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Performances of femininity in Amy Crankshaw's *The Apothecary*

Kate Watson

u18077057

Performances of femininity in Amy Crankshaw's *The Apothecary*

Kate Watson

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Music (Performing Art)

School of the Arts: Music

Faculty of Humanities

University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof Clorinda Panebianco

April 2024



Declaration of Originality

Full name: Kate Watson

Student number: 18077057

Degree: Master of Music (Performing Art)

Title of the research project: Performances of femininity in Amy Crankshaw's *The Apothecary*

I declare that this dissertation is my own original work and that this research has not been submitted for degree purposes at any other institution of learning. All references are provided and acknowledged throughout the research, based on guidelines by the University of Pretoria, School of the Arts: Music. I understand what plagiarism is and the implications thereof.

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DATE:

Ethics Statement

All research conducted for this study was only done so after approval had been obtained from the University of Pretoria's Humanities Ethics Committee and the universities Survey Committee. Ethics guidelines stipulated by the University of Pretoria were strictly adhered to.

Acknowledgements

Completing my Master's degree has been a challenging but incredibly fulfilling journey. I am incredibly grateful to my supervisors, Prof Clorinda Panebianco (research supervisor) and Dr Tessa Rhoodie (practical piano lecturer), for their invaluable guidance, patience and support throughout my studies. I am so fortunate to have such inspiring lecturers and mentors.

I am deeply grateful to Dr Marieke Krynauw for her excellent editing of my dissertation. Thank you for being so thorough and compassionate throughout this process.

An enormous thank you to the composer Amy Crankshaw and librettist Clare Best, for kindly allowing me to explore your work and delve into your creative processes. It has been a privilege to work with you both. I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to numerous individuals who offered feedback and additional insights to my Masters research: Prof Susan McClary (Case Western Reserve University, USA), Kate Wyatt (Royal Opera House, London), Dr Clare Loveday (University of the Witwatersrand), Dr William Fourie (Rhodes University), Bongile Gorata Lecoge-Zulu (Centre for the Less Good Idea), Beth Watson, Chloé Vermeulen and Archibald Rohde.

I am thankful to have had my Masters studies supported by the University of Pretoria Postgraduate Masters Research bursary and the 2022 SASMT Gladwell Scholarship.

Thank you to my wonderful family, particularly my parents, Trish and Dominic, and twin sister, Beth, for your unwavering support and encouragement.

This study is dedicated to my beloved grandmothers: Sheila Mary Watson and Heather Estelle Leppan.

I could not have completed my studies without the Lord's grace and strength. *Ad majorem Dei glóriam.*

Abstract

South African composer Amy Crankshaw's 2020 chamber opera, *The Apothecary*, co-created with British librettist Clare Best, portrays performances of femininity in complex ways. This study presents a qualitative analysis of performances of femininity in *The Apothecary*, while drawing on the composer and librettist's feminist perspectives and interpretations of femininity in contemporary opera.

A qualitative methodological approach is used within a broader framework of feminist phenomenology, within a hermeneutic paradigm. Semi-structured interviews with Crankshaw and Best delved into their perspectives on femininity, and the intention and creative process for *The Apothecary*. An analysis of the score and video recording of the 2021 Guildhall School of Music & Drama premiere of the opera was conducted to explore the intersections between text, music and drama in creating and reinforcing depictions of femininity.

Findings show that *The Apothecary* displays nuanced and ambiguous performances of femininity and provides a criticism of the male gaze through musical, textual and visual elements. This study is the first comprehensive investigation of a South African female composer's operatic work, and the first to specifically focus on the performances of femininity. The insights gained from this study may stimulate conversations amongst creatives within the contemporary opera industry and allows for discussions to be had on the effectiveness of opera as a form to display differing performances of femininity and female agency.

Keywords: contemporary opera; female composers; performances of femininity; South African composers; South African opera

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context

“Opera marshals the power of narrative, theatre and music to make the audience desire the heroine’s death as both inevitable and beautiful” (Hadlock, 2012, p. 259).

The above quote is loaded with cultural connotations about femininity in opera and suggests that femininity in opera is regarded as both threatening and decorative. Despite notable exceptions in Baroque (1600-1750) opera heroines, Mozart’s *opera buffa* (1768-1789) and certain Verdi operas (1839-1893), female characters in especially Classical (approx. 1750-1820) and Romantic (approx. 1830-1900) operas are often victimised (Smart, 2000). They are considered mad, sexualised or are treated with violence. One could argue that these female characters often lack agency: they are unable to make independent choices (Price, 2020). Because of these themes, many question the relevance of opera and whether it is reflective of prominent social issues, especially in the light of the #MeToo movement.¹

Hadlock notes that women have always been central to opera as characters and performers in opera. However, there is not much evidence of women commissioning, analysing or composing operas before the 1980s. During the late 1980s, feminist perspectives emerged that challenged the roles of women as both artists and characters. Hadlock describes these as “perspectives that analysed, interrogated and challenged the ideas about femininity, masculinity, sexuality, love, family and authority upon which operas rely, and which operas have helped circulate and perpetuate” (2012, p. 257). However, Price (2020) argues that it is not helpful to have works by female composers if women characters still lack agency, as in previous opera narratives.

There were some changes in operatic representations of femininity in twentieth century opera, including Berg’s *Lulu* (1937), as views on femininity began to shift (Higgins, 2016). By this time, the ideals of the New Woman had become prominent, advocating for equal job opportunities and financial independence for women. *Lulu* is a complex character that affirms and subverts gender expectations. As both an alluring, sexually independent *femme fatale* who

¹ The #MeToo movement, founded in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke, initially aimed to provide support and resources to sexual violence and assault survivors, particularly women of colour from underprivileged communities. It became prominent on social media platforms in 2017 as a social media hashtag started by actress Alyssa Milano, which sparked dialogue and awareness about sexual harassment and assault. The hashtag became a means for women across various cultures and nationalities to share personal stories of sexual violence. This demonstrates the wide scale and pervasiveness of sexual harassment experienced by women (Price, 2020).

is the object of male desire, she also defies patriarchal expectations and makes “masculine” decisions thereby reflecting feminine emancipation. Conventional portrayals of gender and marriage are explored and critiqued (Rich, 2008).

Developments in female operatic characters have continued into the twenty-first century, with contemporary operatic works written by men and female composers. However, while there are several twenty-first century contemporary operas with feminist perspectives that are being performed and praised, such as Ellen Reid’s *P R I S M* (2018), Du Yun’s *Angel’s Bone* (2017) and Olga Neuwirth’s *Orlando* (2019), there is very little academic research available about them in comparison to operas in the canon. These ideas lead me to consider cultural performances of femininity in South African composer Amy Crankshaw’s 2020 chamber opera *The Apothecary*, co-created with British librettist Clare Best.

Crankshaw and Best created the one-act chamber opera, *The Apothecary*, as part of their studies for an MA in Opera Making and Writing at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, in association with the Royal Opera House. The MA in Opera Making and Writing programme includes pairing a composer with a librettist to create an opera, which is then produced by the Guildhall School of Music & Drama opera department. *The Apothecary* was given a virtual premiere in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. After some revisions, it premiered live in London in May 2021 along with several other one-act operas in a concert called *Beginnings: New and Early Opera*. Crankshaw and Best were inspired by Robert Browning’s 1844 poem *The Laboratory*, detailing a revenge-driven wife’s sinister delight in preparing poison for her husband’s mistress. Crankshaw also drew thematic and character inspiration from the BBC spy thriller television programme *Killing Eve* (2018-2022) (A. Crankshaw, personal communication, June 4, 2021).

Set in eighteenth-century France, *The Apothecary*’s plot follows Madeleine, distressed about her philandering lover, seeking out an apothecary for assistance in her plight. This escalates into an interesting power struggle between Madeleine and the apothecary, where Madeleine ends in a position of unexpected strength and autonomy. While drawing on conventional Romantic themes of gendered madness and desire, there are surprising elements of female agency and performances of femininity, reinforced by the music and libretto, that make this opera unique. *The Apothecary* was well received by critics: it was said to have been an engaging work, and Crankshaw’s “rich vocal lines” and modernist orchestration was praised (Hugill, 2021).

1.2 Rationale

André argues that an “engaged musicology” is vital in opera performances today. This involves analysing what operas in the canon represent historically and identifying how the performers and audience can relate these themes to their lived experiences. Therefore, a greater understanding of historical contexts will be developed by the artists and audiences, in addition to opera becoming more relevant to contemporary audiences. Engaging with controversial and difficult social issues, such as gender and sexuality, through performance can be a powerful way of sustaining opera (André et al., 2018).

1.3 Problem statement

Despite contemporary operas being created and performed, relatively few analyses on contemporary operas have been done (Hadlock, 2012), especially of those written by South African female composers. Higgins (2016), who argues that opera has elements of misogyny and is especially violent to its women characters, notes that contemporary female operatic roles have not changed as much as one would expect. Higgins comments further regarding the lack of female opera composers on the grand scale, despite recognising the works of Unsuk Chin and Olga Neuwirth, amongst others. Higgins adds that the operas composed by women often do not have female librettists, and that male opera composers and librettists greatly outnumber the few who are female. LaBonte (2019) argues that the contemporary operas (here defined as operas composed and performed after 1980) that focus on female narratives and voices do not play regularly in opera companies in the United States of America. She states that although contemporary operas have made progress with gender equality and that there have been numerous efforts to provide opportunities to woman opera creators, this increase in woman creators does not automatically mean that “intentionally feminist” (LaBonte, 2019, p. 86) works will be created.

1.4 Aims

The aim of the study was to explore performances of femininity through a hermeneutic textual analysis of *The Apothecary*'s score and libretto. Furthermore, experiences of the composition process were gleaned through conversations with the composer, Amy Crankshaw, and the librettist, Clare Best, in an effort to understand their intentions and interpretations of femininity in this opera.

The aim of this study is to explore the interpretation and performance of femininity within the contemporary opera *The Apothecary* both musically and textually. By examining the portrayal of femininity in this operatic work, the study seeks to understand how gender identity is constructed, conveyed, and negotiated through music and text. Through an interdisciplinary lens and hermeneutic textual analysis, the research will explore the interactions between musical elements, such as vocal timbre, melodic motifs, and harmonic progressions, and textual elements, including character portrayal, narrative themes, and language usage, to illuminate the multifaceted nature of femininity within the opera. This study will also analyse the filmed Guildhall School of Music & Drama 2021 opera production of *The Apothecary*, focusing on how the use of colour, costume design and stage design emphasises performances of femininity. Additionally, the study aims to investigate how these interpretations and performances of femininity intersect with broader socio-cultural contexts, artistic conventions, and audience perceptions, shedding light on the complex relationship between gender representation and artistic expression in contemporary opera. Ultimately, the findings of this study will contribute to the scholarly discourse on gender, music, and performance, offering insights into the ways in which femininity is articulated and experienced within the realm of operatic storytelling.

This study is mainly targeted towards a feminist musicological scholarly audience, especially those working within opera studies. However, as this is the first comprehensive study discussing a South African female composer's operatic output, I anticipate that this dissertation will also be of interest to South African contemporary art music composers and to the broader scene of female contemporary opera creators.

1.5 Research questions

The following research questions will guide the proposed study:

- **Main research question:** How is femininity interpreted and performed musically and textually in the contemporary opera *The Apothecary*?
- What was Crankshaw's intention regarding female agency in the work?
- In what way did the composer and librettist address gender roles in the opera?
- In what way did the composer and librettist address femininity in the opera?
- How does the music and text challenge and/or reinforce the performances of femininity in the opera?

1.6 Overview of research methodology

This study utilises a qualitative methodology approach, situated within a broader framework of feminist phenomenology, to explore performances of femininity in *The Apothecary*. Adopting a hermeneutic paradigm, the research will employ a case study design to analyse textual and musical elements, as well as the composer and librettist's feminist perspectives on female agency in the opera. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with the composer and librettist and textual analysis of the opera, with particular attention to the composer's South African feminist perspective. The use of feminist phenomenology is chosen to foreground gendered experiences and interpretations, aligning with the research's aim to critically examine performances of femininity in contemporary opera.

While acknowledging alternative ways of expressing this, given the phenomenological and hermeneutical nature of the study, the term “performances” of femininity has been selected. This is in accordance with studies regarding gender performativity, coined by Judith Butler. Gender performativity posits that gender is learned and performed based on cultural norms of femininity and masculinity (Figueira, 2016). Butler (in Salih, 2007) discusses how “gender proves to be performance – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (p. 55).

At the outset of the study, an informal email correspondence with Susan McClary about representations and interpretations of femininity and female agency in contemporary opera was conducted, in addition to an informal interview with Clare Loveday about experiences of South African female composers and performances of femininity in contemporary South African works. Another informal interview was conducted with Royal Opera House producer Kate Wyatt, for further insight on the commissioning processes for contemporary opera and navigating performances of femininity in contemporary opera. These informal discussions helped to further conceptualise, formulate and understand aspects of the study.

1.7 Chapter outline

Chapter 1 describes the background and context, the aim of the study, and the main research questions. Chapter 2 reviews the literature that is relevant to the study. The literature review explores themes regarding performances of femininity in opera, female agency, feminism, South African operas and operas composed by women. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the research methodology that was implemented in the study, and includes the philosophical framework, research paradigm, research design, background to the participants, data collection

and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the collected data and is followed by a discussion of these findings and the relevant related literature in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 highlights the conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. The dissertation concludes with a list of sources and appendices, which include the information and consent letters; the semi-structured interview questions; the transcriptions of the interviews with Crankshaw and Best; and examples of my analyses of the different data sets.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Throughout this literature review, I discuss various aspects of femininity, particularly in opera. The main themes of this literature review explore how femininity is interpreted and performed in opera and provide a contextual background on how feminine representation has developed from Baroque opera to contemporary opera. The notion of “female agency” is rooted in the discourse of gender and feminist theory. Ideas from these fields have been specifically linked in opera studies to the representations of madness, desire and sexuality. This chapter will therefore provide context for a conceptual overview of femininity, historical and contemporary performances of femininity in opera (delving into madness, desire and sexuality); femininity in contemporary opera; examples of contemporary opera by South African composers; operas written by South African women; feminist perspectives of South African female composers; performances of femininity in South African opera; a review of brief scholarly work focusing on South African opera; and musicology perspectives of musical representation and hermeneutics.

2.2 A conceptual overview of femininity

As the concept of femininity is a key term for this study, it is necessary to explore how its various definitions have evolved over time. Femininity is mostly defined as a range of behavioural qualities and social roles that are generally associated with women and girls, which vary in diverse cultures and societies. According to Gonzalez and Spencer (2015), femininity is the “dynamic socio-cultural, psychological, and visible traits and characteristics that are traditionally associated with the birth sex of girls/women in a given culture” (p. 1) and feminine behaviours are shaped by biological and cultural factors. All humans can display feminine and masculine traits regardless of their sex or gender; therefore, femininity is regarded as a different concept to the female biological sex (Ferrante, 2015). Contemporary gender theorists such as Judith Butler argue that sex is biological and gender is socially constructed (Fernelius, 2015). Contemporary views and definitions of femininity are not fixed to the gender binary. Instead, some view femininity and masculinity as markers of social roles and professional identity, instead of a personal and gender identity. Feminists and gender theorists argue that the

traditional definition of femininity is shaped by patriarchal systems and that individuals can define femininity in a unique, personal way (Gonzalez & Spencer, 2015).

In the nineteenth century, the Western images of womanhood was negatively impacted by fear, political anxieties and demeaning associations. One of Nietzsche's criticisms of Wagner's operas was, for example, his supposed "feminisation of culture", wherein the music and characters "condescend to the level of women" (Huysen, 1986, p. 51), thus rendering music into a delusional spectacle instead of true art. Masculinity was regarded as symbolic of modernism in the mid-nineteenth century, while femininity was considered as an inferior aesthetic designated to the masses. Femininity was linked to theatricality and associated with things of lesser value (Huysen, 1986). Mass culture, emotionality, passivity and subjectivity was associated with women, while men were associated with supposedly authentic high culture, objectivity and control. Huysen (1986) argues that men have controlled the productions of mass culture. He contends "the universalising ascription of femininity to mass culture always depended on the very real exclusion of women from high culture and its institutions" (p. 62), a claim which is arguably still true in more contemporary settings.

Modernist (1890-1930) values began to be challenged near the middle of the twentieth century, including one-dimensional gender labels. Various social and cultural changes took place during the *fin-de-siècle* period (1890-1914) and the First Republic (1918-1934) in Austria, in addition to innovations in the arts and psychology. The middle class was given equal rights and the women's suffrage movement helped to create new opportunities for women in politics, business, the press and the arts. The traditional roles of men in patriarchal systems also began to be challenged. During the increased industrialisation in the First Republic, women increasingly took up white-collar jobs and earned salaries. These changes allowed for increased societal freedoms, and women called for equal job opportunities and for marriage laws to be adapted (Rich, 2008). The emergence of the New Woman ideal in the 1920s was a reflection of how American society in the 1920s underwent changes in family and sexual customs and traditions (Dumenil, 2007). Women obtained the right to vote, began to participate actively in the workforce and political activism and had greater public responsibilities. Unfortunately, there were still gendered prejudices during this politically conservative period, as statesmen argued that "women should keep to women's issues" (Dumenil, 2007, p. 23) and reinforced domestic stereotypes of women as "homemakers" (p. 24).

