1-1-2001

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Keywords
Giuseppe Verdi, Simon Boccanegra

This article is available in Verdi Forum: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/vf/vol1/iss28/3
The Name of the Daughter: The Role of Amelia/Maria in Simon Boccanegra

Julia Randel

In one of Verdi's tenderest love duets, Simon Boccanegra sings to the daughter he has just recovered after twenty-five years, "Figlia! a tal nome io palpito / Qual se m'aprisse i cieli!" [Daughter! at that name I tremble, as if heaven had opened to me!] (Simon Boccanegra, Act I, scene 1). The reunion changes the daughter's name from Amelia Grimaldi (the name given her by her adoptive family) back to Maria Boccanegra (the name she was given at birth). Both names carry a symbolic charge. "Maria" aligns her with the mother of God: serene, benevolent, the intercessor, responsive to men's prayers and utterly unselfish. From the first time the name "Amelia" appears, the libretto underlines its resonance with the verb "amare," hinting at the character's capacity to bring love and friendship to the combative men in her life. Her two names, signifying two identities, enable her to form multiple alliances and thus to mediate in political as well as familial disputes. "Maria" was also the name of this character's dishonored yet sanctified mother, who died when her illegitimate daughter was very young. In resuming that name, Amelia becomes a substitute for the first Maria, taking the principal place in her father's heart and repairing the rift that her mother's death had caused between her father and grandfather. These names give the character substantially more symbolic impact than her counterpart in the Spanish play on which the opera is based. Throughout most of Antonio García Gutiérrez's Simon Boccanegra (1843), she is known by her adoptive name, Susana. Her real name in the play, Maria, resembles but does not equal the name of her dead mother, Mariana.

The name that makes Simon tremble, however, is neither Amelia nor Maria, but the generic title "Figlia." That name derives its power from the implied possessive attached to it: in addressing this woman as "Figlia," Simon acquires for himself the name of "Padre." The designation "Daughter" carries particular weight in this drama, because the father-daughter relationship is not fixed, but rather shifts as a single daughter "floats" from father to father. Her movements, moreover, always signal some change in the fathers' political fortunes. Simon's new identity as a father transforms him in public as well as in private life, as his daughter begins to inform his actions as a ruler.

In addition to heightening Amelia's symbolic connection to the ideals of peace and love, Verdi and his librettists (Francesco Piave in 1857 and Arrigo Boito in 1881) give her a more active role in her father's pursuit of them. Amelia's dramatic power in the libretto does not, however, translate into vocal fireworks in the score. She sings only one solo movement on her own (Verdi had also composed a cabaletta for her in 1857, but excised it in the 1881 revision). Some critics, including Joseph Kerman and Julian Budden, have belittled her role, presumably because of this lack of solo numbers, her absence from the Prologue and most of the last act, and her generally understated vocal presence. But on closer inspection, Amelia has musical power as well. I will argue that her political activism is expressed musically in subtle methods of leading ensembles and of unifying the voices of others.

The recognition duet provides Amelia and Simon with a private, intimate context in which to develop vocal characters they will use later in public. Amelia's account of her past, which begins the slow movement, defines her as a storyteller, a character with the power to narrate her own experience. Although her position as narrator gives her dramatic clout, it has contradictory effects on her musical presence: on the one hand, it stimulates flexible and evocative music, but on the other, it limits her opportunities for lyrical expression. Like her earlier solo ("Come in quest'ora bruna"), in which she also recounted a portion of her history, it features lilting compound meter, flexible form, and subdued tone. It confirms, therefore, that this role will not be characterized by vocal display, but rather by long, legato lines and rare ascents to the top of the soprano range.

In this duet, and throughout Act I, Verdi links Amelia's voice with musical evocations of the sea. On her first appearance at the beginning of the act, her voice emerges from what Kerman calls an orchestral sea-picture. She conjures up the same image again in her duet with
Gabriele: the orchestra accompanies her, as in the cavatina, with shimmering trills and grace notes as she urges him to forget his troubles in contemplating the sea. As she describes to Simon the cottage on the shore where she spent her early childhood, her vocal line mimics the lapping of waves. This maritime imagery has further implications for Amelia's role and political significance, to which I will return.

