gustave's touching willingness to help out a needy sailor (for which he incidentally has to slip something into the seaman's pocket), not to mention his own adoption of a sailor's guise. The code of being 'in the navy' predates the Village People.[31] Early nineteenth-century Swedish scandal sheets had pointed to Gustaf's liaisons with soldiers, and it was guardsmen who turned on and beat the Marquis de Custine in 1824. The attraction of certain men for men in uniform has long been part of a cultural knowledge;[32] whether it was activated in the minds of certain segments of Auber's audience must remain an open question.[33]

The final act of Scribe's libretto includes a surprising but historically accurate reference to the queen, Gustave's consort. Paradoxically, the suggestion that Gustave is married makes things more, not less, queer, than does Somma and Verdi's depiction of Gustavo as a bachelor. Certainly, the allusion to a marriage makes Gustave more libertine, and libertinism itself is 'queer' from the perspective of normative bourgeois sexuality. Notably, Scribe's Gustave attempts no protestations equivalent to the 'Ella è pura' or 'Io che amai la tua consorte, / rispettato ho il suo candor' of Verdi's Gustavo/Riccardo in his final moments. Instead, Gustave's last words are addressed to 'Mes amis, mes soldats' and he tells them, 'Entourez-moi! Qu'au moins j'expire dans vos bras!' The stage picture has him moved off with these elements of his court. Not only is this closer to the historical truth – which involved his being moved to his palace and then lingering almost two weeks – but suggests a return to his real element: men in uniform.

In both Auber and Verdi, Gustave/o receives a warning note but decides to attend the masked ball anyway. Among the several reasons he disregards the warning, his desire not to appear a coward is a significant motivating force. While

[31] Arthur N. Gilbert, 'The *Africaine* Courts-Martial: A Study of Buggery and the Royal Navy', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1 (1974), 111–22. On Somma's telling reaccessorizing of this costume, see below.

[32] Not only men. Cf. the Offenbach number 'Ah! Que j'aime le militaire' from *La Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein*. However satiric and parodic it originally was, it now functions as a camp classic for significant sectors of the audience at mezzo-soprano recitals in large urban centres.

[33] One instance that would bear further examination is Warting's reference to Anckarstroem in Act III as 'le favori du roi' (195). Scribe writes that Warting is to say this '*gaiement*'. Could that word already have been coded? One notes the same stage instruction for Gustave at several later points in the libretto, although sometimes in contexts that refer to enforced gaiety, the putting on of a mask. But how far back do overtones of that word go? If its use as American slang for homosexual probably does not pre-date the 1930s, earlier codings cannot be ruled out, especially as the word has a long history, in both French and English, and connoted loose sexual behaviour, and in French *perhaps* a specific connection with homosexuality much earlier (Boswell, *Christianity* [see n. 5], 41–5, esp. 43n.6). A larger question: what is 'enforced gaiety' in a world of 'enforced heterosexuality'?

Of the other moments where one wonders whether Scribe is counting on some members of the audience to have a fuller knowledge, I highlight only the moment in Act III, scene 3 (Act II in Verdi) when Anckarstroem arrives to save Gustave from the assassins and finds him with a woman: 'Vous, sire! dans ces lieux! vous auprès d'une femme!' (184) Is there some particular surprise at finding him with a woman? Anckarstroem's next line ('Il est donc vrai, ç'est pour un rendezvous') may somewhat weaken this reading, but the kind of coding I am trying to trace would only be intermittent, and once activated, is never deactivated.

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many men in many walks of life are driven by society's expectations to maintain the appearance of brave masculinity, it is hard not to associate this impulse in Gustave's case with a deeper play-acting. Gustaf's biographer Gerste draws attention to the king's desire to be, and to be perceived as, a *hjältekung*, a 'heroic king' of the sort King Gustavus Adolfus was in the seventeenth century or Gustav Vasa have been in the sixteenth.[34] Could this be a case of over-compensation?