The postmodern period (1960-approximately 2000) made efforts to combine high art with elements of mass culture. Previously devalued and less-considered art forms and methods of cultural expression were re-evaluated, allowing women and feminist ideas to have a greater influence in the arts. However, Huyssen (1986) notes that there were still misogynistic and patriarchal views on gender and sexuality within the avant-garde movement.

It is apparent that socio-political perspectives regarding women across time periods have influenced performances of femininity in operas. Therefore, an overview about conceptions of femininity is valuable for this study to understand the development of gendered operatic stereotypes and discern potential progressions in performances of femininity in contemporary operas.

2.3 Historical and contemporary performances of femininity in opera

Femininity in opera has been constructed and embodied, musically and textually, in a way that arguably reinforces conservative gender roles. Opera creates gendered meaning in various ways: through the libretti, musical choices, the singing voices and gendered bodies (Hadlock, 2012). In Europe, various meanings were attached to different vocal timbres since the nineteenth century; however, several of these meanings have gendered connotations. Composers used coloratura passages, chromaticism and varied formal structures and traditions to create the “pleasure and danger” (p. 259) of discomfort and disorder, following with harmonic and formal resolution to provide relief and satisfaction (Hadlock, 2012). Smart (2000) notes that spectators are lulled by the music’s intensity and absurdities of the plot, which allows the audiences to condone certain gendered themes that are represented.

Femininity has been represented in various ways in opera as the genre evolved with different social and musical changes. The voice is gendered and has cultural meanings associated with it; therefore, it also becomes part of the musician’s gendered performed identity (Adamy, 2015). McClary (2002, as cited in Adamy, 2015) puts forward the idea that “music informs how bodies perform” (p. 9). McClary argues that music is a gendered discourse in opera, and that repertoire for female vocalists is automatically gendered because of the text or the expected performer. This is also influenced by the historically hierarchical relationship between the typically female performer and male composer. Charlton (2009) argues that the persuasiveness of operatic singing is a result of the deliberately “gendered power” (p. 149) of female opera

singers. Abbate (1993, in Charlton, 2009) argues that when an audience observes a female opera singer, there is a compelling visual and aural element.

The French feminist scholar Clément published *Opera, or the undoing of women* in 1979, where she described how opera librettos usually include the persecution, victimisation and death of their heroines (in Clément, 2000). This work was pivotal in encouraging conversation about gender roles in opera. Although Clément's statements about females in opera may not have been completely accurate, she sparked insightful discussion amongst opera scholars. Her comments about spectatorship, dominance and desire were discussed in debates about operas composed in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Some operas portray women as victims, while women with strong characters are personified with "defiance and seduction" (Hadlock, 2012, p. 264). Cowart (1994) notes how the opera's music, libretto and theatrical elements include musical strategies for depicting feminine madness, sexuality, violence and death. However, Brophy (1964, in Charlton, 2009) argued that, especially in Mozart's works, opera is able to reflect societal inequalities between men and women.

In early opera, musical definitions of masculine and feminine were influenced by the prominent attitudes and expectations of the society in which the composers lived. In turn, those operatic depictions of gender provided examples of how men and women are and should be in society, such as has been done through popular music, films and television from the mid twentieth century onward. McClary (2002) argues that some early gendered musical types have survived along with the attitudes that gave shape to them and are still recognised by audiences today. However, she notes that many ways in which gender is constructed in music is strange to present-day audiences, and these can only be understood by analysing the music's socio-historical context. This is particularly important, as discussions and perspectives of gender and sexuality have changed greatly since the seventeenth century and considerably again since the #MeToo movement, so one cannot rely on what one may assume to be universal experiences of gender (McClary, 2002, p. 37).

2.3.1 Madness

The portrayal of madness, a particularly prominent narrative theme in opera, has evolved throughout the centuries. Miller (2015) notes that operatic depictions of madness and insanity changed according to what the public understood madness to be. Madness soon became a gendered concept assigned to female characters. In the seventeenth century, women were viewed as "fragile" in mind and body, "indicating physical delicacy as well as susceptibility to

passion or madness” (Coward, 1994, p. 205). As the understanding of psychology developed in the nineteenth century, female madness became a popular and aestheticised artistic depiction. The research of French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), who made significant contributions to studies on hypnosis and hysteria, was influenced by sensationalised depictions of madness, such as in Donizetti’s opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) (Sharma, 2020). Romantic opera became well-known for the female’s virtuosic mad scenes; they usually depict a “female lead character overwrought by emotion and driven to extreme behaviour” (Jenkins, 2010, p. iv). Lucia’s mad scene from *Lucia di Lammermoor* is a famous example that has been analysed in various ways by feminist musicologists. Lucia is manipulated into betraying her lover, Edgardo, and is forced to marry another man. In her resulting madness, she kills her husband and dies. The notion of madness is also used to halt or tame *femme fatale* characters and female characters who went against traditional female stereotypes, such as Carmen, Lucia and Salomé. Their challenges to masculine control are undermined by the end of the plot through depictions of hysterical attacks, disease or death, thus silencing them (Sharma, 2020). Furthermore, Showalter (in McClary, 2002) discussed how madness became to be specifically associated with women, where it was regarded as a result of “excess feminine sexuality” (p. 81). Society’s perception of differences between men and women were often linked onto ideas regarding reason, and scientific and artistic institutions helped to create and reinforce stereotypes about women’s madness. Opera reinforced the notion of feminine sensuality as being irrational. Jenkins (2010) notes how the twentieth century operas have “an expanded repertoire of mad women” (p. 9) who are typically abandoned by their lovers or resort to violent revenges. Strauss’s titular Salomé is an example of a woman whose madness was prompted by Jochanaan’s (John the Baptist) scorning of her romantic advances. Strauss’s musical decisions also reflect the thematic content of this opera. Salomé is associated with C-sharp major, which creates tension and dissonance with Jochanaan’s C major harmonies as he rejects her (Zeiss, 2012). Salomé’s frenzied and hysterical madness concludes in a perverse, shocking ending, as she kisses Jochanaan’s decapitated head and expresses her desire for him (Fernelius, 2015), seemingly results from sexual transgression.

2.3.2 *Desire and sexuality*

Smart (2000) notes how opera is a platform where gender relationships and sexual conflict are especially prominent, thus making it the first prospective area for feminist music criticism. She notes aspects of film theory, such as identification and spectatorship, that are prominent in

opera analysis. For example, one aspect of film theory that is pertinent to opera and gender studies is the male gaze, first articulated and described by Laura Mulvey in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975). This idea involves women becoming objectified spectacle and presumes that the free, male gaze of a creator or spectator demonstrates ‘mastery’ over the woman, who is constructed and gazed-upon (Hadlock, 2012). The woman becomes a structure with ideological meanings attached to her, particularly desire. Desire is “inscribed in female imagery and narrative” (Smelik, 2016, p. 2), a prominent aspect in Romantic opera, where opera heroines are “undone” for the wealthy spectator’s pleasure. McClary and Kramer (in Hadlock, 2012) compared the camera’s male gaze to musical structures, which are means of “framing feminine excess” (p. 260) so that male audiences may freely enjoy them.

Shostakovich’s opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1932) was inspired by the growing feminist sentiments of the 1920s (Wells, 2001). It is modernist in terms of its irregular form structures, dissonance and political incorrectness and it became infamous for its depiction of sexuality. It has parallels with ideas of the Soviet feminist Kollontai, who penned the 1913 essay “The New Woman”. This essay argues for a modern, sexually and socially emancipated Soviet woman and a change in traditional family structures and relationships. The Russian Revolution (1917-1923) was supposed to free women by “eliminating the more oppressive domestic and economic aspects of traditional marriage, while allowing them to explore their sexual desires unfettered” (Wells, 2001, p. 177). Marriage was regarded as a capitalist construction that oppressed women economically. However, the shift in thought around marriage also removed traditional behaviours of courtship and family support.

While also prominent in the Romantic period, *femme fatale* characters become particularly popular during the *fin-de-siècle* and First Republic eras as a means for composers, writers and artists to explore the changing roles of women in society. According to Fernelius (2015), the *femme fatale* is an eroticised subject who “manipulates men by using her femininity and sexuality” (p. 14). The woman is defined by her gender and sexuality (Fernelius, 2015). These characters are portrayed as intriguing and seemingly independent, but are unfortunately never granted full freedom. Often they are blamed for the troubles experienced by the male characters, who avenge themselves with the death of the female character. *Femme fatale* characters are arguably masculine constructions of a dangerous and seductive woman. *Femme fatales*, such as Salomé, are seemingly independent, but are still dependent or controlled by men to a certain extent. Taruskin (in Rich, 2008) observes the fixation on these characters during the *fin-de-siècle* as “voyeuristic fantasies of feminine evil” (p.18). Salomé is regarded

as an example of explicit female sexuality. She acts and thinks independently with regards to her desire for Jochanaan, leading to the perverse ending where she embraces and kisses Jochanaan's decapitated head.

Berg's *Lulu* (1935) is an interesting and complex example of the *femme fatale* in opera, as there are reinforcements and subversions of depictions of men, women and marriage. Lulu has a certain level of freedom but is still controlled by the men around her and is the object of male desire. She is not truly emancipated, because she has no financial, social or artistic independence. She is sexually independent, but this arguably displays masculine expectations that are reflected in her character rather than her bodily autonomy. She is unwilling or unable to change her promiscuous lifestyle, which lead to the ruin of her different husbands (Rich, 2008).

2.4 Femininity and contemporary opera

Contemporary operas have reflected femininity and female agency in various ways as ideas regarding femininity, including feminist theory, have developed. According to Cusick (1994), music arguably has not fully utilised these intellectual models and gender-unravelling strategies, in comparison to literature and visual arts, that have adopted and been strongly influenced by feminist theories. Cusick also argues that feminist ideals in music are criticised for being unmusical (albeit intellectually stimulating).

Contemporary opera can display historical, socio-political themes, as well as "intimate portraits of an individual psyche" (André et al., 2016, p. 6). John Adams' *Nixon in China* (1987) depicts the wives of President Nixon and Chairman Mao as strong and politically influential (Daines, 1995). Nico Muhly's opera, *Marnie*, composed in 2017 and based on Winston Graham's 1961 novel, reflects sexual violence and mental illness, echoing the themes of the #MeToo movement (Evans, 2020). Contemporary operas are also beginning to tackle contemporary issues facing women. Examples include Yun's *Angel's Bone* (2017), which describes human trafficking, and Reid's *P R I S M* (2018), which depicts a sexual violence survivor's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

McClary argues that there is no singular feminist perspective in opera; instead, feminist perspectives are diverse and can explore various topics in meaningful ways through the text and musical score (S. McClary, personal communication, May 10, 2022). Several contemporary operas written by female composers have been performed in the twenty-first

century, including Unsuk Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* (2007), Kate Soper's *Ipsa Dixit* (2016), Du Yun's *Angel's Bone* (2017), Ellen Reid's *P R I S M* (2018), Missy Mazzoli's *Breaking the Waves* (2019), and Olga Neuwirth's *Orlando* (2019). Unfortunately, there is limited academic research about these works, all of which feature leading female roles; however, the online reviews of these operas indicate themes portraying femininity in various ways. *P R I S M* shows a complicated mother-daughter relationship dynamic while intricately exploring the psychological effects of gender-based violence, drawing on Reid and librettist Roxie Perkins's personal experiences (Swed, 2018). *Angel's Bone* explores sexual violence and exploitation (Price, 2020). One of the composer's objectives for this work was to catalyse a discussion on solving this problem, and to engage with this particular social justice issue. This has a distinct connection to the #MeToo movement. Similar themes are navigated in *Breaking the Waves*, which additionally tackles themes of misogyny (Stearns, 2020). *The Guardian* describes *Breaking the Waves'* heroine, Bess, as simultaneously "complex" and "childlike" (Smith, 2019); this implies that she is a multi-faceted character, although she has elements of naivete. The opera emphasises that Bess is subjected to various oppressive societal forces and expectations (Molleeson, 2019). Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* implies that Alice's absurd and sinister adventures are a "rite of passage" (Clements, 2015) as the female character explores a fantastical world, reacting with a wide range of emotions (Na, 2012). Neuwirth's *Orlando*, based on Virginia Woolf's titular novel about an Elizabethan man travelling through different centuries and switching genders, explores gender fluidity and gender and sexual roles (Maddocks, 2019). Neuwirth's opera was described in *The New Yorker* as a "radical feminist adaptation", challenging the "conservatism" of the opera industry (Ross, 2019).

According to LaBonte (2019), while contemporary operas do attempt to achieve greater gender equality in their production and narratives, this has not yet been achieved. Furthermore, LaBonte adds that the contemporary operas that do have prominent and thought-provoking woman-focused narratives and that are created by women are not played regularly in national opera companies. LaBonte argues that greater opportunities for woman opera composers, librettists and administrators is pivotal for opera's growth. However, LaBonte also notes that the support and involvement of more women creators in opera does not necessarily result in a dramatic thematic change in the content of their works.

In my personal communication via email and video meetings with Kate Wyatt, Royal Opera House producer and co-creator of the UK-based Engender Festival and network about women opera creators and performances of femininity in contemporary opera, Wyatt revealed

perspectives regarding women opera creators, the opportunities afforded to them, and depictions of women in contemporary opera. Wyatt notes that opera is a “political beast” (K. Wyatt, personal communication, January 19, 2023) and that opera is “malleable, shifting and absorbing as the society around it changes”. Furthermore, she discusses how the Royal Opera House aims to “improve gender representation” and “recognise the importance of the opportunities afforded on our stages” (K. Wyatt, personal communication, January 19, 2023). Although the “massive historical gender imbalance” has resulted in women not being given as many opportunities than men to create new work, Wyatt argues that there is a real want for female voices in opera. The main challenges facing contemporary female composers is mostly the opportunity to create a new work, as it is very difficult for any composer to get a commission for a 90-minute opera and the ones making decisions about who receives these opportunities are mostly male. Although there are talented female composers, the historically larger pool of opportunities for male composers means that larger opera houses tend to go for composers who seem more established in the industry. However, Wyatt notes that this is beginning to change in the opera industry in the UK, Europe and the USA, and that decision makers in opera houses are increasingly aware of the need to commission differently. Wyatt stresses the importance of a variety of perspectives in opera, and that refraining from giving more commissioning opportunities “at all scales and levels of the opera ecosystem” (2023) fuels negative public perceptions about opera. In terms of audience reception to new operatic works made by women, Wyatt notes that there are audiences who champion works with female perspectives being performed onstage, and these have successful ticket sales and receive good feedback (2023). Wyatt also commented on the “diverse” range of composers and writers aiming to create opera that “reflects our changing society”, who have the potential to attract new audiences and maintain opera’s relevance.

Wyatt stresses the importance of women leading creative conversations and getting equal opportunities and platforms to create things in their vision. Although Wyatt advises against pushing for any particular agenda when creating work, she emphasises the importance of women having their own voices in opera and having female characters with multiple complex layers. Wyatt advocates for giving agency to women on stage, for both old and new operatic works. She also commends creative teams who take operas in the canon and bring out complex layers to the women characters. When women are able to create new operas, they contribute to the growing multiplicity of meanings and perspectives on feminism and femininity. Furthermore, the gradually increasing numbers of new operas on main global stages being

made by women means that the opera scene is moving beyond the point where women feel that they only can write about what is considered women's issues and are starting to compose and write about narratives that they want to discuss regardless of their gender (K. Wyatt, personal communication, January 19, 2023).

2.5 Examples of contemporary opera by South African composers

South Africa's operatic culture dates from first half of the nineteenth century. Although it was initially considered a non-black venture in the colonial and apartheid regimes, black musicians and singers had exposure to opera through choirs, classical music in church organisations and differing educational centres. Western European operas were given considerable funding during the apartheid government's rule. Since the emergence of democracy in South Africa in the 1990s, the post-apartheid South African opera scene has become more diverse, with numerous black opera singers achieving enormous international success and South African composers premiered operas that represented black South African voices (André, Somma & Mhlambi, 2016).

There have been numerous contributions to South African opera, which as a genre has undergone significant development. While mostly Western operas have been performed in South Africa, they are often staged in a South African context, and South African opera composers have opportunities to write operas based on South African stories. South African opera composers whose operas feature leading female roles and differing performances of femininity include Hendrik Hofmeyr, Bongani Ndodana-Breen, Neo Muyanga, Mzilikazi Khumalo and Peter Klatzow (André et al., 2016).

While productions of Western operas in the canon are regularly staged in South Africa, the directorial decisions do not always conform to a traditional Western style, with some directed in a unique style where South African and Western elements are combined. A notable contributor to this is South African artist William Kentridge, whose repertoire of operas combined with his distinctive artistic style includes *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992), *Die Zauberflöte* (2005), *The Nose* (2010) and *Lulu* (2015). Other productions of operas in the canon that combine Western and South African elements, this time by setting these operas in a South African context, are *U-Carmen eKhayalitsha* (2005) and *La Boheme Abanxaxhi* (2012). These two productions, produced by the Isango Ensemble, included strategies that resulted in the indigenisation of the music, lyrics, setting, themes and sub-themes.