Simon steps into his new musical character in the cabaletta, adopting a firm yet gentle tone of paternal authority. The text explicitly ties his bond with his daughter to his political office: at the climax of the verse he proclaims, “Di mia corona il raggio / La gloria tua sarà” [The lustre of my crown will be your glory]. The music, too, evokes his position as head of government: its square phrase lengths, dotted rhythms, and steady pizzicato accompaniment give it the character of a march. Yet this march has a sensitive, quiet side, with markings of con espressione and dolcissimo (Example 1). A detail added by Verdi in 1881 illustrates the Doge's newfound sensitivity: the subito ppp, though a counterintuitive response to the words “la gloria tua sarà,” makes a far more intimate expression of fatherly tenderness than the original cadential burst of triplets. Later, when baritone and soprano make the sudden drop in volume together, it suggests a deep understanding between the two characters.

Even while heightening their emotional intimacy, Verdi's revisions make Amelia a more individual character, more ready to participate in Simon's political life. In the 1857 version, she marches meekly along behind him, both musically and verbally. Singing to the same tune, with the same accompaniment, she protests that she needs no greater glory than her father's love. By contrast, in the revised version, Amelia immediately grasps the public implications of their reunion, declaring that she will become the “colomba mite” [dove of peace] in his palace. In a musical demonstration of how she will contribute to his rule, she adapts his rhythmic figures to a melody of her own, which becomes a counterpoint to his when they sing together. She participates in defining Simon's new musical character, further softening the march with a lush and fluid accompaniment (Example 2, p. 11). Father and daughter cement their partnership in the duet's coda, where the text (“Avremo gioie...” [We shall taste undiscovered joys...]) anticipates their new life together. Amelia takes the musical lead, echoed by Simon. Twice in the revised coda Verdi brings the voices together in parallel tenths, ending with the intimate cadential figure from the main melody. The orchestral postlude confirms Amelia's transforming effect on her father. In the instrumental reprise of the theme, Simon's march is refracted through Amelia's music, scored with the lush, lyrical string writing we heard in her solo section.

Example 1. Act I, scene 1

Simon: Daughter!... At that name I tremble, as if heaven had opened to me. You reveal to me a world of unspeakable joy; your loving father will create a paradise for you; the lustre of my crown will be your glory.
The dramatic and musical developments of this scene prepare the two characters for the political crisis they will face in the Council Chamber. Amelia will take control of the scene when she tells another story of her disappearance from the seashore, while Simon will find the firm yet gentle tone of a lyrical march effective in subduing his rebellious subjects. Yet the most important weapon that father and daughter bring to the coming battle is their close and equal relationship, which makes them partners in the struggle for justice and peace.

Simon and Amelia's equality and mutual respect make their relationship nearly unique among Verdi's fathers and daughters. Although they face the same conflict that divides other men from their children, they find a mature resolution. Like Aida, Gilda, and her own mother, Amelia loves a man of whom her father disapproves. But unlike Amonasro, Rigoletto, and Amelia's grandfather, Jacopo Fiesco, Simon shows respect for his daughter's wishes, accepting that she must choose her mate for herself. Among Verdi's operas, only Luisa Miller features a similarly egalitarian father-daughter relationship. Like Simon, the loving Miller has a foil in Walter, whose tyrannical behavior toward his son ultimately brings about the tragic ending.  

The spirit of equality that Simon brings to his family life parallels the democratic and forgiving style he ultimately adopts as a ruler. Both contrast with the attitudes of Amelia's grandfather, Fiesco, who represents the old dictatorial model. Fiesco exercised a stern authority over his daughter, Maria, preferring to imprison her in the family palace – a living tomb that became her literal tomb – rather than allow her to marry Simon against his wishes. The stubborn patriarch stands in the opera for his crumbling patrician class, which took a similarly repressive approach with its political subjects. These tactics backfire in private as well as in public life: both the daughter and the populace defy the Fiesco family and transfer their allegiance to Boccanegra. In the next generation, however, Simon's loving relationship with his daughter directly brings about his calls for peace among his people.