*

If Verdi and Somma 'straighten out' Scribe's libretto, in one sense this is entirely appropriate. By removing such overt signals as Gustave's work with the ballet, Verdi and Somma reproduce the experience of the gay monarch in the eighteenth century working to pass as heterosexual and himself censoring behaviour that might give him away. It is as if Verdi's text (if I may personify it thus) has cottoned on to a historical truth over and above the consciousnesses of its authors. Like the king of Sweden, the operatic Gustavo plays straight, and the more desperate he is, the more he pretends to be normal. Indeed, a gay Gustavo in the Sweden of his day might well have sought out an affair with a married woman as a cover for his true affections, although it may be nineteenth-century sensibilities that inject the sense of panic.[35] The centrality of such gestures of repression and over-compensation in Verdi's opera is perhaps one reason why stagings that depict Gustavo/Riccardo as effeminate have not succeeded dramatically. Legendary among productions of *Un ballo in maschera* is one by Göran Gentele for Stockholm's Royal Opera, which used a restored Swedish setting.[36] Birgit Nilsson, the Amelia, reported how hard it was to play opposite a Gustavo whom Gentele directed to act in a manner the audience would readily identify as 'homosexual'. As a directorial concept, this view of Amelia as cover story would be difficult to execute convincingly – repression and over-compensation are hard to convey in performance spaces as large as modern opera houses. But as an *aperçu* its points to ironies that run deeper than the drama itself.

So far my interpretation has concentrated on the elements in Scribe's libretto for Auber that were removed in Somma and Verdi's opera: especially the removal of the sequence in which Gustave displays his talents as a theatrical amateur from Act I and the appearance of Gustave's queen in the finale, both of which kept a rather more 'queer' Gustave before the audience's eyes. But one telling example of the

[34] 'Ein *hjältekung* zu werden war der Traum des jungen Gustav', 23; often repeated by Gerste (see n. 14), for example on 220.

[35] At age twenty-two Gustaf does appear to have had a passion for Charlotte du Riez, but Charlotte was never exclusively devoted to him, and that revelation alone seems to have been sufficient to put an end to the affair (Gerste, 39–40).

[36] The practice of restoring – reconstructing would be a more appropriate term – the Swedish setting apparently dates back to a Royal Danish Opera production in 1935. According to Francis Toye, the habit of abandoning the Boston 'original' can be traced as far back as Paris in 1861, when 'to satisfy the vanity of the tenor Mario, who refused to wear the kind of Puritan clothing associated with Boston in the eighteenth century, the action was transplanted to the Kingdom of Naples'; Toye, *Giuseppe Verdi: His Life and Works* (New York, 1972 [1930]), 97.

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erasure of Scribe's coding does not involve excision but mere renaming. In Auber's Act I, Gustave proposes that, when he and his courtiers visit Arvedson, he adopt the costume of a soldier or – and this seems better to him – a sailor.[37] This particular assumed identity sets up the mariner's chanty he sings in Act II. Verdi composes a comparably marine piece for Gustavo/Riccardo to sing in the corresponding spot, but Somma's libretto of Act I, scene 1, has him donning the one seaman's outfit that is not gay apparel. 'E tu m'appronta un abito', he tells Oscar, 'da pescator': he will disguise himself as a fisherman.[38]

In general, the text Verdi set to music extends and completes the process of 'heterosexualization', scrambling the codes Scribe might have left behind or inserted. But – and it is a big 'but' – Oscar remains.[39] Obviously, no account of *Un ballo in maschera* can ignore Oscar, but in a way, the 'assignment' that fell to speakers at the 'Primal Scenes' conference, to focus on the opera's second act, the one and only scene in which Oscar does *not* appear, actually proved a spur to look for deeper traces. Will the exception, as the expression goes, prove the rule?

One can easily read the Oscar-free Act II as Gustavo's most sustained attempt to project himself as a heterosexual. Here we have Gustavo as the ardent would-be lover of Amelia, so ardent that Amelia responds and succumbs. At the same time, we might say that the silencing mandated by normative heterosexuality is at its most intense in Act II. Recognizing Act II as the high-water mark of such 'compulsory heterosexuality', one sees that the particular power of the heterosexual passion represented and expressed there, with no bars to vocal ecstatics, is itself produced and fuelled by flight from homosexuality. This would certainly square with a reading of a queer Gustavo, for whom passion for Amelia represents an attempt to over-compensate. Within such an erotic economy, it also makes perfect sense that it is only after Amelia has been touched with the taint of illicit desire, the brush of queerness, that her husband Renato/Anckarstroem verbalizes his erotic attachment to her.

This passionate heterosexual triangle can also be seen as 'queered' by Amelia's masking and unmasking at the centre of the second act. Across the opera as a whole I want to emphasize the trope of masking as concerned with the masking of sexuality, which in most studies of the opera remains, almost incredibly, unstated.[40]

[37] 'Un habit de soldat ou bien de matelot', 156. Gustave's self-correction – shall we say 'fussy self-correction'? – seems to underscore the rightness of the sailor suit. And how like our hero to choose between two uniforms.