New South African operas continue to be created and produced by South African composers of varying backgrounds, allowing various South African voices to be heard. Mzilikazi Khumalo's opera *Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu* (2002), commissioned by Opera Africa in Durban, depicted the famous Zulu Princess Magogo's life and musical compositions. The opera included princess's own compositions in addition to Khumalo's original musical material, demonstrating that opera can showcase and document diverse South African stories and history. Another project commissioned by Cape Town Opera in 2010 involved five South African 20-minute operas inspired by South African stories and themes, and was titled *Five:20 – Operas made in South Africa* (Spies, 2010). The operas were:

- Bongani Ndodana-Breen's *Hani*, based on the life of political figure Chris Hani,
- Hendrik Hofmeyr's *Saartjie*, based on the life of the KhoiKhoi woman Sara Baartman,
- Martin Watt's *Tronkvoël*, depicting Afrikaans poet and anti-apartheid activist Breyten Breytenbach's imprisonment,
- Peter Louis van Dijk's *Out of Time*, depicting various groups of people as they travel on fast-paced South African minibus taxi, which is used as an abstract idea to tackle themes of xenophobia and violence,
- Peter Klatzow's *Words from a Broken String*, showcasing the British linguist and anthropologist Lucy Lloyd and her documentation of San rituals and language (Mhlambi, 2015, in André et al., 2016).

2.5.1 Operas written by South African women

There are several well-known South African female composers who have written instrumental and vocal works, such as Rosa Nepgen, Blanche Gerstman and Princess Magogo (also known as Constance Buthelezi); these women composed vocal music, such as art songs, traditional South African music and choral works. However, their vocal music output does not include full-scale operas. Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph, the first South African woman to receive a doctorate in composition, premiered a rock opera, *Rage in a Cage*, in Israel in 1986. Another notable operatic contribution is Angelique Mouyis' opera *Bessie: The Blue-Eyed Xhosa*, premiered in association with Cape Town Opera in 2015. However, as of yet there are no formal analyses of these aforementioned operas, although there are formal analyses available of other South African operas by male composers. As of 2024, Amy Crankshaw is one of three South African female composers to have created and premiered an opera in a theatre. Her opera is titled *The Apothecary*.

The South African composer Clare Loveday gave an online presentation of her opera-in-progress, *Where does the air go?*, as part of the Royal Opera House's 2022 Engender Festival. As the Engender Festival aims to address gender inequalities in opera, the development of Loveday's opera and its formal theatrical premiere could be a notable contribution to South African contemporary opera and a point of further study. Loveday is developing *Where does the air go?* as a long-term theatrical project with collaborators from the Royal Opera House (London) and the Centre for the Less Good Idea (Johannesburg), conceptualising it as an all-women's opera. She aims to "research contemporary approaches to writing song cycles and chamber operas, and think through the creative and musical challenges of writing for a variety of women's voices, and what it means to write opera in South Africa" (Loveday, 2024).

2.5.2 Feminist perspectives of South African female composers

Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph (1948-) is hesitant about being labelled a 'female composer', as it seems to suggest that different criteria should be applied to music written by women; however, she also recognises that 'female composer' can be used to address the inequalities that have existed for centuries in the male-dominated composition field (Zaidel-Rudolph, in Walton & Muller, 2005, p. 81).

According to Clare Loveday (1967-), South African feminist perspectives in music are very diverse, as there are racial and cultural aspects to consider. Therefore, when discussing the experiences of female composers in South Africa, it needs to be done with caution (C. Loveday, personal communication, November 17, 2022). The different forms of feminism also need to be taken into consideration, as different South African female composers may subscribe to different waves of feminist thought. Despite these challenges when having conversations about feminism and gender discrimination in the South African composition scene, Loveday emphasises the importance of making sure that female voices are heard, especially in the South African music industry.

Zaidel-Rudolph (in Walton & Muller, 2005), who studied initially at the University of Pretoria and then continued her studies in the Royal College of Music (London) and in Hamburg with György Ligeti, experienced discriminatory behaviour and attitudes towards female composers in South Africa and abroad. She has been subjected to sexist reporting and gender stereotyping, including condescending comments about her marital status and reviewers expressing surprise at how "strong" and "masculine" her compositions sound. Nevertheless, she remains a respected figure in the South African music industry, a longstanding member of the

International League of Women Composers and the International Association of Women in Music.

Loveday (2019) notes that the structures in the South African new music scene remain patriarchal and that sexism in the classical music industry is systemic. She recalls numerous situations where her input was ignored or not taken seriously by her male colleagues, despite her international accolades and reputation. She reports that fellow female musicians, also highly educated and experienced, had similar experiences of being treated in condescending ways by various professional institutions.

Furthermore, Loveday (2022) comments that there are strong contrasts between the music scenes in South Africa and the United Kingdom. She argues that the new music scene and opera scene in South Africa is still very small and conservative, with limitations for female composers; in comparison, the UK new music scene is very diverse and busy, with more funding and opportunities to commission and perform new music (C. Loveday, personal communication, November 17, 2022). In addition, Loveday (2019) describes the engagement, collaboration and respect she has been given when she works in the UK. These experiences inspired her to create the Women's Music Collective, which became the Women in Music SA platform. The platform aims to promote and publicise the work of female South African musicians from all backgrounds and disciplines.

Amy Crankshaw (personal communication, July 24, 2019) revealed that although female composers are receiving more recognition for their work than in the past, there are still gender barriers in the new music composition scene. However, she notes that there are several people who actively promote female composers' work and aim to normalise female talent for future generations.

2.5.3 Performances of femininity in South African opera

Several South African operas depict leading female historical characters with unique performances of femininity, including the Zulu Princess Magogo, the KhoiKhoi woman Sara Baartman, the San documenter Lucy Lloyd, political activist Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Bessie the white Mpondo queen. Arguably, these diverse heroines not only reflect elements of South African historical events, but also demonstrate the potential of the South African opera genre to display diverse performances of femininity with which South African audiences could resonate. Conductor Kamal Khan argues the importance of creating new South African operas, emphasising that South African opera singers should be able to "sing their own stories" (André

et al., 2016). Furthermore, Stolp (2016, in Gerber, 2021) argues that the focus on South African historical women reflects “the desire to reflect elements of national identity, a crucial component of the nation-building process” (p. 32).

Mzilikazi Khumalo’s opera *Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu* (2006) is the first opera entirely written in Zulu, with the titular character performed by the renowned South African mezzo-soprano Sibongile Khumalo. The opera starts with the princess reflecting on her life, and flashbacks reveal the struggle between her duties as a princess and as a non-conformist woman, as well as her determination for the unification of the Zulu people. The opera delves into her character as a political activist, singer and composer, and uses extracts of her own musical compositions (Khumalo, 2006).

Hendrik Hofmeyr’s *Sara Baartman* (2022), which was inspired by his 20-minute opera *Saartjie* (2010), is written from Baartman’s perspective as she reflects on her life. The opera details her tragic history of racial and gendered oppression and humiliation. The libretto starts with Baartman employed in the Cape and details how her body is exhibited as an exotic specimen in nineteenth-century Europe. She is exhibited in both England and France, where she is studied by the racist scientist Georges Cuvier, and the opera concludes with her alcoholism and untimely death in 1815. When interviewed about this opera, Hofmeyr discussed that he wanted to portray Baartman as a multifaceted woman, while acknowledging the undeniable exploitation and objectification she experienced. Hofmeyr argues that she was an uncanny businesswoman who was able to negotiate an extremely lucrative contract for her shows in Europe, and was the first South African to publish in London and receive most of the profits. She also always wore a full body-stocking in her shows and refused to strip, which, according to Hofmeyr, reflects her strength of character (in Swingler, 2022).

Klatzow’s *Words From a Broken String* focuses on the work of the late nineteenth-century English anthropologist Lucy Lloyd as she documents San rituals and language. Klatzow emphasises the interaction between the Victorian English and San cultures in Southern Africa, which he does through melodic gestures (Spies, 2016).

Ndodana-Breen’s *Winnie: The opera* (2011), a prominent and well-documented full-length original opera by a black South African composer (André, 2016), depicts the life of the political figure Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Written in both English and Xhosa and combining elements of Western classical and traditional South African music, the opera portrays Madikizela-Mandela’s life in a series of flashbacks while she is in a courtroom. These

flashbacks reflect on her separation from her husband and children during apartheid and her role in political protest, amongst other key moments (Redvers, 2011). Both the composer and librettist aimed to tell Madikizela-Mandela's story as a stand-alone narrative. They believed that her story often is viewed alongside that of her ex-husband Nelson Mandela and wanted to focus on her specifically and independently.

Not only do the woman heroines in South African contemporary operas reflect various female perspectives and experiences in South African history, but they also delve into the heroine's complex personalities and emotions, providing multi-dimensional performances of femininity. The performances of femininity of the operatic heroines of *Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu*, *Sara Baartman*, *Words from a broken string*, *Winnie: The opera* and *Bessie: The blue-eyed Xhosa* are all connected by themes of non-conformity and navigating socio-political struggles, while also incorporating various South African languages and musical styles.

It is evident that while although are woman heroines in contemporary South African operas derived from South African history, most of these operas are put forward by male composers. However, Mouyis's *Bessie: The blue-eyed Xhosa* is one of few South African operas written by a woman, depicting the story of Bessie, rescued as a child by the local Xhosa inhabitants after the ship she was travelling in was wrecked along the Wild Coast. Bessie grew up in the Xhosa community and became the wife of a Xhosa prince, becoming a respected figure and leaving an enduring legacy in the Xhosa royal families. Mouyis's work potentially displays performances of femininity relating to feminine power and racial politics, but unfortunately no formal analyses have been made on this opera as of yet.

2.5.4 A review of brief scholarly work focusing on South African opera

Significant scholarly attention has been given to South African operas with leading woman characters, by Bertha Spies and Naomi André. These studies provide possible frameworks about how to conduct thorough investigations of South African contemporary operas.

Spies attended and reviewed all five short contemporary operas premiered at the UCT South African College of Music in 2010, including works by Bongani Ndodana-Breen, Peter Klatzow and Hendrik Hofmeyr. In her review, she draws on various aspects to analyse these 20-minute operas. Spies communicated with the composers, read the opera programme notes, watched the operas, and did theoretical studies of the melodies, rhythms, pitch patterns and text used in the operas.

Spies has conducted extensive hermeneutic studies on *Saartjie* by Hendrik Hofmeyr in 2014 and *Words from a Broken String* by Peter Klatzow in 2016, depicting the woman characters Sara Baartman and Lucy Lloyd, respectively. In *Saartjie*, Spies notes the use of changing melodic gestures, which demonstrates Baartman's turbulent moods and emotions. These melodic gestures undergo changes in dynamics, tempo and rhythm. Four South African languages are present in the opera, namely English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa and Khoi; Spies analysed Hofmeyr's specific use of language and text in the opera as a means of revealing Baartman's character and upbringing. Spies uses extracts from the musical score in her article to corroborate her observations. Spies also focuses on melodic gestures and motifs in Klatzow's *Words from a Broken String*; she argues that these represent the cultural interaction between the English and |xam groups. Spies' analysis of theoretical aspects and text helps the reader to come to an understanding of the opera's characters and themes.

The American opera scholar Naomi André collaborated with South African researchers Donato Somma and Innocentia Mhlambi to study Bongani Ndodana-Breen's *Winnie: The opera* (2011). Their study investigated South African history and social issues through this musical portrayal of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. The writers employed hermeneutic approaches to allow for greater understanding of the work. Theoretical aspects are studied and comparisons are drawn between South African operatic culture and the Western operatic traditions. Additionally, the writers investigate South African sociological issues and use multi-disciplinary approaches to explore how opera demonstrates broader political, cultural, and historical meaning in South Africa, especially relating to the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Like Spies did in her aforementioned studies, the three writers attended live performances of *Winnie: The opera*, studied the programme book and consulted the score, libretto and composer's commentary to observe analytical information. Furthermore, André, Somma and Mhlambi conducted interviews with several cast and crew members.

Ndodana-Breen's commentary discussed discusses the use of identifying recurring musical themes and the score's harmonic language; however, at the request of the composer and librettists, the authors did not include specific extracts from the score, which differs from Spies' articles. They also interviewed prominent South African opera composer Neo Muyanga, to provide greater insight on black opera culture in South Africa.

The scholarly analyses completed on South African contemporary operas with female protagonists provide a frame of reference for future analyses of performances of femininity in

operas by South African composers, such as *The Apothecary*. Spies and André's articles explored the operas from various perspectives, which included discussions with composers, conducting theoretical analyses, making connections to South African socio-political issues and experiencing the performances of the operas as audience members. Nevertheless, it must still be noted that the women heroines present in contemporary South African operas are created by male composers, thereby perpetuating disconnections between the composer's and the character's perspectives.

2.6 Musicological perspectives of musical representation and hermeneutics

Musicologists have approached exploring femininity in opera with different approaches, including analysing the text and musical score. While some musicologists focus on the individual experience and the effect of the musical textures on the senses, others use specific analytical methods to uncover themes through the music (Smart, 2000). Abbate argues that the "reality" of opera lies in the performed voices and the text (Smart, 2000, p. 7), and that opera conveys social meaning musically by exploiting an established hierarchy of voice types and dramatic connotations. McClary, known for the "musical specificity" of her opera studies (in Smart, 2000, p. 6), examines operatic music by using musical analysis and exploring social contexts, thus creating a greater understanding of the music and combatting the idea that the music is indescribable.

Kramer (2011) argues that although theoretical elements of music are often taken into consideration when analysing music, such as pitches, chords and neo-Riemannian theory, the same cannot be said for historical, political, social, cultural and ideological elements. He states that music analysis should involve exploring world issues, as music often offers insight into those issues. Theorists such as Nattiez (1990) agree with this sentiment, as "music is an essential part of man's anthropological aspect".

According to Charlton (2009, p.148), opera can display power relations in action, which can be done through musical elements acting as "carriers of meaning" that can be interpreted. Composers can use various musical devices, such as melodies, rhythms, instruments or motifs; audiences can recognise the extra-musical connotations of these devices, such as 'the erotic' or 'death'. However, the audience understands these meanings because of cultural training; they do not arrive at these conclusions wholly independently.

Charlton (2009) writes that Schoenberg noted that rhythm is an effective means of musical recognition, especially in opera. Using rhythm as a means of thematic representations in opera has been used by Mozart and Wagner. Rhythms have been used to indicate the class and social status of characters. During the twentieth century, Berg's operas *Wozzeck* (1925) and *Lulu* (1935) utilised text, drama and continuous music effectively to convey themes. Post 1945, operas started experimenting more with absurdist, metaphorical narrative themes and more experimental musical devices. Composers started experimenting even more with the extremes of tessitura, range, dissonance and volume, and plots started having a more psychological element.

In her study of Unsuk Chin's 2007 contemporary opera *Alice in Wonderland*, Na (2012) analyses the timbre, form, pitch, meter, tempo, rhythm, motivic themes and instrumentation to help analyse the character of Alice, as well as the dramatic and vocal requirements to portray this role effectively. Part of the study is motivated by her curiosity about how the complex moods in *Alice in Wonderland* could be conveyed through music and drama. Na's study also includes a theoretical analysis of the orchestral score and piano reduction of *Alice in Wonderland* and uses tables to summarise different musical features of each opera scene. These musical features included rhythms, pitch structures, meter, tempo and instrumentation. She makes comparisons between Chin's older works, to determine any distinctive stylistic traits present. Na employs a dramatic analysis of the opera, involving studying the plot structure, set and costume design, and doing character analyses. In addition, Na explores the vocal writing and performance requirements for Alice's character, by exploring the different vocal considerations, extended techniques and breath control required in each scene. She studies the different uses of speaking and singing throughout the work, which helped the investigation lay a foundation for its discussion of Alice's emotional state and how she tries to exert control in Wonderland.

The result is a thorough and detailed musical analysis of the work. Na's careful and varied analysis provides a guideline for my own study, in terms of both its analysis and discussion of musical features, for example the study of Alice's character through her vocal part, and in considering how such elements may affect performances of femininity in *The Apothecary*.

2.7 Summary

Chapter 2 examined the literature relating to the research themes of performances of femininity. This chapter explored various themes, including historical and contemporary performances of femininity in opera; feminine madness, desire and sexuality; notable examples of contemporary operas by South African composers and those written by South African women; the perspectives and experiences of South African female composers; performances of femininity in South African opera and analyses of South African operas with female heroines; and the musicological perspectives of musical representation and hermeneutics.

This literature review revealed that there is paucity of research focusing on performances of femininity in contemporary opera, particularly those by South African composers. Additionally, no formal analyses have been completed of contemporary operas written by South African female composers. This study aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of performances of femininity in the contemporary operas of South African composers, while additionally emphasising the contributions and perspectives of South African female composers.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 includes the researcher's methodological approach of the study which will be conducted within a broader framework of feminist phenomenology. The research will adopt a hermeneutic paradigm with a case study research design to explore performances of femininity in *The Apothecary*, while exploring the composer and librettist's feminist perspectives and interpretations of female agency in the opera. The composer's South African feminist perspective is also explored.