It is not unusual in Verdi for the ostensibly private relationship between father and daughter to have a public dimension. For families of all social classes, the daughter's honor represents the father's. Miller states the connection most explicitly in Act I of Luisa Miller:

D'ogni bene il ben più santo,
Senza macchia io vo 'l onor.
D'un' al figlia il don soltanto,
Ciel, mi festi, e pago io sono...
Ma la figlia, ma il tuo dono
Serba intatto al genitor.

The holiest of all possessions,
My honor, I want without stain.
Heaven, you made me the gift of
Only one daughter, and I am content;
But keep that daughter, your gift,
Untouched for her father.

In Rigoletto, the aristocrat Monterone regards the seduction of his daughter as an "atroce insulto" to his family; for the jester equally an attack on his daughter's honor is an attack on himself. The proud father in Stiffelio insists that his adulterous daughter keep her dishonor a secret for the sake of the family name, whatever the emotional cost to her. Simon Boccanegra doubles the problem of paternal honor with two generations of fathers and daughters.

The public significance of the father-daughter relationship is further magnified when, as in Boccanegra and several other operas, "padre" equals "patria." The daughter's honor then stands not only for her father's, but for her entire nation's. This weight of responsibility falls heavily on the daughters of political leaders. Aida's father, Amonasro, thunders that if she refuses to betray her lover for the sake of Ethiopia, she is no longer his daughter and no longer worthy of her country. In Giovanna d'Arco, the unique case in which the daughter and not the father occupies a position of public leadership, Giovanna's father, Giacomo, regards her behavior as so disgraceful to himself and to France that he denounces her, causing her to be delivered to the English. Simon and Amelia are again unusual in that both embrace the public implications of their relationship. Unlike Aida, who tries to separate her love life from her patriotic duty, Amelia uses her personal influence over her father and lover to make them settle their political differences. And unlike Giacomo, who wishes his daughter would stay home and behave herself, Simon allows Amelia to guide him in his public actions, issuing pardons and making peace in response to her entreaties.

Still, the most striking aspect of the father-daughter relationship in this opera is its impermanence: during her life Amelia fills the role of daughter for three fathers. The libretto highlights this mobility with images of physical spaces filled, and then vacated, by daughters. The particular spaces they occupy associate the daughters' movements with the changing political fortunes of their fathers. The first daughter vacuum is left by Amelia's mother, Maria, who dies during the Prologue, twenty-five years before the events of Act I. While she hovers between life and death, political power in the city of Genoa hangs in the balance. The election in progress will elevate Simon Boccanegra, a plebeian and pirate, to the office of Doge, over the objections of the old ruling patrician families in general and of Fiesco in particular. Fiesco's political authority (i.e., the authority of his class) is closely tied to his control over his daughter: on the same night that he loses Maria, he and his class also lose the election. In a sense he had already lost his daughter a few years earlier, to the same man who now usurps his political power. Insofar as the daughter is keeper of the father's honor, she was lost to Fiesco as soon as she surrendered her chastity to Simon.
Example 2. Act I, scene 1
Example 2 (continued)
Although Maria Fiesco never appears onstage, the Fiesco family palace, which dominates the scene throughout the Prologue, is a visible index of her presence and subsequent absence. In the opening scene, Paolo, the villain, plants the image of Maria as the soul of this otherwise lifeless façade: her laments, he tells the crowd, are the only human sounds that come from it; the only light to be seen there flickers from her window. After Maria's death, the palace empties of all other living people as well, as the nurses, pages, and servants depart, leaving her corpse in the empty building. Simultaneously a familial and political space, the palace links the Fieschi's power with the presence of a living daughter.