[38] A more painstaking 'excavation' would need to discern, to the extent possible, the words of all prior versions. The text of *Una vendetta in domino* presumably comes as close to what a Somma–Verdi Swedish setting would have been as we can imagine, but it of course does not represent their own last thoughts (however much those were influenced by the externalities of the production process and censors' concerns). Productions that 'restore' a Swedish setting generally deploy a 'Boston' libretto altered only in the most superficial ways (personal names, 'patria' for 'America' in the opera's final moments, etc.).

[39] Roger Parker has kindly reminded me that no other Verdi tenor has a sidekick in the least like Oscar, and in his view that singularity constitutes something quite 'queer'.

[40] Hudson points to a signification of 'something *else*', but she does not penetrate beyond 'masking and unmasking': 'Thus the constantly shifting surface of contrasts can be

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But in Act II the mask is uncannily transferred to Amelia, as if to implicate her in Gustavo's queerness and his need to conceal his own identity. Act II reveals that what appears, in a phobic world, as queerness is conceived as spreading by contagion. Involved with and in love with Gustavo and loved by him, Amelia herself becomes effectively queer. It is she who is forced to mask herself and it is through her that the unmasking takes place, with ultimately fatal consequences for Gustavo. At the level of plot, one could construe this as resulting from male–male vengeance for a breach of homosociality, of the contracts that exist between men concerning the exchange of women.[41] But on a more allegorical level (which I would also argue is the more historically accurate), Amelia's unmasking suggests that in a universe of compulsory heterosexuality, queerness itself, once unmasked, must be destroyed for its own sake. It is the power of this mandate that we perhaps ought to attend to in the rousing male calls for vengeance in the opening scene of Act III.[42]

The odd doubling that dogged the genesis of *Un ballo in maschera* – divided between *Una vendetta in domino* and *Adelia degli Adimari*, between Pomerania (Stettin) and Florence, Stockholm and Boston – emerges yet again in accounts of the unmasking itself. Synopses of the plot often claim that Amelia drops her own veil at the crucial moment, hoping to save her husband from the conspirators, who, having been cheated of their intended target, want to force at least something from the man they have found. Yet the stage directions for Scribe's libretto, at least, clearly indicate that that the veil falls accidentally as Amélie moves rapidly to avert a fight; no intentionality is attributed to her.[43]

There is something odd at work here, and I would like to read this knot or flaw in the interpretative skein as yet another instance of over-determination. Need one ever unmask oneself? Is there any mask that is not already askew, so that unmasking is inevitable? Certainly, a face cannot be recognized as masked unless one knows what lies underneath. These questions link, oddly enough, to manifest themes that traverse both Scribe and Verdi's 'masked balls', from the explicit 'saper vorreste' [wouldn't you like to know?] of that most explicit character, Oscar, in Act III back to the rigging or would-be rigging of Ulrica's/Arvedson's prophecies in the first act. This rigging is itself double. First, there is the successful rigging in the case of the

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understood to stand as a sign of something *else* in the drama, that I believe lends the oppositions their dramatic force: namely, masking and unmasking. In these terms, then, when Verdi's words are examined rigorously, his metaphor can be refigured' (Hudson, 'Masking Music: A Reconsideration of Light and Shade in *Un ballo in maschera*', in *Verdi's Middle Period*, ed. Chusid [see n. 1], 258).

[41] I use the term 'homosociality' in the sense explored in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985).

[42] And in the vigorous orchestral prelude to the scene, one of the few instances where Auber sounds (to my ears) as driven as Verdi.

[43] It was thus quite astonishing that after a lengthy discussion of this detail at the conference, with acknowledgement by one and all that, however hard it is to stage, there is no question that the veil is to be understood as falling accidentally, one participant volunteered that he nonetheless preferred the idea that a self-sacrificing and loyal Amelia would make it fall. The machine of heterosexualization apparently has no off-switch.