The chapter discusses the qualitative research approach, feminist phenomenological theoretical framework, hermeneutics research paradigm and the case study research design. Brief backgrounds to the participants, composer Amy Crankshaw and librettist Clare Best, are provided. The data collection and data analysis and interpretation is described, which includes three data sets of semi-structured interviews, score analysis and video analysis. The research quality and ethical considerations are also elaborated upon.

3.2 Research paradigm and theoretical framework

Qualitative research typically involves researchers collecting several forms of data, including interviews, audio-visual information and observations, which they organise into themes. Data is gathered through direct interactions with their participants in a natural setting, and emphasis is placed on discovering the meanings that the participants bring to the study about certain topics and issues. Qualitative researchers aim to understand the holistic picture by investigating numerous perspectives, and the researcher's subjective experiences are considered to acknowledge how these may shape the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2018).

A qualitative research methodology has been selected for this study because it is suitable to explore subjective experiences and allows multiple viewpoints to be investigated. This study will use a qualitative research approach because it involves "understanding the subjectivity of social phenomena" (Noor, 2008, p.1602). This exploration of subjective experiences connects to feminist phenomenology, which involves investigating gendered experiences and sexual difference within this study. In addition, the hermeneutics paradigm falls within a qualitative methodology, as it allows for an interpretation and engagement with the subjectivity of the musical work and the discourse surrounding it.

3.2.1 *Feminist phenomenology*

The choice of feminist phenomenology as the theoretical framework stems from its emphasis on understanding lived, subjective, specifically gendered, experiences. Although feminist research is usually post-structural in nature, feminist phenomenology is the sub-field wherein this study is placed. According to Shabot and Landry (2018), phenomenology is feminist if it includes questions pertaining to gendered experience and sexual difference within the chosen area of study. Phenomenology is effective in analysing gender and sexual politics, as it involves discovering and describing a lived experience. Feminist phenomenology allows the participants' first-person descriptions of their gendered experiences and their experiences of creating the opera to provide understanding of their intentions regarding performances of femininity and gender roles in *The Apothecary*.

Phenomenology is a research methodology and philosophical field involving the study of lived, subjective experience. It aims to understand the outside world as it is interpreted by consciousness (Hodges, 2017). Phenomenology involves analysing how we perceive what we experience and involves engaging with people and objects in the world. The body is also an important part of phenomenological research, as it is seen as the site where personal world experiences unfold. Phenomenology acknowledges that the participants' experiences and worldview are shaped by socio-historical context (Eatough & Smith, 2008), in addition to recognising and researching the different constructions and meanings that individuals assign to their personal experiences (Noor, 2008).

This study engages with phenomenology while considering feminist ideas, and from a feminist perspective. According to feminist author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014), a feminist “believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes” (p. 47). Feminist research often has themes of activism and empowerment, by placing marginalised groups as the focus of attention and investigating power relationships. Feminist research also encourages agency; it challenges dominant perspectives of learning and gaining knowledge, “urging women to live and invite in differences, to embrace the creativity and knowledge building that lies within the tensions of difference” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 5).

Feminist phenomenology combines theoretical research with goals that target relevant social issues and which can be applied to create change. Therefore, feminist phenomenology is what is known as critical phenomenology: that is, research that aims to understand the human experience and consciousness in a broader context, while being aware of its limitations and

understanding the influence of politics, language, ideology and power structures on moulding and constraining the participants' and their own experiences (Simms & Stawarska, 2014).

According to Simms and Stawarska (2014), feminist phenomenologists strive to balance different hermeneutic disciplines. They must incorporate “the hermeneutic discipline of suspicion” (p. 11) with prevailing discourse schemas alongside a hermeneutic discipline of affirmation and empowerment of “the complexity of individual, situated, gendered life experiences” (p. 11) to stimulate non-patriarchal political outcomes.

The writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir argues that the male subject's experiences have been deemed as the norm, therefore automatically gendering the subject of experience as male (Shabot & Landry, 2018). Beauvoir also implies that sex is biological, while gender is a cultural interpretation. According to Butler (1988), phenomenology also distinguishes between a participant's biological factors that “structure bodily existence” (p. 520) and the cultural meanings and interpretations that the embodied existence takes on “in the context of lived experience” (p. 520). Butler argues that the subjective experience is constructed by existing socio-political contexts, but such experiences also affect those contexts. Both phenomenology and feminist analysis aim to identify and discuss lived experiences and explore how worldviews are produced. Butler maintains that phenomenology is useful in feminist research, as its focus on the acts that construct cultural identity helps researchers to understand how bodies are shaped into certain genders, thus embodying cultural conventions (Butler, 1988).

3.2.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics focuses on interpretation and is used in various study fields that have subject matter requiring interpretative approaches. This is a result of the study matter relating to the meaning of the human experience as represented in the arts, or the meaning of human actions, belief systems and intentions. While typically utilised in theological fields, hermeneutics is also often used in the arts, humanities and social sciences (George, 2020). A hermeneutic methodological approach is appropriate for this proposed study because this will be effective for exploring representations of femininity within the texts of *The Apothecary*.

Phenomenology and hermeneutics have certain similarities. They are both concerned with investigating the human experience to create meaning and achieve a level of greater understanding. However, while phenomenology emphasises consciousness and focuses on understanding phenomena, hermeneutics focuses more on realising the impact of the world on one's experience. Polkinghorne (in Lavery, 2003, p. 4), defines hermeneutics as an

interpretative process that focuses on the “historical meanings of experience” and how these have an effect on a personal and societal level. According to Annells (in Lavery, 2003), the process of hermeneutics aims to provide an understanding and discussion of phenomena through language; it approaches human cultural activity as texts with meanings to be interpreted. The cultural “texts” studied include written communication, oral traditions, music and visual arts (Lavery, 2003, p. 9).

In hermeneutics, interpretation aims to find the meaning and greater understanding of the text. To create an effective interpretative process, interaction and participation in dialogue is vital; understanding is crucial to discover the meaning in the text or action. According to Howell (2015), interpretation involves a mutual negotiation and interaction.

The musicologist Lawrence Kramer (2011), regarded for his research on musical hermeneutics, states that “music is interpreted by being performed” (p. 1), as the performer produces a gestural understanding of the music while playing. However, he argues that musical hermeneutics is interesting because it allows the researcher to show how music functions in the world through interpreting both music and musical performances. Musical hermeneutics involves analysing both the music as a “text” and the discourse surrounding it. To understand music, we must engage with the work and attempt to interpret it. Kramer argues that “meaning in discourse always arises concretely from a speech act that enters the discourse from outside” (p. 6), which emerges once the interpreter has read the symbols and signs within the work.

3.3 Research design

The study will be an “instrumental case study, which is undertaken when a case is used to shed light on a phenomenon or issue” (Williamon et al., 2021). In this study, the phenomenon is the contemporary opera *The Apothecary* and the case revolves around the composer, the librettist, the text, the score and the video, which will be investigated as multiple data points. These data points are the interviews with the composer and librettist, and analyses of the score and of the filmed opera production. The phenomenon is the expression of femininity in the opera, explored through subjective accounts of its realisation from the composer and librettist. The case also involves analysis of the opera’s text and score, as interpretation of both the functional elements of music and socio-political elements present in music contribute to greater understanding (Kramer, 2011).

According to Merriam (1998), a case is “a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). She argues that as long as the researcher is able to specify the phenomenon of interest and isolate what they are going to enquire specifically, then it can be considered a case. This approach allows for greater flexibility for researcher in using case study strategies in various forms of qualitative research. Merriam (in Yazan, 2015) argues that there are three main attributes of case study methods: they focus on particular phenomena, they allow for thick descriptions of the phenomenon when it is studied, and they provide clarity in the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon.

3.4 The participants

The participants are the composer, Amy Crankshaw, and the librettist, Clare Best. The study explores their subjective feminist perspectives on representations and performances of femininity in contemporary opera. Both participants signed informed consent forms and provided written permission for their identities to be revealed in the study.

3.4.1 Amy Crankshaw – composer

A South African composer based in London, Crankshaw (b. 1991) studied at the South African College of Music in Cape Town. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Performances of her works have been held at Festival Présences, Bloomsbury Festival, Barbican Centre, Silk Street Theatre, the Grahamstown National Arts Festival, and Festival d’Aix-en-Provence. Crankshaw’s works have been performed throughout Europe, Canada and South Africa, and she is the recipient of various scholarships, including the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Scholarship and the Boltini Trust Scholarship (Crankshaw, 2022).

3.4.2 Clare Best – librettist

Best (b. 1955) is a British poet and author whose literary works have been shortlisted for numerous awards, including the 2012 Seamus Heaney Centre prize. She completed her Master of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Sussex and has been an associate lecturer in creative writing for the Open University since 2006. Her work has received awards from the Arts Council England and the Society of Authors and she has held writing residencies in a range of settings, including at the University of Brighton and HMP Shepton Mallet. She is a librettist for various operas and art song cycles, including *The Apothecary* (2020) and *End of Season* (2022), which she co-created with composer Amy Crankshaw (Best, 2024).

3.5 Data collection

Three data sources will be drawn on for this study, namely semi-structured interviews with the composer and librettist, an analysis of the musical score, and an analysis of video recording of the 2021 Guildhall School of Music & Drama recording of *The Apothecary*.

The joint semi-structured interview with the composer and librettist took place online via Zoom. The interview lasted 65 minutes. Another separate interview solely with the composer to discuss questions relating to performances of femininity in South African opera took place directly afterwards, also online via Zoom, and lasted ten minutes. The interviews were audio-visually recorded and transcribed.

The composer provided the full score and video recording of *The Apothecary* to facilitate my further analyses.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

The data and analysis and interpretation of the three data sets are described in this section. The three data sets include semi-structured interviews with the participants, score analysis of *The Apothecary*'s score and video analysis of the opera's 2021 premiere to explore performances of femininity. A hermeneutic approach was followed where possible.

3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews with the participants were transcribed verbatim and the participants' responses were placed in separate tables. These responses were read several times and codes were assigned to summarise and condense the data. Codes are words or short phrases that are assigned to a section of visual or language-based data to summarise the essence of what is being described or represented (Saldana, 2008). An inductive analysis was undertaken to reveal themes and sub themes; this is an iterative process of data-driven thematic analysis where the data is coded without being constrained to a pre-existing coding framework or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I read the transcripts, I wrote down detailed preliminary observations, including any questions that the data raised. Once I completed this process, I decided on and wrote down emerging themes, which were grouped into main themes and sub-themes (see Appendix E for examples of these data sets).

3.6.2 Score analysis

In line with inductive research, the score of the opera was scrutinised, particularly the thematic and melodic material. The score analysis uses a similar strategy to that employed in Na's research (2012), with a table detailing the musical features of rhythmic motifs, melodic motifs, form, instrumentation, meter, vocal range and atmosphere as separate columns. Using the score, I wrote down observations of these musical features for each scene.

Once I completed analysing the musical features, the musical score was compared to the text; and associations between text and musical interpretations were explored. I specifically looked for the composer and librettists' interpretations of elements of femininity, and whether this was represented in the music or text. These observations were placed into a table with specific musical examples. In my score analysis notes, I determined congruencies and deviations between the composer and librettist's comments and my findings in the score (see Appendix E for examples).

3.6.3 Video analysis

Additionally, I watched the video recording of the 2021 performance of *The Apothecary* for additional observations. I analysed the video frame by frame, taking note of lighting, stage design, blocking and costume design choices for each scene. These observations were placed in a table to determine how elements of femininity were reinforced in the staging of this opera (see Appendix E for examples).

3.7 Research quality

The quality of this study is affirmed by various practices and methods. Its use of interview transcripts and detailed descriptions of opera video extract analysis, analysis of extensive literature in the field and reflective commentary will contribute to this research proposal's credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

The researcher's acknowledgement of their subjective experiences is prominent in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2018). In phenomenological studies, the researcher aims to understand different meanings and interpretations placed on their data and can engage with the participants while acknowledging their subjective experiences (Lester, 1999).

The use of multiple methods (the interviews and analyses of the score and video performance) in this study allows for a triangulation of data collection points. Such triangulation, according

to Heale and Forbes (2013), results in a more comprehensive study, and using multiple approaches helps to clarify meaning, ensures objectivity and, according to Stake (2000), allows for the verification and validation of my findings.

Throughout the study, I have ensured that there is ethical validation and substantive validation in my research processes. All ethical procedures have been followed to ensure that the participants feels comfortable to have their experiences heard. I have questioned any underlying assumptions that I may have and have acknowledged my own subjectivity when crafting the research questions and starting the semi-structured interview. In addition, the study shows an awareness of socio-cultural spaces and experiences of both the participants and researcher, takes the extensive literature regarding the topic into consideration. Unambiguous language is used throughout the study so that the participant and potential readers have a clear understanding of what the study entails and requires (Angen, 2000).

Throughout my research, I have endeavoured to provide methodological integrity by presenting a holistic approach and perspective. I have maintained personal and interpersonal integrity by treating my participants with care and respect, being aware of their socio-cultural context, and by approaching my research questions with commitment and focus. I have also displayed aesthetic integrity, as I present an enlightening and creative research study to potential readers (Bruscia, 2015). This study is useful and relevant, as it explores femininity in opera in a work by a South African female composer; this allows for performances of femininity from a South African female perspective in music to be documented and interpreted.

3.8 Ethical considerations

The study followed the ethical guidelines provided by the University of Pretoria. I contacted the participants via email providing a brief background and context of the study, and to invite them to take part in the study. Once Crankshaw and Best expressed interest in taking part in my study, I sent a more detailed email including an information form (see Appendix A) with the title and particulars about the study, along with a letter of informed consent for them to complete and return to me (see Appendix B). I requested their consent to make audio-visual recordings of the interview. They were informed that this research data would be stored electronically at the University of Pretoria: School of the Arts for a minimum of 15 years. I emphasised that they are free to withdraw from this study at any stage, without any negative consequences. They were informed that the data would be used for further research purposes.

Furthermore, when I analysed the 2021 recording of *The Apothecary*, I took copyright into consideration. Even though the current recording of the opera is in the public domain, I requested permission from the composer and librettist to study and discuss this work (see Appendix C). I did not share this recording without their permission.

3.9 Summary

Chapter 3 includes the study's qualitative methodology approach, which was conducted within a broader framework of feminist phenomenology. The research adopted a hermeneutic paradigm with a case study research design to explore performances of femininity in *The Apothecary*, alongside the composer and librettist's feminist perspectives and interpretations of female agency in the opera. Furthermore, the chapter gave contextual information about the two participants. The data collection and data analysis and interpretation entails three data sets of semi-structured interviews with the two participants, score analysis and video analysis of the 2021 premiere of *The Apothecary*. Lastly, there were explanatory details provided regarding the research quality and ethical considerations of the study.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The findings presented in Chapter 4 are the result of an inductive data analysis approach, where patterns and themes emerged organically from three data sets: semi-structured interviews with Amy Crankshaw and Clare Best, a score analysis, and the analysis of the filmed Guildhall School of Music & Drama opera production in 2021. These findings explore how each of these aspects contributed to performances of femininity in *The Apothecary*.

The themes and sub-themes from each data set are summarised in Table 1. The analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed four main themes and several sub-themes. These themes collectively captured the composer and librettist's reflections regarding the conceptualisation of the opera, intentions regarding performances of femininity, gender roles and the complexity of characters, and the realisation of femininity and sensuality.

Five themes and several sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the score analysis which summarises the cast, instrumentation and plot of *The Apothecary*, and elicits an exploration of gendered Romantic ideals and the use of instrumentation, musical motifs and cyclical structural elements. The analysis of the video recording revealed three main themes which discuss the use of colour and imagery in the lighting, costume design and set design to reinforce sensuality and the male gaze, in addition to exploring how the music and text was reinforced by the singers' acting decisions.

Table 1:

Summary of themes and sub-themes from each data set.

Themes	Sub-themes
I - Semi-structured interviews	
1. The conceptualisation of the opera	i. Inspiration for the opera ii. Creative processes iii. Musical representations of potions through multi-sensorial experiences

Themes	Sub-themes
2. Intentions regarding performances of femininity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Gradual development of themes and performances of femininity ii. Challenges and social issues in contemporary opera iii. Authentic storytelling in contemporary opera iv. The South African contemporary opera scene
3. Gender roles and the complexity of characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Gender roles and the operas historical context ii. Gender roles and operas requirements
4. The realisation of femininity and sensuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Sensuality and multi-sensorial experiences ii. Madeleine's performances of femininity, contrasted with the apothecary's reflection of the male gaze
II - Score analysis	
1. Gendered Romantic opera themes present in <i>The Apothecary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Aspects of Romantic feminine madness and desire ii. <i>Femme fatale</i> characteristics with Madeleine's seduction and power
2. Instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements in <i>The Apothecary</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Apothecary's shop theme ii. Translucence theme iii. Instrumentation and extended techniques iv. Belladonna theme
3. The male gaze and shaping the apothecary's character intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Creating the apothecary's predatory character ii. Male objectification of female characters
4. The realisation of femininity and sensuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Reinforcing feminine sensuality through instrumentation ii. Text and melody reinforcing sensuality iii. Madeleine's performance of femininity

Themes	Sub-themes
5. Power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary	i. Cyclical musical structures and power dynamics ii. Use of rhyme for shifts in power dynamics
III - Video recordings	
1. Effective use of colour in lighting and costume design	i. Colour symbolism in <i>The Apothecary</i> 's lighting choices ii. Performances of femininity with colour choices and costumes
2. Reinforcing sensuality and the male gaze through set design	i. Reinforcing feminine sensuality and the male gaze visually ii. Critiquing the apothecary's male gaze through set design
3. Reinforcing the music and text through the singers' body language	i. Boen's performance of Madeleine's frustration with societal expectations ii. Boen's performance of Madeleine's manipulation and overpowering of the apothecary

4.2 Findings: Semi-structured interviews with Amy Crankshaw and Clare Best

The interviews with Crankshaw and Best are discussed under four themes which shed light on their creative processes and intentions while creating *The Apothecary*. These interviews also discussed Crankshaw and Best's perceptions of femininity in contemporary opera.