Fiesco makes his need for a daughter explicit in his first exchange with Simon, offering his pardon for the seduction of Maria only if Boccanegra will turn over the illegitimate child of their affair. Simon cannot comply, however, because his daughter too is lost. His position as a parent parallels his political position: he has just acquired, nominally at least, the political power that Fiesco wants his own patrician class to retain. Simon, who never sought the position of Doge, might have consented to share the power, as he would have shared the daughter, except that it is not really his to give. The whole election was in fact orchestrated by Paolo, who chose Simon as his figurehead. In love as in politics, Simon's intentions are not evil, but in both he accedes to his paternal role by questionable means. Ironically, he thinks that his ill-gotten political power will allow him to legitimize his relationship with Maria and with his daughter; indeed, Paolo uses that hope to persuade Simon to accept the office, assuring Amelia: Father, you shall see your watchful daughter always near you; I will wipe away your tears. We shall taste undiscovered joys known only to heaven; I will be the dove of peace in your royal palace.
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him that Fiesco could never deny the Doge his daughter's hand. Fiesco, of course, shows no sign of greater affection for Simon after the election or greater inclination to accept him as a son-in-law; in any case the point is moot by that time because Maria is dead.

In Simon's life, as in Fiesco's, there is a dwelling that symbolizes his political position and that should contain a daughter but does not. In Simon's case, the space is a small cottage by the sea, far from Genoa. Its humbleness, location outside the urban center of government, and maritime associations aptly represent the source of Simon's power: he won his fame, and hence the office of Doge, through his exploits as a pirate. As he explains to Fiesco in the Prologue, he left his young daughter there in the care of an old woman, but returned to find the guardian dead and the daughter vanished. The image suggests that he has at best a tenuous hold on his paternal authority.

At the beginning of Act I, we know immediately that Fiesco occupies a more powerful position than he did in the Prologue, because he once again has a palace with a living daughter in it. The palace, located just outside of Genoa, is borrowed from the Grimaldi, another patrician family, from whom Fiesco has also borrowed a name (Andrea), and a daughter (Amelia). The daughter turns out to be doubly borrowed. As Fiesco tells her suitor, Gabriele, she is actually an unknown orphan who appeared twenty-five years earlier, just in time to fill a daughter vacuum in the Grimaldi family. Fiesco's account of Amelia's past highlights the image of a vacant space that must be filled by a daughter: when the real Amelia Grimaldi died in a convent, the orphan "inherited her cell." The position of the family required that the place be filled with a daughter because, for reasons that are not entirely explained in the libretto, a daughter could prevent the Doge from stealing the Grimaldi fortune. (The play makes this a bit clearer: because the Grimaldi sons have been exiled for their political activities, they cannot inherit the family fortune, but Amelia can. For this reason, the family specifically needs a daughter and not a son.) In her role as Amelia, the young Maria successfully mediates, for the first time but not the last, between Simon and Genovese patricians. This minor plot detail underscores the point that not only do daughters need fathers (Maria had neither a home nor a legitimate identity before she became Amelia Grimaldi), but fathers need daughters as well. They need them not only for private, emotional reasons, but also for public, political reasons.

Amelia's text in the recognition duet ("Io la colomba mite / Sarò del regio ostel" [I will be the dove of peace in your royal palace] Act I, scene 1) places her physically in Simon's new daughter-containing space, the ducal palace. Although he has nominally held power there for many years without a daughter, the reunion transforms him as a ruler. In a first assertion of independence, Simon begins standing up to the conniving Paolo. Paolo had sent him to the Grimaldi palace on that day planning, as usual, to use Boccanegra to acquire power for himself: in the Prologue it was power over Genoa; now it is power over Amelia that he desires. After the recognition scene, however, when Paolo returns to claim his prize, Simon refuses without explanation beyond a kingly "Il voglio" [It is my will]. Alone, Paolo fumes over Simon's denial, which he assumes is based on Simon's authority and will as Doge, a position he owes to Paolo. In fact, Simon now speaks from his legitimate position as Amelia's father, for which he owes Paolo nothing. This new confidence in his authority carries over from Simon's personal to his political life, as his actions in the rest of the drama will show. Once Simon's daughter space is filled, Paolo loses his influence. Paolo's first attack on the Doge's political position comes in the form of an attack on his daughter, although he is not aware of the relationship. He has Amelia kidnapped, situating her in yet another physical space that represents a locus of power, the palace of Lorenzino Buchetto, a floating conspirator with no real loyalty to anyone, but who wields considerable influence from behind the scenes (literally - he never appears on stage in the opera).