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promotion first predicted for, then obtained by the secondary character Silvano – and it is a nice touch that Silvano too is 'in the navy'. Then comes the ultimately failed rigging in the case of the fatal handshake. Arvedson/Ulrica predicts that Gustavo will be assassinated by the next person who shakes his hand. Ever defiant, Gustavo proffers his hand to one and all, but finds no takers. (What they are afraid of can be read at multiple levels.) Anckarstroem rushes in, and, unaware of the prophecy, greets his friend with a handshake. Gustavo and all on-lookers assume that this guarantees that the prophecy will prove false, but ultimately the prediction is stronger than the friendship. Even if the theme of ineluctability occupied Verdi in other operas, it would be interesting to explore the inescapability of the prophecy – Ulrica claims she is revealing truth written in the stars – in *Un ballo in maschera* as a trope for the inescapability of the queer. It might be in this field that the opera comes closest to adumbrating a theory of homosexual orientation and identity just slightly in advance of its medicalized arrival on the European scene. Once understood and accessed as an operative category, the queer cannot be evaded.

In the finale of Act II, the contagion of queerness assails Anckarstroem. The revelation of what he takes to be his wife's adultery with his best friend and king, and that friend's betrayal of him with his wife, is one he must bear internally. Amelia understands what he is thinking, but the rest of the world, represented on stage by the chorus of conspirators, does not. They know that something is funny here – it is not normal for a man to have a tryst with a veiled woman who turns out to be his wife – but they cannot precisely know how things look from Anckarstroem's point of view. So they laugh. And laughter above and beyond everything else, the laughter of men at a man, is the ultimate enforcer of norms. Of course, within the machine of the plot, the apparently cuckolded husband has sufficient justification to seek revenge, but in both of our operatic 'masked balls', it is revealed how the mockery of men serves as a motor to guarantee the enforcement of rigid standards and the exclusion and destruction of the queer.

The 'laughing chorus' and the mocking voices that enforce the compulsory nature of heterosexuality echo long after the curtain drops on Act II; indeed, long after the final curtain falls. A full account of *Un ballo in maschera* in a queer context would also document at least the opera's immediate reception. It would be fascinating to discover whether we can determine the extent to which spectators 'got' the coding, or if others in the know added new layers of signification. One might then proceed through the other horizons that intervene between Auber and Verdi: on the operatic stage alone there are two other reworkings of Scribe's Gustave story, as well as a play that held the Roman stage at the time Verdi was being tormented by the Neapolitan censors, the existence of which suggested to him that he might be able to mount his Swedish opera there – an inference only partially correct.[44] Even

[44] The play is by Gherardi del Testa; mentioned in Gerhard (see n. 18), 417. The operatic treatments are Gaetano Rossi/Vincenzo Gabussi, *Clemenza di Valois* (Venice, 1841); Salvatore Cammarano/Saverio Mercadante, *Il reggente* (Turin, 1843). Such an enquiry could also encompass James Robinson Planché's 1833 burlesque of the then-new Auber opera, in which the king is said to have 'a monkish disposition'.

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without embarking on this ambitious reception history, a few telling details jump out: for example, the fact that Saverio Mercadante's *Il reggente* was set in Scotland, the regent of the title the guardian of the young James VI of Scotland, a figure who has his own queer history, or that the Neapolitan censors of Somma/Verdi's *Una vendetta in domino* reacted – phobically, one strongly suspects – to 'Oscar'. In their 'correction' of the opera, which they proposed be called *Adelia degli Adimari*, they turn the page into a warrior.[45]

Tracing a genealogy of (homo)phobic responses is, of course, no more an exact science than is tracing a genealogy of queer references. There are many reasons why individuals criticized now this, now that work of Verdi's, and the harsh commentary on *Un ballo in maschera* from the pen of Camillo Boito would probably have attracted little attention had he not written it to his younger brother Arrigo, himself a frequent critic of Verdi and later to become the composer's most impressive collaborator. Closer study might reveal whether the elder Boito's particular take on the music of *Un ballo in maschera*, namely, that it 'was trivial, lighter, and more wretched than anything else written by Verdi', actually reflected a phobic response in which 'trivial' and 'lighter' served as code words for 'effeminacy'.[46] Some phobic responses are even, paradoxically, couched in admiring terms. For example, Francis Toye appreciates Oscar even as he insists – in an aside set off by dashes – on the distance between him and Riccardo: 'The modern listener . . . will probably agree with Verdi himself in giving his especial affection to Oscar, a figure who might have stepped out of a drawing-room not only of the eighteenth but of the twentieth century. The gay frivolity of the page – totally unlike that of his master, be it observed – is perfectly reproduced in the sparkle and the lightheartedness of his music'.[47] 'Totally unlike that of his master'? I don't think so.