4.2.1 Theme 1: The conceptualisation of the opera

Theme 1 encompasses Crankshaw and Best's conceptualisation of *The Apothecary*, and the sub-themes detail the inspiration for the opera, Crankshaw and Best's creative processes and the musical representations of potions through multi-sensorial experiences. These sub-themes reveal how the opera was shaped by many factors, including the practical elements of the opera and the explorative creative processes of the composer and librettist. Crankshaw and Best

focused on specific elements such as rhyme, the use of voices and the stage settings to reinforce ideas of multi-sensorial experiences and sensuality.

Inspiration for the opera

The origins of the idea for the opera and the intentions of the composer and librettist were linked to their course requirements for the Masters program in opera making and writing at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. They were both aware that they needed a maximum cast of five, and that they needed male and female voices, which influenced their creative process.

We knew from the start that we would have a maximum cast of five... more or less, give or take. And we had some idea of there needing to be a mix. So we knew we were dealing with both male and female singers. CB

Crankshaw also noted that she and Best were attracted to each other as collaborators, and one of their intentions was to “see what the [artistic] possibilities were” when they worked together. Best also noted that one of her intentions was to challenge herself as a writer.

Crankshaw and Best both decided on the Robert Browning poem “The Laboratory” as their inspiration, which neither of them had known much about before and which entailed a “straightforward narrative” spoken by a woman. The monologue details a woman visiting an apothecary for advice on poisons to kill one of her rivals; near the end of the poem, she implies to the apothecary that she will give him sexual favours as a kind of recompense for his advice. Best and Crankshaw vividly described their experience of conceptualising the opera:

So here was this very, very straightforward beginnings of a plot, which appealed, I think, to both of us straightaway. And in fact, it's, the story is based on a true story. But Browning set it in sort of revolutionary France, but it's actually from about 100 years earlier. And it's kind of based on a true story of a woman who poisoned various members of her family. So... there's quite a few layers already, before you get into it, which ... I often feel makes it easier to take something as an inspiration, because it already has this kind of depth of story, real story, history. And then it changed a lot. Obviously, we didn't stay with the simplicity of that. CB

Crankshaw commented further that she and Best were intrigued by the “really rich content” present in the poem, and that they could “imagine ... various ways that the story could go in the form of an opera, which is exciting, especially at the beginning of the whole process.”

Elements of the poem alluded to themes of sensuality and multi-sensorial experiences, which appealed to both of them:

What really stood out from that poem, and just from the kind of the world that it felt it was in or that we could get into with the poem, was topics of sensuality, and kind of multi sensorial experiences. So, you know, thinking about this laboratory, you know, what happens there, what does one smell, what does one see, what does one taste, and all of these sorts of sensorial experiences, I think kind of ignite my imagination when it comes to musical content. AC

Creative processes

Crankshaw and Best's creative processes involved experimentation and close collaboration, while working within the course requirements for the project. As a starting point, they both focused on the sensory elements present in Browning's poem to brainstorm themes and colours, which could be reflected in the text and music. Best also found focusing on the sound elements of the text to be helpful in the early stages of writing. Although Best is known for writing in free verse, the historical context in which she and Crankshaw chose to situate *The Apothecary* encouraged her to write a libretto that was not fully free verse. Best discussed how she built in elements of rhyme into her work, including half rhyme, internal rhyme, and couplets.

[The opera] also brought with it challenges for me in terms of what to do with the language, because I'm more used to writing free verse, and because of this historical context, I felt it was it would be interesting to have something which wasn't entirely free verse... Amy and I had very interesting discussions about this, because every which way, we wanted to avoid the horrible constraints of rhyme and strict meter, because that would have been horrible for everybody. So I did build in elements of rhyme, but some of it was half rhyme, internal rhyme. And then there were little bits, little couplets, sometimes a little full rhyme which, which, which Amy has done brilliant things with. So there was there was a linguistic sort of tonal set of challenges for me as a writer as well, which I wanted very deliberately to make. CB

On occasion Best used full rhyme for specific effects, notably to depict the apothecary's authoritarian character. Best noted that the kind of voice she gave to the apothecary was

“something I did quite deliberately” and was to a certain extent “attached to a kind of ... gender reading of the apothecary”. She continued:

This could also ...[have] been given to a woman, but I think something that I did quite consciously was to make the apothecary’s voice and the way that he says things, very kind of that, you know, the fact that I use full rhymes sometimes there, he's assertive, he's quite controlling. ... I see that as a kind of, in my own experience, particularly as the kind of predominantly a male characteristic. And that's a horribly unfair thing to say, but you know, that is kind of what I was doing with the apothecary in giving him these, these very commanding, assertive sort of ways of saying things if you like, so I would say, ... for instance, ... the lines “such beautiful skin translucent as porcelain such charm, but jealousy is Madeleine's burden”. And then, you know, the following the two couplets after that equally have full rhyme. ... There's a sureness about the way that he does things, which I think is can be interpreted as traditionally quite a male area of operation if you like. And I think I did want him to come over that way. And Amy set the lines fantastically, so that you get the sense both of his own desire to command and control his feelings as well, as well as what he has around him in terms, what he does with the substances and all the rest. CB

While writing the libretto, Best considered sound elements of specific word choices; she focused on which kinds of words and syllables would sit well in a particular voice and how the words would be effective in certain vocal ranges.

It sounds awful, but... the practical functional elements for it started to come into my process very, very early on. And then that was a really interesting journey for me. And also the sound elements and trying to work out ... which kinds of words, which kinds of syllables would sit well in a voice and if it was a lower voice would this work or, you know, it was a higher voice would this not work? ... I had my antennae out in every single direction all at once as a writer, and then also because I was learning what you can do with words on stage and what you can't what you should or shouldn't, or what you don't need to because it's going to be shown. CB

The creators also focused on the main arias first, with Best showing Crankshaw early drafts of the text. While composing, Crankshaw aimed for the music to serve the text and the story. She argued that creating fairly flexible functional and musical boundaries were helpful as a means of “starting blocks” at the beginning of their creative process. Crankshaw found that deciding

on practical elements, such as the stage directions and setup, aided in the early stages of creating.

It was so helpful to just distinguish between firstly, the places that we go, the actual physical geography within the stage. I think from early on, we realized we needed two precincts. So one was the apothecary shop. One was this kind of dressing room type place, it's a bit ambiguous as to what exactly it is. And so the music needed to distinguish between these two places to help the audience know that we're trying to transitioning into a different place, even though it's on one stage. That was just one very key functional decision and sort of something we had to navigate throughout the process. ... Are the other decisions that really helped? Well, I wouldn't say decisions, but I suppose boundaries that I tried to create for myself, so that my music would kind of serve the text and the story. AC

Crankshaw also viewed the characters as a form of creative boundaries, using both the characters' motives and possibilities of the singers' voices as guides for conceptualising the project.

The other sort of boundaries were characters. Of course, that wasn't only dictated by the character itself, but who was singing that character? Whose voice was I working with? What could they do? What did they enjoy singing? What could we do to make the most of their particular voice on the stage? AC

Musical representations of potions through multi-sensorial experiences

Crankshaw focused on the multi-sensory experiences one might associate with different substances in her musical scoring decisions for representing the belladonna poison and the love potion. She considered all sensory aspects of the potions, such as their smell, taste and physical sensations, and thought carefully about how she could set those aspects to music.

Exploring ways to musically distinguish between these two substances was a thrilling part of my creative process. The remedies became one of the key areas in which I explored “sensuality” and “multisensorial experiences”. I was asking myself: what does this music smell like – and what does that music smell like? How acidic are the eye drops, or how bitter is the ‘love remedy’, and how do I musicalise that? This way of

thinking imbued a large part of the creative process, and it's something that I think has now burrowed its way deep into the way I think about and write music. AC

Crankshaw and Best both noted that their processes were experimental and explorative, and they tried not to impose an agenda on the opera. Crankshaw noted how their creative processes involve creating a “reflective space” and “allowing space for imagination”; she resisted the notion of feeling “pressure to create some product”.

If we had been too prescriptive about it beforehand, I feel like it would have been a contrived process and creativity might not have found as deep roots, you know, kind of would have felt a little bit surface-y, which just wouldn't be as exciting as makers. You know, you want to open a fertile space that just you can, Clare actually introduced me to this concept of letting ideas compost over time, you know, and kind of throwing things into the pot, stirring it and ... seeing what might come up with that. And maybe you have to throw it out and start again, but it's kind of, absolutely, opening that space, allowing it to become fertile ground and for you to actually grow something that you think ... is worthwhile. AC

Best argued that when creating the opera, they did not want to “impose things on it”; rather, they wanted themes and ideas to “emerge from the space that [we have] created”.

What you do as an artist is to open up space, and the space becomes both the third character if you like, or the third maker. ... And it also becomes, it becomes something that if the work is going well, that kind of grows, rather than shrinks. CB

4.2.2 Theme 2: Intentions regarding performances of femininity

Theme 2 explores how Crankshaw and Best's intentions regarding performances of femininity. The sub-themes explore the gradual development of these themes and performances of femininity, the challenges and social issues in contemporary opera, authentic storytelling in contemporary opera and the South African contemporary opera scene. Crankshaw and Best hoped to create an opera that subtly challenged historical operatic tropes. While they acknowledged different opera narratives and the importance of contemporary opera discussing prominent social issues, Crankshaw and Best stressed the importance of authentic storytelling that is “genuine”, “honest” and delves into issues that the creator is passionate about. Both discussed the challenges present in creating contemporary operas, and Crankshaw also shed

insight on performances of femininity in the South African contemporary opera scene as a South African female composer.

Gradual development of themes and performances of femininity

Crankshaw and Best's intentions regarding performances of femininity were not completely clear-cut at the beginning of their collaboration. Rather, they found that these themes gradually became more apparent as they explored the characters. Best noted that one of their intentions was to consider femininity in the operatic canon and to create an opera that, while in a particular historical context, "didn't adhere to historical tropes in any particular ways". She notably mentioned that they wanted to create an opera that appeared "a wolf in sheep's clothing" with an element of the unexpected for the audience. They hoped to create an opera that "appeared to be nodding to historical aspects", and while aspects of the production continued to allude to historical elements, Crankshaw and Best wanted to "move[d] away from that, according to our own artistic lights, not with political sort of overtones, but in terms of how we wanted to interpret this particular story that we ended up with."

We had the basis of the plot and the basis of character for a long time, before we really hit on the kind of ending that, that we felt would be appropriate, and that we felt would be, that would kind of in a way fit into both the historical context and a contemporary context, without appearing to be a kind of feminist manifesto of any sort or anything too political and so that was... I think that the intention of the whole for me felt like it had to be something that worked on its own terms. CB

Crankshaw commented further on their organic development of themes relating to performances of femininity, explaining that certain themes emerged more prominently as they experimented with ideas:

It was a long process and totally necessary, you know, for us to really kind of tease out what it is we want to write, what it is the opera is going to do. And I think in a way, for me that the opera itself, like the work itself became kind of the third person in our collaboration, you know, because it became its own thing that we would then bounce ideas at, and see, does that stick? Does that work? How will that situate itself in this opera? And ... it felt like it became a discussion between Clare, myself and the actual piece. ... And I think also, as we explored the characters more and more, certain themes became more apparent. And these characters became different personalities of the opera itself. AC

Crankshaw added that they both were aware of different opera narratives and connotations that they might have incorporated “consciously or subconsciously” and noted that there was a decision to foreground Madeleine’s narrative in the opera.

That was ... important for Clare and I, at least for me, you know, to think about those things in opera, because opera as a form is different to writing purely instrumental music, there are narratives, there are lots of connotations that we might, consciously or not consciously, be tapping into. And, you know, it's impossible to be fully aware of how the opera will sit for certain audiences, and how it will be interpreted, it's just impossible. And that's kind of part of the fun of it, you know, to put something out there and go, “Well, we made something. So, let's see, you know, like, where it goes and what it does, and you know, who makes what of it?” But, you know, I think what was important was that we focused on Madeleine as kind of a central force and, and what she did, and that was just, I think, really exciting. AC

While discussing her perceptions on how femininity is performed in opera, Best mentioned that it is “very tempting” to say that women are very stereotyped in a lot of the canon as victims and “hysterical mad women”, particularly in Puccini’s operas. She also discussed the twentieth-century composer Britten and how femininity is performed in his operas, noting an interesting range of femininity. In her opinion, Britten’s *Turn of the Screw*’s performances of femininity have an interesting range of depictions and are “complex and compromised at the same time”. In other Britten operas, such as *Peter Grimes*, the women characters such as Ellen Orford are depicted as saviours, protectors and mother figures, which aligns with stereotypes of traditional femininity.

Challenges and social issues in contemporary opera

This subtheme explores the ways in which both creators recognised the social and financial challenges facing contemporary opera, and how this impacts creators’ processes. Best noted that opera appears to be “struggling to keep its place in the range of arts that we consider contemporary” and that there are discussions in the UK about opera being considered elitist. She also argued that it is difficult to justify writing opera to sponsors and funders “unless it appears to have issues very much in the mix from the beginning”. However, this is not always reflective of a composer and librettist’s creative processes, as often creators have not realised their full vision of their work at that stage.

There are lots of aspects of why, and I think one of them is also the paymaster. ... Here with the Arts Council and other funders, you know, that the questions when you apply for funding for anything are always about, ... “Which are really important, contemporary issues you’re addressing?”, and it's like, “Well, we haven't written it yet”. We don't know half the time that this will be really important things to address, but you know, until you actually have the artwork, you're not, you're not entirely sure. CB

Authentic storytelling in contemporary opera

Crankshaw and Best emphasised how opera as a form is very effective at communicating and exploring social issues, but that this must come from a place of authenticity.

I think it's really important that opera does address subjects or talk about stories which address subjects that make people think really hard about issues that are important to us all. But ... I think those issues have to come after the story, it has to be really good story with convincing characters, and the work has to be really good. And then people will find all sorts of stuff in it. CB

Crankshaw discussed how opera has a “beautiful way” of “telling a story and leaving things to be explored”. She argues that the use of the aria to “explore one thought for a long time” is unique to opera, as one arguably does not explore one thought in such detail in other artistic mediums, such as film. Best noted how opera has a “unique ability... to mess around with time”, which is very effective for storytelling as it allows the creators to focus on and unpack topics, even in a discreet manner. Crankshaw described that the “beauty” of opera collaborations comes from the production and creative teams being “so multi-faceted”, exploring music, text and stage directions.

Crankshaw added, “Opera wouldn't have the magical open-minded power that it could have if makers went into it with a very strong, contrived way of choosing to tell the story”. She noted that there is a nuance to be had where creators allow others to take over the discussion of themes in their operas. She stressed the importance of creators finding a balance between how much to tell and how much to leave open to interpretation.

The South African contemporary opera scene

While discussing the South African contemporary opera scene, Crankshaw argued that it is a scene “rich with potential” and noted the importance of having diverse South African female perspectives present in contemporary opera. While acknowledging the “lack of female makers” in the South African contemporary opera scene, Crankshaw noted that there are challenges when staging operas in South Africa in terms of funding and audience interest.

It sometimes feels very heavy, because you know, you want to, as a creator, you want to make something and it's not as simple as having the ability to make it. You also need a whole other range of support. AC

However, she spoke positively about Hendrik Hofmeyr’s 2022 opera *Sara Baartman*, saying that it would be “a very interesting opera to explore in this context [of femininity in South African contemporary opera]”. Nevertheless, she still noted there is a need for even more of these projects, and for prioritising the accessibility of these for South African audiences.

I think there are a lot of other projects going on, but probably not enough ... I feel like we need to encourage more of this sort of thing where, where composers and writers and makers are making opera, again, because of what the form offers ... it is different to other forms of theatre. And it does take a lot of convincing ... of your general population to go and see an opera. But that's also part of the challenge of opera making: how are you going to market it so that people can understand that they're welcome. And they're included, and they don't need to understand music, or whatever, or singing or they don't need to be theatre fanatics to be able to go to the opera. So, you know, I think opera companies have obviously a big responsibility with that. AC

Crankshaw advocated for South African composers to consider what is relevant and interesting to South Africans when writing opera, and that there is a lot of potential to explore different perspectives on how gender roles are defined in South Africa.

How can we ... how can we grow the potential for more interest in, you know, in different topics, including female perspectives, which is so important, and perhaps, perhaps there is something there about specifically South African female perspective, you know, in as with any nation, or culture or country, there's going to be different perspectives on how gender roles are defined. So it's really rich with ... with potential. ... What can we make that's actually relevant? And interesting to the people who live here? AC

4.2.3 Theme 3: Gender roles and the complexity of characters

Theme 3 discusses Crankshaw and Best's aim to create complex characters regardless of gender, while choosing to allude to aspects of the eighteenth-century historical context regarding gender roles. This theme revealed two sub-themes regarding the historical context of the opera and the gender specifications for the opera's requirements.