All this passing around from container to container seems on the surface to justify Budden's characterization of Amelia as "little more than a pawn" in a drama enacted by the men. But in fact, once she has identified the space where she belongs, the palace of her real father, Amelia takes the initiative in moving herself to the appropriate physical location. The libretto in this sense grants Amelia agency that her counterpart in Garcia Gutiérrez's drama lacked. In the play Simon tortures Paolo into confessing to the kidnapping and then rescues his daughter; in the opera she escapes by herself and makes her own way back to the site of Simon's power, the ducal palace. She thus makes the last transfer by her own action, placing herself in the Doge's palace. Once there, she continues to act, guiding Simon's use of power.

Recent opera scholarship has focused on tensions among the "systems" at work in opera: verbal text, music, and stage action. In many discussions of female characters, the argument is that their voices and music give them power that transcends their dramatic impotence and tragic endings. Elizabeth Hudson's reading of Gilda, for example, holds that her music "speaks" even when her father silences her words. Explicitly or implicitly, such readings answer the argument of Catherine Clément that opera "undoes" women by seducing us through music into embracing misogynist librettos.
In Amelia’s role, the tension between score and libretto pulls the other way: her dramatic strength seems to be undermined by a subdued musical presence. Besides singing only one solo movement, she tends to express herself in long, often descending, legato lines, rarely exploiting the upper reaches of her vocal range. The apparent disconnect between Amelia’s dramatic power and her understated vocal presence is especially striking here, since, in adapting the play, Verdi and his librettists increased her agency and yet passed up opportunities to give her vocal power. In particular, they made her a storyteller: two of her solo sections are racconti. In contrast to Gilda, whose father refuses to hear her narrative (as Hudson points out), Amelia is permitted to present herself and her story in a public context and makes her father not only listen to her but also respond the way she wants him to. This narrative in the finale of Act I was added to the libretto. In the play, since Amelia was rescued by her father, she had no need to make a public recital of her kidnapping. But the choice to make Amelia a storyteller has musical consequences: narrative music is seldom as lyrical and freely expressive as outpourings of emotion.

Kerman, like Budden, dismisses Amelia’s role, concluding that it consists of “little more than saving Boccanegra twice from Adorno’s dagger.”10 (The first time is in the Council Chamber scene, when Gabriele accuses Simon of masterminding her kidnapping; the second time in Act II, when Gabriele, believing Simon to be a romantic rival as well as political enemy, nearly murders the Doge in his sleep.) But if this were not enough, on the same occasions, Amelia also saves her lover from her father, also twice (each time persuading Simon not to execute Gabriele for his treason). Moreover, she brings about their complete reconciliation and the end of their enmity. Some other Verdi heroines (Aida, Gilda, Leonora in La forza del destino) might well wish they had accomplished so “little.” Precisely because of her success as a peacemaker, however, Amelia never faces the agonizing decisions, divided loyalties, or tragic death—moments that inspire other Verdi sopranos to their greatest displays of vocal power.