Setting Anselm Gerhard's sophisticated reading in this sequence is much more complex. Making it the subject of his final chapter, Gerhard proclaims Verdi's opera as the only treatment of the subject that fully realizes 'the dramaturgical potential of Scribe's text'.[48] Gerhard admires the dehistoricization that Verdi represents vis-à-vis *grand opéra*'s festishization of history, and of its mania for historical accuracy. Thus rather than seeing, as I do when I look back through Verdi to Scribe to the historical

[45] Toye (see n. 36), 93. It would also be interesting to know whether Verdi himself was alluding to some extra-musical code when, resisting setting his opera in medieval Florence, he said that characters of the 'French cut' like Oscar and Gustav would be out of place there (cited in Powers, 'The "Laughing Chorus" in Contexts' [see n. 4], 24).

[46] Quoted (and translated) from P. Nardi, *Vita di Arrigo Boito* (Milan, 1942), 88, in Marcello Conati and Mario Medici, ed., *The Verdi–Boito Correspondence*, trans. William Weaver (Chicago, 1994), xv, n. 6. To my ears, Verdi makes his Oscar's music 'flittier' than Auber's for the French Oscar (compare, for example, the two settings of Oscar's defence of Arvedson/Ulrica in Act I) as if he were seeking to concentrate 'effeminacy' primarily in the character of the page. Pierluigi Petrobelli concurs that the ' "light" side of Gustavus–Riccardo is best reflected in the character of Oscar'; 'The Fusion of Styles', in *Verdi: A Masked Ball* (see n. 4), 9–14, here 10.

[47] Toye (see n. 36), 316. Toye's British usage seems to be innocent of the connotation of 'gay' as 'homosexual', but given the currency of the terms in 1930s America, it is entirely possible that the usage might have circulated in special circles and even that Toye meant it as a coded message to 'music lovers'.

[48] Gerhard (see n. 18), 12.

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king Gustaf, successive layers of (mis)representation laid one upon another, Gerhard sees some larger drive at work. He does not name this the drive for the naturalization of all heterosexuality, but he well might. Where I find Gerhard's 'silence' most troubling is in his reading of 'masquerade' itself. 'There was only one recourse for characters in opera, as there was for people in the world outside who had assimilated the conventions of polite society in the 1840s and 1850s, and that was to assume a mask, as a rough and ready means of hiding the gulf yawning between incompatible emotions'.[49] Are all 'incompatible emotions' equal? Even when he speaks of Riccardo and his masking, the avoidance of what I have been attempting to unveil as a considerably deeper (if not necessarily ultimate) mask verges on the uncanny. 'That Riccardo is not wholly at ease in his disguise is suggested not only by such alienating features in the harmonies but also by the rhythms of this unusual *canzone*', he writes of the seaman's song, suggesting that the new disguise as fisherman, however pungent, cannot totally efface the more erotically coded scent of the sailor's uniform. Circling ever nearer, it might seem, Gerhard continues, 'in the end, in this ambience of disguise, hedonism, and nervous tensions, where even Riccardo's mask slips, no one knows the truth about his own feelings any more'. But even as he seems, in the next sentence, to give that truth a name, it is not its true name, or at least nothing like the name I would give it:

> Only Oscar, a 'beardless page, lively, feather-brained, who, being only a boy, takes the liberty to joke and gibe at everyone' – as the character is described in the written submission presented in Verdi's case against the Naples censors – feels free to express emotions in a manner that is not infected by the general air of frenzy, simply because his boyish disinterest sets him outside the intrigue, so that he can be said to be above the drama.[50]

Are we still at a 'masked ball'? It is not possible not to be complicit (whatever one's intentions) in the work of silencing.

Revealing the masking in which *Un ballo in maschera* itself participates and, it would seem, continues to inspire is the only way to counter the cumulative force of the tradition. This is, of course, only one mode of interpretation, one moment of reception. I personally believe it is an essential one, but it by no means forecloses the possibility of entering into and enjoying the masked drama. Like Gustavo, even after the letter of warning has been delivered, we may, drawn to the music, choose to attend the ball, masked. But we had better know what the letter says, that it is true, and that attending balls, masked or otherwise, can be dangerous to our health and survival.

[49] Gerhard, 435. Gerhard (426–36) discusses the social practice of 'masked balls' in, I find, an equally unilluminating fashion.

[50] Gerhard, 433. The quotation comes from a pamphlet published anonymously but penned by Ferdinando Arpino: *Difesa del maestro cavalier Giuseppe Verdi: Nel tribunale di Commercio di Napoli* (Naples, 1858), 19.

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