Gender roles and the opera's historical context

Browning's poem is set in eighteenth-century Revolutionary France, where, according to Best, women's rights were at "their earliest stage", and it was also inspired by a true story of a woman who had poisoned various members of her family. The historical period and context appealed to Best and Crankshaw, as it provided different layers of the story to delve into, and they were intrigued by the "ambiguous" relationships and gender roles in the French courtly setting.

In terms of the story, and the context of that, which I think is quite interesting. Women's rights in Revolutionary France were their very sort of earliest stage if you like, so around the time that the opera is so called set. Women were just getting kind of civil rights, and were beginning to be no longer treated as underage, and therefore, outside of any rights at all. ... The Revolutionary period was a huge beginning of all of that kind of civil rights for women, and so on in France. So there's this kind of background. There is also a kind of awareness that that courtly life was a, was a kind of a whole mash of things, relationships that were probably very fluid, probably very ... Ambiguous. So I would have thought in lots of different ways where, you know, partnerships were probably not very fixed. You have lots of courtesans, that there was a whole range of kind of female roles within the court setting that would have been very typical of the time, but which is probably very hard for us to understand looking back on it. So we had this kind of mash up really, of a setting in which I think I felt almost anything was possible. CB

Best noted that although they did not necessarily aim to understand the complexities of eighteenth-century gender roles, those themes provided an interesting setting to explore Madeleine's subversion of expected gender roles.

The whole thing about understanding gender and how the genders would have related in those times was way beyond anything that we either wanted or needed to look at. But

it kind of provided an interesting backdrop, or setting for the story of a woman who steps outside of what might have been expected roles. Who knows, maybe there were, in fact, lots of female apothecaries in Revolutionary France. We don't know. But I doubt it. And we sort of for the purposes of the opera, I think we felt that that was a fair, a fair cop if you liked it to assume that she was a one off. So we took, we took the character of Madeleine as really being an ambitious woman who had a very good brain and wanted to do something other than dress up and flirt. So she ended up as a sort of serial killer and an apothecary. CB

Crankshaw and Best tried not to be overly prescriptive about their characters' intentions, but also had to manage their intentions to be able to let the plot develop. They chose to prioritise focusing on the characters and their voices rather than focusing specifically on their gender. They aimed to develop the characters not only by their agendas, but also by exploring the characters' personalities in depth. They admitted that some subconscious gendered portrayals may have been present in their characters, but that they nevertheless were aiming to create complex, multifaceted characters regardless of gender.

We spent a lot of time trying to develop the characters, you know, not only by agenda, but by who, who are they? What do they enjoy? What do they dislike? What are their personalities, you know? Probably there are some gendered things in there naturally. It just sort of developed that way. ... I think the characters themselves as people were really of interest to us to try and develop quite deeply and each having its own personality and the music followed that as well. AC

Gender roles and the opera's requirements

The composer and librettist noted that the gender choices for the opera initially did come from the casting availability. They also felt that in their creative processes, "it wasn't a question of gender, [it was] a question of voice", which potentially had unintentional gender ramifications. They also acknowledged that as it was a short opera, the male roles had less of a part to play because of the practical limitations of the project, and they explained their desired focus on Madeleine's development as the protagonist and the apothecary as the antagonist.

It's a short opera. It's not, you know, there's not a huge amount we can do with the men in this opera. But so, you know, maybe that's very unfair of me, I should have focused on them more. CB

For sure, some of the male roles maybe had just less a part to play. And again, mostly out of practicality. Also, because they just weren't the main character. I mean, the apothecary himself was a pretty interesting character. And I liked that we got to really characterize him quite intensely. ... But yeah, Madeleine was ... our complex character that we tried to really craft carefully. AC

4.2.4 Theme 4: The realisation of femininity and sensuality

Theme 4 details how Crankshaw and Best realised their depictions of femininity and sensuality in various ways throughout the opera. This theme elicits two sub-themes, which discuss how they depicted themes of sensuality and multi-sensorial experiences, Madeleine's performance of femininity and the apothecary's characteristics and elements of the male gaze.

Sensuality and multi-sensorial experiences

Femininity and sensuality were constructed in various ways by both the composer and the librettist. Crankshaw aimed to explore different aspects of sensuality, such as the sensuality of the female characters as well as the multi-sensorial experiences within the opera.

So much of opera performance consists of heightened emotions and actions on the stage, and I wanted to intensify the idea of sensuality through the sounds we heard. I was aiming to make the specificity of the particular human sensations and chemical or fragrant substances to be a central gravitational force in the work, and therefore I needed to find ways to "heighten" that sensuality within the music without simplifying their distinct nuances. AC

Crankshaw's depiction of feminine sensuality in scene 4, "Dressing Room", was connected to the sense of scent; this was made clear through the musical setting as well as the stage direction. When Madeleine, Elise and Pauline sing about the 'seductive' scents of "nutmeg, rose, juniper", Crankshaw added "hmmmm" afterwards, to emphasise those scents and their sensual

qualities. She appreciated how the director, John Ramster, chose to set that moment onstage, as she felt it enhanced the musical and textual content.

AC:

I felt I had to add “hmmmm” afterwards, to give those three substances their own time, their own music, and an appreciation for their sensualities. The stage director (John Ramster) did a wonderful job in that moment (and many others), where he had the singers slowly touch their faces and necks as they sang “nutmeg, rose, juniper... hmmmm”. Altogether I think it worked really well. AC

Madeleine’s performances of femininity, contrasted with the apothecary’s reflection of the male gaze

The lead role of Madeleine was viewed by Crankshaw as a “force” in the opera, and she and Best hoped to craft her complex character carefully. Both Crankshaw and Best regarded Madeleine as “an ambitious woman” who “questioned” what was happening around her and was not content to “dress up and flirt” in French courtly life. They viewed her as “adventurous” and Crankshaw noted that “she [did] some things that we perceived that would be not usual at the time”. Best commented that it took her and Crankshaw a long time to decide on the ending of the opera, and they thought that Madeleine ending the opera as a serial killer and apothecary would be unconventional. They were very satisfied with how it came to being in the premiere. Best noted that there was a sense of “Madeleine’s arrival as the person that she seems to want to be. ... She has fulfilled something. In that ending, there was also a sense of the whole opera being fulfilled”.

The character of the apothecary was constructed to portray domineering and controlling characteristics, arguably reflective of the male gaze. Crankshaw noted that there was a “dictatorship feel” with the apothecary’s character, and he was created to appear mysterious and elusive. Both Crankshaw and Best described the apothecary as “controlling”. Best deliberately used rhyming techniques and imagery to reinforce his “assertive” and commanding character, as well as his objectification of Madeleine. This is especially evident in the lines from the apothecary’s aria, where he sings “such beautiful skin, translucent as porcelain, such charm, but jealousy is Madeleine's burden”. Best also wrote the following two couplets with full rhyme to reinforce the apothecary’s authoritarianism.

4.3 Findings of the score and libretto

While analysing the score of *The Apothecary*, I made detailed notes on the instrumentation, rhythms, melodies, voice types, voice ranges, meter, textures and atmospheres of the score for each scene of the opera. I also took note of the score indications given by the composer, which added further commentary on the characterisations and intentions of the characters. Crankshaw uses instrumentation, rhythm, melody and vocal types and ranges effectively to convey differing performances of femininity and to develop the characters.

The themes uncovered from the score and libretto include gendered Romantic opera themes present in *The Apothecary*; instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements in *The Apothecary*; the male gaze and shaping the apothecary's character intentions; the realisation of femininity and sensuality and power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary.

The following table encapsulates the main details about the cast, instrumentation and bar numbers, while also providing the titles of the different scenes and the summaries of the plot.

Table 2:

Summary of The Apothecary's cast, instrumentation and plot.

Cast	Scenes	Summary	Instrumentation	Bar numbers
Madeleine (soprano)	1: Madeleine's aria	Madeleine laments François's infidelity and describes her emotional distress at seeing him with other women.	Alto flute, piccolo, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, unpitched percussion, violin, viola, cello, double bass, piano, vibraphone	1-58
Madeleine and apothecary	2.1: Madeleine and the	Madeleine enters the apothecary shop. She is fascinated by the	Glockenspiel, vibraphone, piano, flute, bass clarinet,	1-21

Cast	Scenes	Summary	Instrumentation	Bar numbers
(bass-baritone)	apothecary's shop	apothecary's potions, while the apothecary takes an interest in her.	bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello, double bass	
Madeleine and apothecary	2.2: Chemistry	The apothecary presents the different remedies and suggests that Madeleine poisons Elise, François's current mistress	Glockenspiel, vibraphone, unpitched percussion, flute, piccolo, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello, double bass, piano	1-99
Apothecary	3: The apothecary's aria	As Madeleine leaves with the belladonna poison, the apothecary muses over his attraction to her and how she will return for more potions.	Vibraphone, unpitched percussion, flute, piccolo, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello, double bass, piano	1-23
François (tenor), Elise (mezzo-soprano), Madeleine and Pauline (soprano)	4: Dressing room	Madeleine, Elise, Pauline and François prepare for an evening of desire. While Elise gets ready to meet François, Madeleine cunningly poisons her.	Glockenspiel, unpitched percussion, flute, piccolo, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello, double bass	1-139

Cast	Scenes	Summary	Instrumentation	Bar numbers
Madeleine and apothecary	5: The negotiation	Madeleine returns to the apothecary, where he gives her an aphrodisiac to help François return her affections. The apothecary implies that in future, Madeleine should pay him through sexual favours.	Glockenspiel, vibraphone, unpitched percussion, flute, piccolo, bass clarinet, bassoon, violin, viola, cello, double bass, piano	1-48
Madeleine, François, Pauline	6: Aphrodisiac	Madeleine's plan backfires when François transfers his affections to Pauline. Furious and humiliated, she combines the remaining belladonna poison with the aphrodisiac and returns to the apothecary.	Glockenspiel, vibraphone, unpitched percussion, flute, piccolo, clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello, double bass, piano	1-113
Madeleine and apothecary	7: Madeleine kills the apothecary	Madeleine tricks the apothecary into drinking a combination of belladonna poison	Glockenspiel, vibraphone, unpitched percussion, alto flute, piccolo, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, violin,	1-62

Cast	Scenes	Summary	Instrumentation	Bar numbers
		and the aphrodisiac, killing him.	viola, cello, double bass, piano	
Madeleine	8: Final aria	Madeleine assumes the role of the apothecary, singing about her love for her potions and greeting Pauline, who enters the shop.	Glockenspiel, vibraphone, unpitched percussion, flute, piccolo, bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, horn, violin, viola, cello, double bass, piano	1-55

4.3.1 Theme 1: Gendered Romantic opera themes present in *The Apothecary*

The first theme includes a discussion of gendered Romantic themes found in *The Apothecary*, particularly relating to ideas of feminine madness and desire, which was derived from elements of the score and libretto. This theme presented several sub-themes, including textual and musical aspects of Romantic feminine madness and desire; and *femme fatale* characteristics with Madeleine's seduction and power.

Textual and musical aspects of Romantic feminine madness and desire

Romantic themes of feminine madness and desire are prominent musically and textually throughout *The Apothecary*, particularly in Madeleine's character. The text of Madeleine's aria in scene 1 hints at these themes:

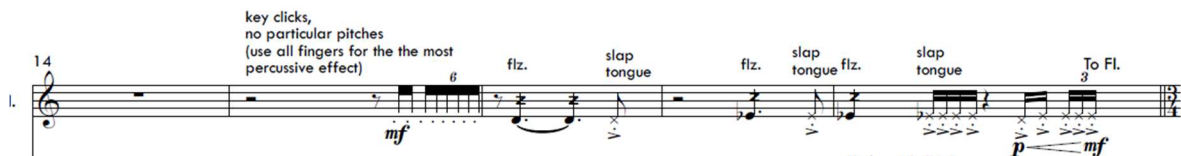
*They don't know I see them, how I'm quite undone, and why should I care?
 Now he's holding this one, now he's kissing that one; all so easy, so laissez-faire!
 Look how he is draped, first around Elise, then another,
 While I burn, I burn with desire!
 The pain! As though he's ripp'd out my heart, my liver,*

Yet still I'm on fire!

Example 1: Madeleine's aria. Scene 1

Madeleine sings how seeing François with other women makes her “quite undone”, describing her intense despair as almost synonymous for with madness.

Crankshaw reinforces Madeleine's despair through extended techniques in the woodwinds. Throughout the opera Crankshaw writes for percussive extended techniques such as key clicks to reinforce eerie and uncertain situations; this also is apparent when Madeleine sings in her first scene about how she is “quite undone”. Crankshaw additionally utilises slap tonguing and flutter tonguing with woodwind instruments, such as the alto flute, for percussive effects (example 2). These effects are used after Madeleine laments “They don't know I see them, how I'm quite undone / And why should I care?” These extended techniques, marked in the score as to be played “as percussive as possible”, reinforce the sharp pain that Madeleine is experiencing.



key clicks,
no particular pitches
(use all fingers for the the most
percussive effect)

14

mf

6

flz.

slap
tongue

flz.

slap
tongue flz.

slap
tongue

3 To Fl.

p

mf

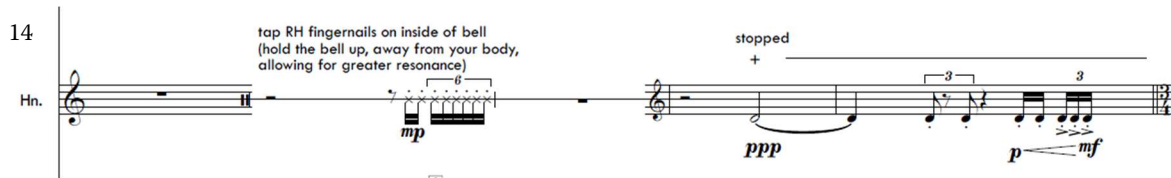
Example 2: Alto flute extended techniques. Scene 1, bb. 14-18.

Crankshaw continues to emphasise different percussive elements on different instruments, such as the horn (example 3). A horn player herself, Crankshaw writes interesting extended techniques for this instrument, such as tapping the right-hand fingernails on the inside of the bell. She also instructs the player in certain circumstances to “hold the bell up, away from your body, allowing for greater resonance”. The horn techniques used in example 3 are also from when Madeleine sings “And why should I care?” in her first aria; the percussive tapping sound from the horn indicates her persistent discomfort and frustration with her lover's unfaithfulness.

14

tap RH fingernails on inside of bell
(hold the bell up, away from your body,
allowing for greater resonance)

stopped
+



Hn.

Example 3: Horn extended techniques. Scene 1, bb. 14-18.

Best's libretto describes Madeleine's deep anguish with graphic similes, where she cries out "The pain! As though he's ripped out my heart, my liver." Crankshaw's scalic vocal writing allows the singer to emphasise the words "burn" and "pain", with both lines spanning a seventh interval.

37

M (Sop.)

f

burn

with de- sire.

M (Sop.)

f
expressively

The pain!

f

As though he's ripp'd out my heart.



Example 4: Scallic vocal writing to depict Madeleine's anguish. Scene 1, bb. 37-45.

Crankshaw also utilises glissandi in her instrumental writing in Madeleine’s first aria to convey tension and the character’s emotional distress. As Madeleine laments, “The pain!”, she is accompanied by strings using glissandi to move to the next notes, while the crescendos and decrescendos add to the tension (example 5).

42



D
Più mosso

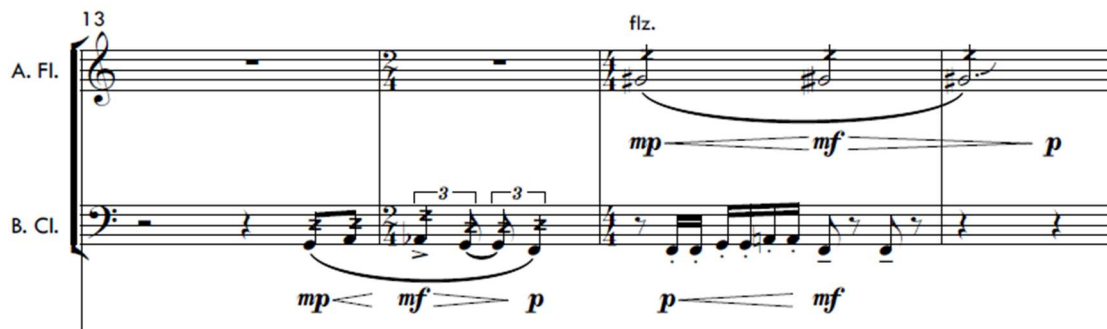
 A four-staff musical score for strings. The top staff is for Violin I, Violin II, and Viola. The second staff is for Violoncello and Double Bass. The third staff is for Violin I. The bottom staff is for Double Bass. Dynamics include p, mp, and mf. Glissandi are marked above and below notes. A pizzicato triplet is marked in the bottom staff.

Example 5: Use of glissandi to reinforce Madeleine’s distress. Scene 1, bb. 42-43.