The role of Gabriele in this opera would seem to confirm that vocal prominence masks dramatic impotence. Amelia’s lover, the only character with a double aria of his own (Act II), is the real pawn. In the political arena, he acts on behalf of others: he joins Fiesco’s conspiracy, serving the older man’s interests, to avenge his own father’s death; Paolo nearly succeeds in manipulating him into murdering Simon. When he learns of Simon’s relationship to Amelia, Gabriele instantly transfers his political allegiance to the Doge. Although his aria gives him one opportunity for musical preeminence, that power evaporates when he sings with Amelia. She leads the way in their Act I duet, setting the musical tone for both slow movement and cabaletta and verbally telling him what to do. She soothes him, urging him to forget his troubles in “the harbor of love,” then announces that they must be married right away. In their Act II duet, Gabriele sings first, accusing her of infidelity. Although Amelia does not succeed in persuading him verbally, she effects a change to the major mode and imposes her soothing tone on the rest of the movement. In the brief cabaletta to this duet she again sings first and this time does convince him to do what she wants, to hide from the approaching Doge. She does not, however, acquire power using the conventional weapons of volume and range.

It could be argued that the quality of Amelia’s vocal role has simply to do with the overall sound of the piece, dominated by low voices and some of Verdi’s richest orchestral writing. Verdi deploys the soprano voice not for fire and brilliance, but as a smooth surface spreading over dark undercurrents. Although this mode may command less attention and applause than coloratura brilliance, it is effective in making peace. For the Council Chamber scene, Verdi explicitly asked Boito for a modification to the libretto that would bring the text into line with Amelia’s musical role: in a letter he requested that the word “pace” be inserted in her text, so that she can sing it as her voice floats over the murmurs of the newly subdued crowd.11 In this case the woman’s voice does have greater power than her words: although the word is embedded in an aside to Fiesco, the voice accomplishes something much bigger. The role of the soprano voice in the sound world of this piece is inseparable from Amelia’s role as the peacemaker.

Amelia’s most public peacemaking success comes in the finale of Act I, the most radically revised portion of the opera. As we have seen in the recognition duet, Verdi’s 1881 revisions make Amelia stronger and more ready to take part in her father’s public life. In the Council Chamber scene she takes her place at the center of Simon’s government, directing his new policy of openness and forgiveness. The 1857 version of the scene opened with a celebration for the Doge, complete with hymn of praise and ballet of African pirates. As Frits Noske has argued, this festival scene, for all its pageantry and spectacle, presents Simon as little more than a figurehead. In the revised version, in contrast, we see Simon in his Council Chamber, not only occupying his throne but actually governing. He becomes a real leader and also a human being, struggling with his position. According to Noske, Amelia “takes sides with her father against the chronic discord between the two civil parties and in favour of a mature ideal: the unity of Italy.”12 But she does more than take sides; she inspires and guides her father in the pursuit of that ideal. Without her he
might have given in to his first impulse to fight insurrection with more violence and might never have escaped his role as Paolo's puppet.

The most important structural revision to the scene is that Amelia arrives earlier, lending her voice to more of the big moments. Originally Gabriele made his entrance waving the bloody dagger he used to kill Lorenzino and accusing and threatening Simon. Simon then made up his own mind to forgive him, won over by the young man's defense of Amelia. Only then did Amelia return to tell her story, so that all could rejoice in her safety and demand justice for the kidnapper. In the revision, however, Amelia secures clemency for Adorno, intervening at the height of the confrontation between her father and her lover. Simon acknowledges her power over him, telling us that the sound of her distress turns his thoughts away from vengeance and toward love; we also hear her pacifying influence in his music, which sounds like a storm dying down on the ocean. Her racconto then opens the space for Simon's climactic and very paternal "Plebe! Patrizii!" [Plebeians! Patricians!], in which he rises above the petty conflicts among his subjects to call for peace and love. The voice that emerges in the second part of his solo (meno mosso: "Piango su voi"), simultaneously loving and forceful, comes out of the recognition duet, where we heard earlier a march-like theme transformed by the "dove of peace" (Example 3, p. 17). Musically as well as politically, Amelia offers an alternative to the exercise of raw power.

In Act II, Amelia has to hold Simon to his ideal of peace. Having forgiven Gabriele for the murder of Lorenzino, Simon has since discovered that the young man is involved in a conspiracy against him and may still deserve punishment. Amelia (by threatening to die alongside her lover) just manages to convince her father that he could pardon Gabriele if the young man renounces his treacherous associations. In a soliloquy and dream scene, Simon still hesitates to offer his enemies so much mercy and tries to come to terms with his daughter's love for a conspirator: while the orchestra plays the melody from their Act I cabaletta ("Figlia a tal nome"), he murmurs in his sleep, "Amelia... ami un nemico" [Amelia, you love an enemy].

This is a peculiar moment with respect to the daughter's name. Although the music recalls Simon's earlier text and his joy at naming her his daughter, here he still addresses her as Amelia. In the context, that name places her in the enemy camp, since it is the name of a patrician daughter. Simon's words show that he cannot quite reconcile her love for an enemy with her role as his daughter. The symbolic potential of the name Amelia has not been fully realized: the love and friendship it promises has not yet encompassed all the men she loves, making them love one another. Amelia's love for the enemy, however, soon shields her father from the enemy's hatred. She returns just in time to stay Gabriele's hand for the second time. Of course, by this time it is too late to save Simon from his real worst enemy, because he has already drunk the poison left in his water jug by Paolo. However, Amelia's intervention prolongs his life long enough for her to complete the reconciliation of her father and her lover.

That reconciliation turns out to be surprisingly easy. When Gabriele learns that Simon is Amelia's father he is instantly contrite, begging forgiveness from Amelia and surrendering himself to the Doge. Simon, meanwhile, concludes that his ideal of peace for Liguria will be better served by clemency than by retribution. By the end of the scene Gabriele swears never again to fight against Boccanegra. In the play the young man justified abandoning his long-standing hatred of Simon, and the duty to avenge his father's death, by conceding that, since his father died honorably on the battlefield and not by trickery or murder, vengeance is not really necessary after all. Verdi and his librettists scrap that flimsy bit of reasoning and rely instead on the more compelling musical and emotional logic of a trio that brings the three characters to a closeness and understanding beyond what is verbalized.

Amelia's role in this scene reminds us again of her real name, Maria, and its implications. Her words are a prayer to her dead mother, one that could as easily have been addressed to their common namesake, the Virgin Mary. Her voice, spreading a placid surface over the texture, seems to stand in for the intervention of the two absent Marias. In the 1881 revision, Amelia's vocal lines are in general simplified and rendered more forceful. At her entrance, for example, Verdi smooths a virtuosic, disjunct line into a simple descending scale. Throughout the G-flat middle section, he replaces her original quick rhythms beginning on weak beats with longer notes that begin forcefully on the downbeat (Example 4, p. 18). This tendency to simplify is standard procedure for Verdi's revisions and later compositions in general, but here it clearly has to do with characterization as well: for Gabriele, stammering his apologies, Verdi retains the shorter, faster figures, while both Amelia and Simon sing with greater assurance. By the end, Gabriele joins them musically, and they demonstrate the strength of the new, three-way partnership, singing together without accompaniment.

Amelia's voice also presides over the first moments when Gabriele and Simon finally begin to sing together. The two men come together for their first fragment in parallel sixths at the cadence that marks the return to the tonic, E-flat major (see Example 4; in the original, the tonic
returns five bars earlier and with much less effect). Tenor and baritone move together while the soprano holds the leading tone above them. In the coda that follows, Simon and Gabriele demonstrate new musical closeness twice more: in the unaccompanied passage, while Amelia floats above on a high E-flat, they begin a phrase together in parallel tenths; they end the trio with a last cadential figure in parallel thirds.