She later says to the apothecary in scene 2 that she is “sick with jealousy”, an emotion commonly associated with madness or resulted in madness in Romantic operas. However, Madeleine’s jealousy conflicts with her desire for the philandering François; in scene 1 she sings that although she sees him with other women, she “burn[s] with desire” and “is still on fire” despite the pain he causes her. The fire imagery reinforces the intensity of her emotions, implying that her emotions are forceful and potentially destructive.

Madeleine’s desire for François conflicts with her deep betrayal and fury; she sings to the apothecary in scene 7, “I am caught between my desire for him and my wish to kill him!” Crankshaw reinforces the intensity of these emotions with flutter tonguing in the lines

composed for the alto flute and bass clarinet in example 6, as if to signify Madeleine trembling with anger:



Example 6: Clarinet and bass clarinet techniques. Scene 7, bb. 13-16.

Madeleine is characterised as having very intense emotions, with the apothecary commenting in the same scene, “such passion in her dark eyes!” This appears to reflect a theme of women’s emotions and deviousness equating to madness, as nineteenth century perceptions of feminine madness were attributed to a woman’s emotional fragility (Cowart, 1994).

Femme fatale characteristics with Madeleine’s seduction and power

Crankshaw and Best used musical and textual elements that alluded to aspects of the Romantic *femme fatale* and themes of Romantic gendered desire. Desire is a prominent theme throughout the opera, and the seductive qualities of all the women characters are emphasised through the music and text. Many elements of *femme fatale* characterisation is present, which involves a female character being “independent, confident and us[ing] her sexuality to her advantage” (Dams, 2013). For example, Elise is deceived into taking Madeleine’s fake eye drops containing belladonna when Madeleine cunningly says that they will make her eyes appear like “lakes of desire”; she takes advantage of Elise’s goal to be desired and beautiful to poison her.

Additionally, Crankshaw and Best construct Madeleine’s sexuality and seductive qualities either to manipulate the apothecary or to convince him to help her so that she can gain control of different situations. This is evident in Best’s text and the score indications and demonstrates Madeleine’s *femme fatale*-esque use of her sexuality. We first see Madeleine become flirtatious with the apothecary in scene 2.2 (example 7), when she comments on his different potions and remedies (bb. 27-28). While she is genuinely fascinated, she also appears to be appeasing him and flattering his profession to put herself in a better bargaining position.

27

mf much more flirtatious, becoming a little sinister *f*

M (Sop.)

At - ten - ding to the ills of

M (Sop.)

spi - rit and flesh - (sh).

Example 7: Madeleine begins to flirt with the apothecary. Scene 2.2, bb. 27-31.

Crankshaw and Best portray Madeleine’s use of her sexuality to convince the apothecary of what she wants is seen again in scene 5 (example 8) when she asks for a love potion to reignite François’s desire for her. When the apothecary initially refuses, Madeleine resorts to using flirtation and manipulation to make the apothecary reconsider (bb. 27-28).

26

mf feeling desperate *mp* seductive, manipulative

M (Sop.)

I need this cure - (r). Let me have it - (t).

Example 8: Madeleine is seductive and manipulative to convince the apothecary. Scene 5, bb. 26-28.

The last time Crankshaw and Best write for Madeleine to use her sexuality to manipulate the apothecary and obtain a more powerful position is in scene 7 (example 9), where she tricks the apothecary into drinking belladonna poison. Aware of the apothecary’s lust for her, she deceives him into drinking the ‘love potion’ to improve their sexual experience, and Crankshaw and Best write her character directions to sing “flirtatiously” and “seductively” (bb. 36-38). Crankshaw provides sprechstimme and glissandi in Madeleine’s melody (bb. 36-38) to reinforce Madeleine’s flirtation. Unbeknownst to the apothecary, Madeleine has combined the belladonna poison and the love potion, deliberately killing him. Madeleine exerts power over the apothecary by taking matters into her own hands and using flirtation as a means of

manipulation. In these scenes she demonstrates both her awareness of his interest and her ability to manipulate this for her own purposes.

33

f *mp*

M (Sop.)

I know I owe you, but first, take some of your

35

f *sprechstimme* *flirtatiously* *ord. seductively*

M (Sop.)

own fine brew, to raise our le-vels of sa-tis-fac-tion... Here, I have some left - (t).

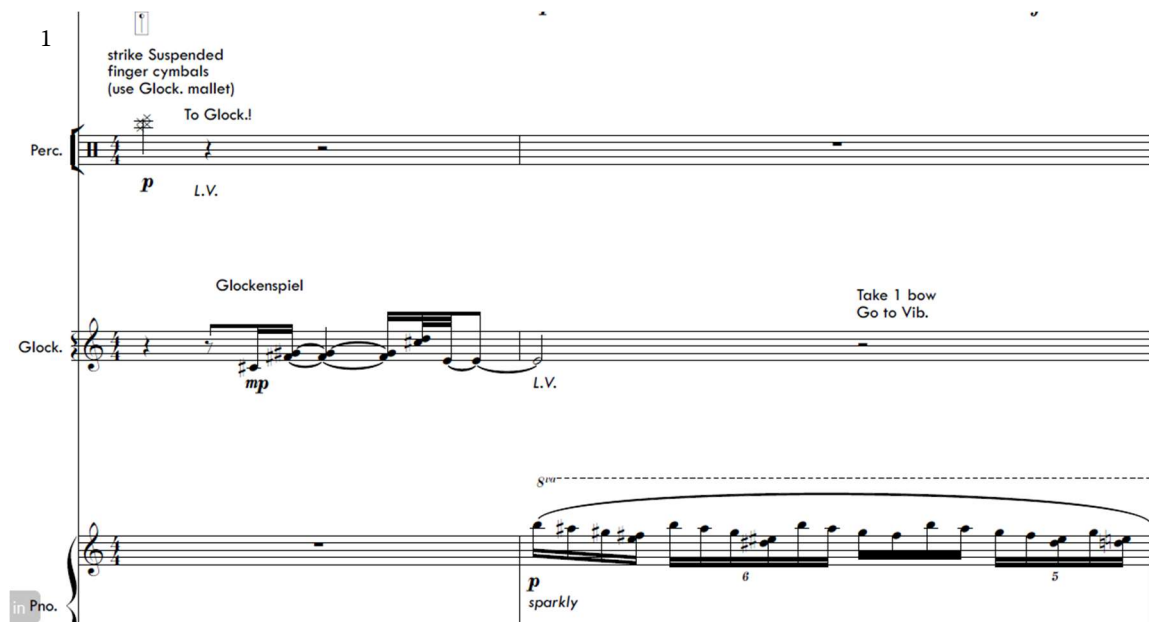
Example 9: Madeleine flirts with the apothecary to trick him into drinking the poison. Scene 7, bb. 33-38.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements in *The Apothecary*

Theme 2 describes the instrumentation, musical and textual motifs and cyclical structural elements used in *The Apothecary*. There are several textual and musical motifs that Crankshaw and Best use in various ways throughout the opera to create a cyclical narrative structure. The sub-themes are the apothecary's shop theme, the translucence theme, instrumentation and cyclical narrative elements and the belladonna theme.

Apothecary's shop theme

I have chosen to label this motif with the suspended cymbals and the glockenspiel as the "apothecary's shop theme" as it becomes evident that Crankshaw uses instrumentation and melodic motifs to reinforce settings in the opera, specifically that of the apothecary's shop.



Example 10: *Apothecary's shop theme*. Scene 2, bb. 1-2.

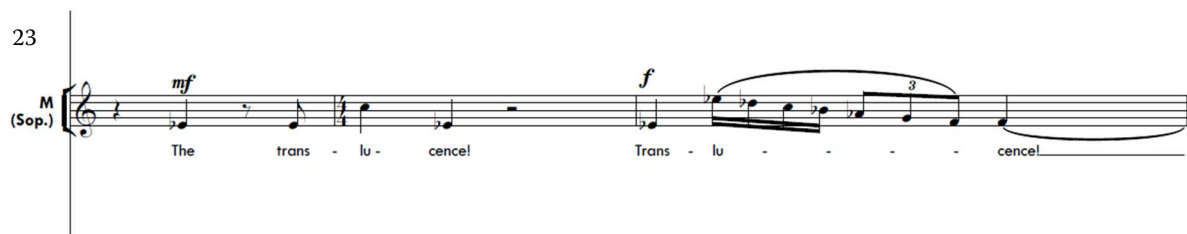
This prominent musical motif represents the apothecary shop through instrumentation, melody and rhythm. Whenever Madeleine (and Pauline at the very end) enters the apothecary shop, Crankshaw uses suspended finger cymbals and a glockenspiel motif using second intervals to establish the setting. The clear, ringing sounds of these percussion instruments add to the sense of mystery and intrigue. The minor second intervals and semiquavers in the glockenspiel seems to imitate shop doorbells that would ring as a customer entered the establishment.

The apothecary shop theme reoccurs in scene 5 and scene 7, when Madeleine returns to the apothecary shop. The final time we hear this motif is in scene 8, when Pauline enters the shop and Madeleine has become the new apothecary. This is significant as it officially establishes Madeleine in her new profession as she welcomes Pauline in a “dignified” manner, and emphasises her newfound autonomy and the cyclical structure of the opera.

Translucence theme

A textual and musical motif that is prominent throughout the opera is “translucence”, which is always sung by Madeleine and uses specific melodic contours and rhythms. Madeleine first uses this word to describe the potions in the apothecary shop in scene 2, as shown below:

23



M
(Sop.)

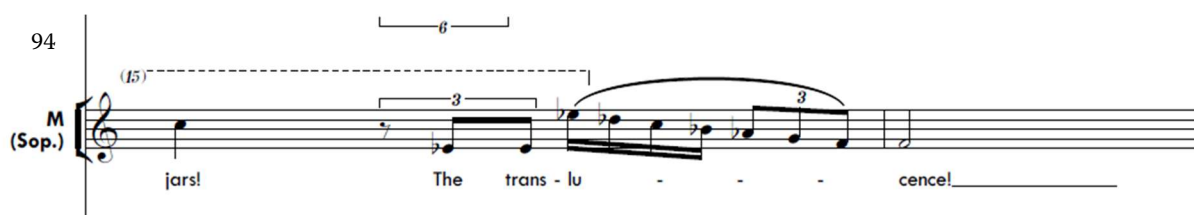
mf *f*

The trans - lu - cence! Trans - lu - - - - - cence!

Example 11: Translucence theme, first iteration. Scene 2, bb. 23-25.

The translucence theme is repeated once as Madeleine leaves the apothecary shop with the belladonna poison, with some rhythmic diminution:

94



M
(Sop.)

jars! The trans - lu - - - - - cence!

Example 12: Modified translucence theme. Scene 2, bb. 94-95.

The modified translucence theme (example 12) draws attention to Madeleine’s fascination with the translucence of the potion bottles, with their partial opacity arguably echoing Madeleine’s moral ambiguity and her ambiguous intentions throughout the opera.

The translucence theme reflects translucence in various structural ways. It usually starts with an ascending octave jump, leading to a descending major scale with a flattened 7th. The scale structure on the third beat of example 3 mimics the deception or ambiguity of the translucent jars, overturning a possibly expected major scale after the octave jump, with a flattened seventh

which creates a Mixolydian mode. The use of rhythm may also emphasise translucence in that the fast semiquaver rhythms slow down to a triplet rhythm and a minim, which implies a sense of excitement but also a difficulty in reaching the end of the scale, potentially illustrating the lack of clarity with a translucent glass jar. In both examples, Madeleine is only accompanied by pianissimo strings playing harmonics, adding to her sense of wonder and intrigue.

The “translucence” theme recurs in scene 8 with slight variations, when Madeleine has become the new apothecary and describes the potions as “my one constant love”. In this example, the beginning interval is of a 9th, and there are triplet rhythms instead of semiquavers. Here, there also is a huge swell from the orchestra to reinforce Madeleine’s new powerful position as the new apothecary. The strings play fortissimo, with alternating semiquavers and triplet rhythms with perfect fifth and minor sixth intervals to create a dense musical texture. Simultaneously, there are flourishing descending scale patterns with flute and piano. The violins have ascending glissandi, adding to the building climax. The score indication (overleaf) describes this musical section as “powerful” and “relaxed”, implying that Madeleine has found joy, fulfilment and power in an influential position.

3 *f* *ff*



trans - lu -

A

Relaxed and powerful (♩ = c. 96)

ff

ff

ff

arco

fff

7

M
(Sop.)

cence - - - (s)

Vln.

Vla.

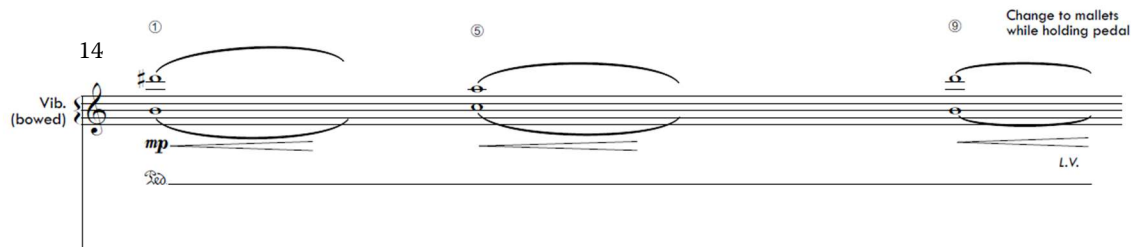
Vc.

Cb.

Example 13: Final translucence theme. Scene 8, bb.3-7.

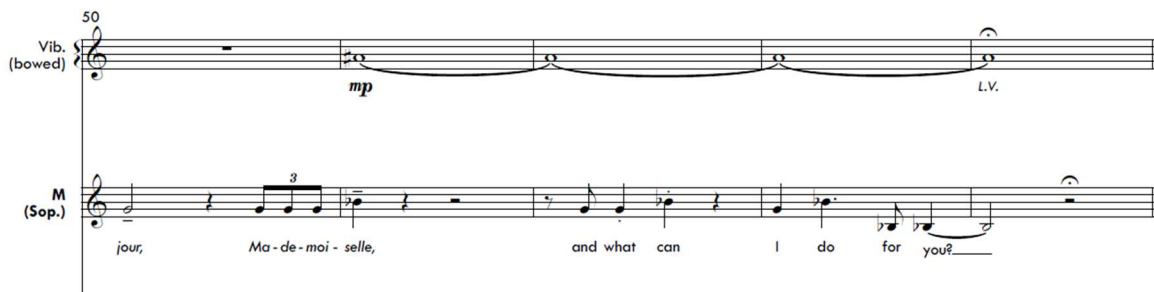
Instrumentation and cyclical narrative elements

Crankshaw uses evocative instrumentation to highlight cyclical narrative themes, including the mysterious nature of the apothecary’s shop, and Elise’s unfortunate fate. Crankshaw writes interesting techniques for the percussion section to bring out certain timbres for particular scenarios within the opera. For example, she often writes for a bowed vibraphone to reinforce a mysterious character, or to foreshadow an ominous event (example 14). This is evident in the opening to the apothecary’s aria, with the vibraphone’s intervals and timbres creating a haunting, uneasy character.



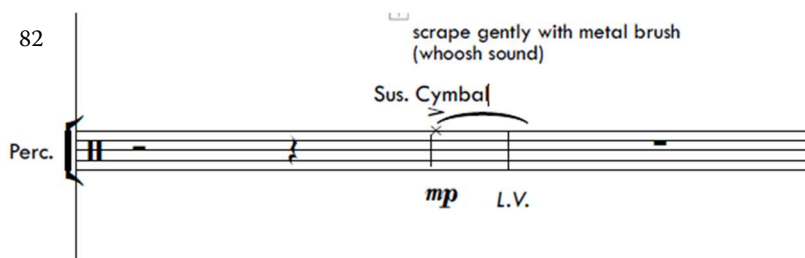
Example 14: Bowed vibraphone. Scene 3, bb. 1.

The bowed vibraphone techniques are apparent in Madeleine’s final greeting in the opera, as Pauline enters the apothecary shop. After Madeleine sings “Bonjour, mademoiselle, and what can I do for you?”, the opera concludes with a final bowed note on the vibraphone, creating a sense of uncertainty and intrigue (example 15). The recurring, strategic use of the bowed vibraphone provides structural cyclicity, but it also showcases thematic cyclicity. Madeleine is thus linked musically to the earlier-established apothecary theme, which implies that she has not just taken over the literal shop but also the types of solutions and morally dubious situations that the apothecary had proposed earlier in the opera.



Example 15: Bowed vibraphone in Madeleine’s final greeting. Scene 8, bb. 50-54.

Crankshaw also instructs the percussionist at times to scrape the suspended cymbal gently with a metal brush to create a “whoosh” sound. This technique is often used to foreshadow ominous events or deception. For instance, Example 16 illustrates the moment when Madeleine starts giving Elise the belladonna eye drops in scene 4, describing them as “pure magic!”. The subtle scraping sound undermines the positively transformative meaning of Madeleine’s words, rendering them ironic and foreboding. The disastrous qualities of these substances – and Madeleine’s use of them – is suggested again in scene 5 (see Example 17), where Crankshaw instructs the percussionist to bow the cymbal once more just as Madeleine she admits that Elise is dead and before the apothecary gives her the love potion for François.