This trio, which in effect makes Simon a father to Gabriele as well as to Amelia, brings up the issue of fathers and sons. The young men in this opera (Gabriele and the young Simon of the Prologue) display a poignant longing for fathers. When Simon cannot restore Fiesco's granddaughter, he earnestly offers the older man his own love as a consolation ("Coll'amor mio saprô placarti"). In Act I, Gabriele turns to Fiesco as Amelia's father. Verdi overhauls their duet in 1881 so as to highlight the paternal side of Fiesco's character. In the 1857 version, after they have discussed Amelia's background and Fiesco has consented to the marriage, Fiesco quickly changes the subject to revolution: don't let love distract you from your patriotic duty, he warns. The scene ends with a giuramento, in which the two swear vengeance on the Doge—Gabriele for the death of his father (killed, according to the play, in some earlier rebellion against Simon) and Fiesco for the loss of his daughter. The musical weight of the scene thus falls on their bond as political conspirators, not as father and son-in-law. Although the revised scene begins with almost exactly the same conversation, Verdi replaces the closing number with a benediction and prayer. The revision softens Fiesco's character and emphasizes his paternal side. This, we know from Verdi's letters to Boito, was one of the composer's explicit aims in rewriting this scene.

What means most to me is to change the duet between Fiesco and Gabriele: "Tremble O Doge!" It is too cruel and says nothing. I would rather instead that Fiesco, practically Amelia's father, blessed the future young couple. In other words, instead of confirming their political relationship, Fiesco and Gabriele cement their familial relationship. This amounts, however, to the same thing since, as we see in Act II, Gabriele automatically grants his political allegiance to the father of his fiancée.

The consistent association between the place of the daughter and the political position of the father suggests a reading of this character as a political symbol. The historical period during which Verdi composed the opera, like the period in which it takes place, witnessed the birth of a new phase in Italian history, of a new incarnation of the Italian nation. For Verdi and his audiences, Simon's desire to make peace with the Venetians and to regard them as the Genoans' countrymen would have resonated with mid-nineteenth-century calls for Italian unification. Reading the opera as historical allegory, we may understand the two generations of Marias in this story as the old and the new Italy. The first Maria's father, Fiesco, preferred to lock her in the living tomb of his palace, rather than allow her to marry her seducer, a man beneath her station. This par-
Example 4. Act II, finale

The Name of the Daughter: The Role of Amelia/Maria in Simon Boccanegra
Amelia: Mother, you who from Heaven protect your daughter, with me recommend pity to my father’s heart... His crime was caused only by too much love.

Gabriele: Forgive me, Amelia. Fierce and jealous was my love. Doge, let the veil be torn aside. I am an assassin. Let me die: I do not dare to raise my eyes to you.

Simon/Doge: Should I spare him and extend my hand to my enemy? Yes, let peace shine on this city, let ancient hatered be appeased; let my tomb be the altar of Italian brotherhood.

Philip Gossett’s political reading of Simon Boccanegra centers on the chorus as the representative of the nation that the male characters seek to rule. Under Simon’s leadership in the Council Chamber, this “unruly mass” becomes a “mature people.” In my reading, Amelia represents not the reality of the mass of people who make up a nation, but rather the hope of nationhood. Her connection to the sea links her with Simon’s project of Italian union, since seafaring makes the common bond between Venice and Genoa. But if Simon unites the masses, Amelia gives him the musical means to do so: the chorus becomes unified under her cries of “pace” and in response to his lyrical march, the tool he acquired on becoming a father.

In Act III, the transfer of power in Genoa again coincides with a sacramental event in the daughter’s life – in this case also a name-changing event. Like the parallel event in the Prologue (Maria’s death), Amelia’s marriage takes place offstage, announced by an offstage chorus. Meanwhile, on stage Fiesco again confronts Simon, hoping at last to enjoy the revenge for which he has waited twenty-five years.
Instead of vengeance, however, he finds reconciliation, when Simon reveals that the woman they know as Amelia is in fact Fiesco’s missing granddaughter, who “bears the name of her dead mother” (“il nome porta della madre estinta”). Their familial alliance ensures a bloodless political transition. Although the daughter is absent, her name brings peace.

1. The first time the name is uttered is in Fiesco’s “ami Amelia” (you love Amelia), addressed to Gabriele in Act I. In Simon’s dream scene in Act II, to which I shall return, he links her name again with the same verb.