82

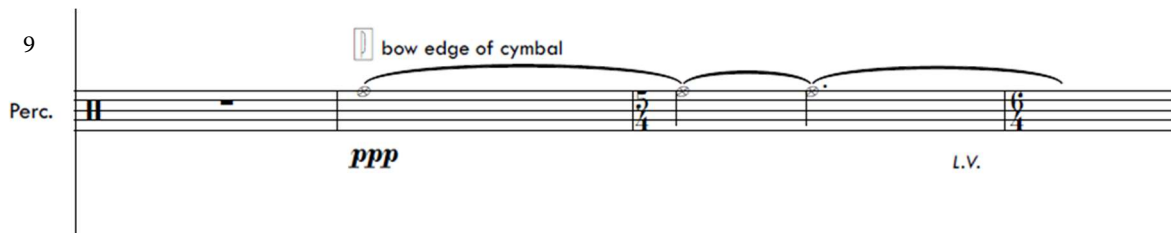
scrape gently with metal brush
(whoosh sound)

Sus. Cymbal

Perc.

mp L.V.

Example 16: Bowed suspended cymbal. Scene 4, bb. 82.



9

bow edge of cymbal

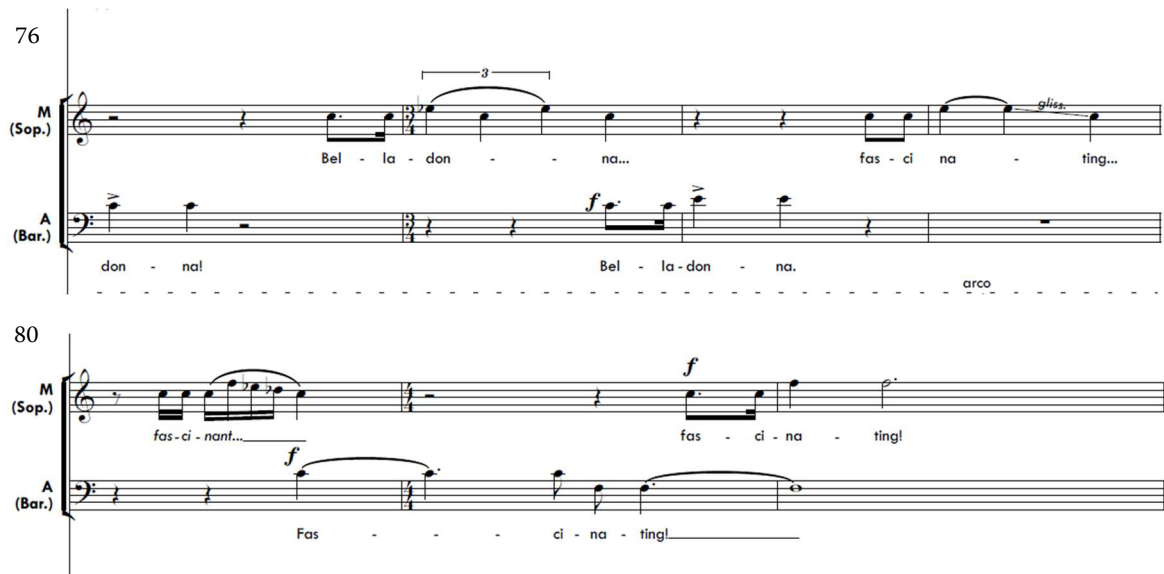
Perc.

PPP L.V.

Example 17: Another use of bowed cymbal. Scene 5, bb. 9-10.

Belladonna theme

There is a distinct melodic, rhythmical and textual theme that one might name “belladonna”, noticeable in scene 2 and scene 7 (example 18). While belladonna is a poison, the literal translation of belladonna is “beautiful woman”, which hints at *femme fatale* tropes that are prominent throughout the opera.



76

M (Sop.)

Bel - la - don - - na... fas - ci na - ting...

A (Bar.)

don - na! Bel - la - don - na. arco

80

M (Sop.)

fas - ci - nant... fas - ci - na - ting!

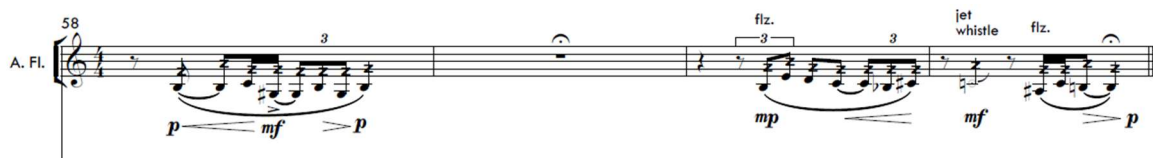
A (Bar.)

Fas - - - ci - na - ting!

Example 18: First iteration of the ‘belladonna’ theme. Scene 2.2, bb. 76-83.

“Belladonna” is first sung by the apothecary in scene 2 (example 18), with Madeleine echoing him as he prepares the poison. Phrases all start on a C, changing direction with each repetition of “belladonna” and “fascinating”. The apothecary’s more straightforward phrases with dotted and straight rhythms reinforce his decisiveness and authority, while Madeleine’s triplet rhythms, glissandi and semiquaver rhythms possibly represent her growing excitement and eagerness to learn more about the potions.

The ‘belladonna’ theme returns in scene 7 (example 20), after Madeleine tricks the apothecary and kills him. She sings “sweetly” and “gracefully”, with flutter tonguing from the alto flute and a bowed cymbal adding to the “suspenseful”, “eerie” atmosphere. Crankshaw’s use of flutter tonguing becomes increasingly sinister throughout the opera (example 19), especially after Madeleine has killed the apothecary, while she sings “Belladonna, belladonna / For the longest, deepest sleep”. The alto flute’s distorted tone contributes to the uneasy atmosphere.



58

A. Fl.

flz. flz. jet whistle flz.

p mf > p mp mf > p

Example 19: Flutter tonguing in alto flute writing. Scene 7, bb. 58-61.

Madeleine echoes the initial dotted rhythms that the apothecary uses in scene 2, reinforcing the cyclical structure of the work. It is here where the double meaning of belladonna becomes more apparent; Madeleine, who is described by the apothecary as a “beautiful” woman, kills the apothecary with his own poison. This potentially reinforces *femme fatale* stereotypes, as the beautiful Madeleine is represented as dangerous and cunning. This motif also highlights how the apothecary’s lust for Madeleine contributes to his downfall, as he does not realise how a beautiful woman could thwart his plans. Madeleine finishes the scene with *sprechstimme*, emphasising the “longest, deepest sleep” of death.



Example 20: Second iteration of the ‘belladonna’ theme. Scene 7, bb. 54-61.

4.3.3 Theme 3: The male gaze and shaping the apothecary’s character intentions

Theme 3 explores the creation of the apothecary’s sinister character, and critically examines how Crankshaw and Best used rhyme, melody, and instrumentation to create this predatory

character. In doing so, this theme also considers how these elements of characterisation contribute to a critical commentary on the presentation of the male gaze in *The Apothecary*. The two sub-themes explore creating the apothecary’s predatory character and the male objectification of the female characters.

Creating the apothecary’s predatory character

In scene 2, when the apothecary is introduced, he sings to Madeleine: “Bonjour, mademoiselle, and what can I do for you?”. Crankshaw writes the direction “with authority” above this line, already implying the apothecary’s domineering character.

Crankshaw uses interesting percussive instrumentation with the string instruments to emphasise the menacing elements of apothecary’s character while he prepares the potions. She utilises *col legno battuto* playing in various scenes, such as scene 2.2 while the apothecary prepares the belladonna poison, thus building tension and emphasising the dangerous nature of the apothecary’s plan (example 21). Crankshaw also writes specific directions for what she describes as “creaking door sounds”, which is when the string instrumentalists play behind the bridge to create a forceful, aggressive sound.



The musical score for Example 21 spans measures 76 to 79. It features vocal lines for Soprano (Sop.) and Baritone (Bar.), and string parts for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.).

- Soprano (Sop.):** Singing "Bel - la - don - - na... fas - ci na - - ting...". Includes a triplet of notes and a glissando.
- Baritone (Bar.):** Singing "don - na! Bel - la - don - na.".
- Violin (Vln.):** Starts with *mf* dynamics. From measure 77, it plays *col legno battuto* with *f* dynamics. From measure 79, it plays *arco ord.* with *mf* dynamics.
- Viola (Vla.):** Starts with *mf* dynamics. From measure 77, it plays *col legno battuto* with *f* dynamics. From measure 79, it plays *arco ord.* with *mf* dynamics.
- Violoncello (Vc.):** Starts with *pizz.* and *dampen* markings, playing at *mp*. From measure 77, it plays *col legno battuto* with *f* dynamics. From measure 79, it plays *col legno battuto* with *f* dynamics.
- Contrabasso (Cb.):** Starts with *arco* and *dampen* markings, playing at *mp*. From measure 77, it plays *col legno battuto* with *f* dynamics. From measure 79, it plays *col legno battuto* with *f* dynamics.

Example 21: *Col legno battuto* playing in strings. Scene 2.2, bb. 76-79.

5

M (Sop.) *mp* with admiration
Man - drake...

A (Bar.) *f* dark, with authority *sprechstimme* kooky, excited *ord.* Man - drake...
Man - drake to smother the pain of child birth

Vln. *mf* play on / behind the bridge no pitch, heavy bow (creaking door sound) *f* col legno battuto

Vla. *mf* play on / behind the bridge no pitch, heavy bow (creaking door sound) *f* col legno battuto

Vc. *mf* immediately after pizz. attack, gliss. as far up the string as possible *f* col legno battuto

Cb. *mf* immediately after pizz. attack, gliss. as far up the string as possible *f* dry pizz.

Example 22: Use of 'creaking door sound' in strings. Scene 2.2, bb. 5-8.

23

ord. *sprechstimme*
pow - ders to

arco sul pont. *p*

arco sul pont. *p*

arco molto sul pont. *p*

Example 23: *Sul ponticello* indications for strings. Scene 2.2, b.23.

This also is evident earlier in the scene, as the apothecary describes the different potions. As he talks about mandrake, the “creaking door” sounds reinforce the “dark”, “authoritative” quality he has (see score indications in Example 22), implying that his potions and actions have strong reactions or consequences.

Crankshaw often writes for the string instrumentalists to play *sul ponticello*, which is extremely close to the bridge, to create a more distorted sound to further emphasise the ominous and menacing atmosphere as the apothecary describes his remedies (example 23). The use of soft harmonics adds to the eerie tone colours.

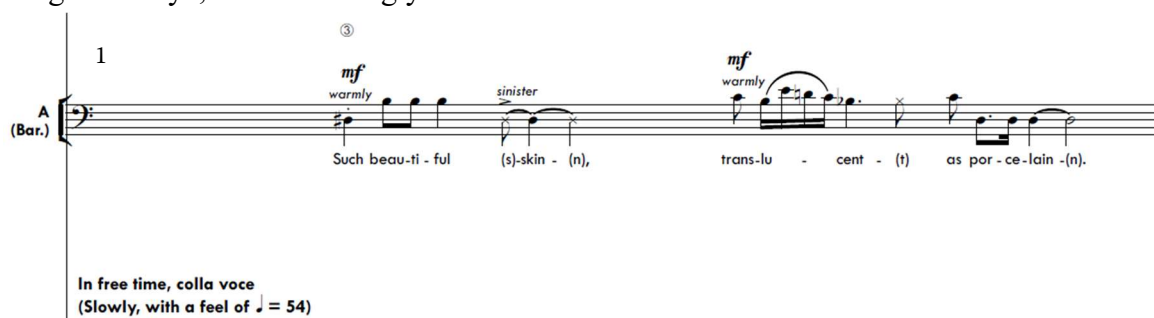
Best deliberately uses full rhyme to reinforce the apothecary’s assertive and controlling character throughout the libretto. This is evident in scene 3, “The apothecary’s aria”, where the lyrics are as follows:

Such beautiful skin, translucent as porcelain
Such charm, but jealousy is Madeleine’s burden.
The most deadly disease is love out of balance,
When pure desire meets cruel nonchalance!
Madeleine will come back to the apothecary,
Wise source of medicine for every malady.

Example 24: The apothecary's aria, scene 3.

These three rhyming couplets all consist of approximately twelve syllables per line; this precision and carefully crafted poem reinforces the apothecary’s meticulous and controlling character. Best also uses specific rhyming techniques, such as sibilance (repetition of the “s” sound), to emphasise particular words, such as in “Such beautiful skin, translucent as porcelain”. The repeated sounds mimic the apothecary’s desire for Madeleine, as the sounds seem to slither over her various physical attributes in a predatory manner.

The apothecary’s complex and sinister character in this aria is reinforced by Crankshaw’s use of instrumentation, melody, meter and vocal writing. The apothecary’s voice type is a bass-baritone, which is a voice type stereotypically used to portray villains or law-givers, such as the evil baron Scarpia in Puccini’s *Tosca* and the devil Mephistopheles in Gounod’s *Faust*. Crankshaw’s score indications alternate between “warmly” and “sinister” while the apothecary sings “such beautiful skin, translucent as porcelain” (example 25). The contrast between these tones hints at his less-than-noble intentions with the underlying threat of his gaze isolated to his mention of her “skin” while the seeming focus on aesthetics (“translucent as porcelain”) is sung “warmly”, and disarmingly.



1

A (Bar.)

③

mf warmly

mf warmly

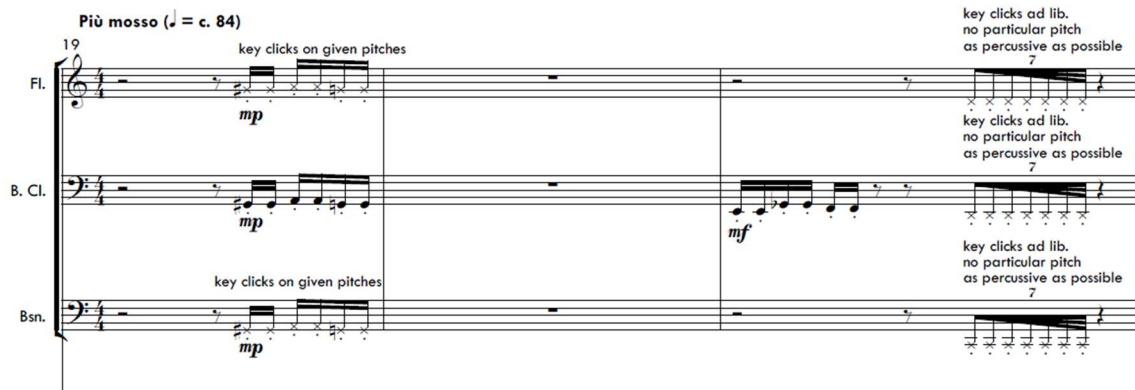
sinister

Such beau-ti - ful (s)-skin - (n), trans - lu - cent - (t) as por - ce - lain - (n).

In free time, colla voce
 (Slowly, with a feel of ♩ = 54)

Example 25: Ominous score indications for the apothecary’s aria. Scene 3, bb. 1.

Crankshaw deliberately used percussive elements such as woodwind key clicks to reinforce the apothecary’s controlling and cunning nature. Crankshaw reinforces the percussive effects of these extended techniques so that they are as audible as possible. Example 26 below illustrates the use of key clicks to reinforce sinister intentions from the apothecary’s aria, after he sings “Madeleine will come back to the apothecary / Wise source of medicine for every malady”.



Example 26: Woodwind key clicks in the apothecary’s aria. Scene 3, bb. 19-21.

Best’s libretto also uses alliteration (the repetition of consonant sounds) to reinforce the words and heighten the dramatic tension. When Madeleine returns to the apothecary in scene 5, asking for another potion to restore François’s affection for her, the apothecary’s line uses plosive “d” consonants in “An aphrodisiac is a wild card dealt by the devil” to emphasise his authoritative the risks of Madeleine giving François a love potion. Madeleine responds with a rhyming sentence, using repeated words and alliteration of the plosive “p” sound in her desperation: “Please, please, please help! I am ready to deal with that peril!” The apothecary then becomes more threatening, answering with another rhyming couplet: “This kind of potion is expensive / I do not think your resources are extensive.” Crankshaw emphasises this line with a crescendo and accents on the word “extensive”. Madeleine, “feeling desperate”, becomes “seductive” and “manipulative” as she asks again for the love potion. Crankshaw adds to the ominous intentions of the apothecary through her musical directions; this is evident in bar 33 (see Example 27), for when the apothecary gives his ultimatum to Madeleine, implying that she will have to pay him with sexual favours when she next needs his assistance, Crankshaw writes “slightly threatening” and writes tenutos in the sung melody. The instrumentation also adds to the sinister atmosphere: there is a chromatic ascending line in bass clarinet, echoed by piano. As the apothecary sings the “slightly threatening” section, there are piano chords in the low register, joined by woodblocks and triangle. Additionally, the strings play behind the bridge for a creaking effect, adding to the menacing atmosphere. As the apothecary states “You must

find alternative ways of paying”, Crankshaw requests that this is done with *sprechstimme* and glissandi, suggesting a simultaneous musical and visual leering attitude as he gives her this command.

33

Pno.

scb **f**

A (Bar.) *slightly threatening* *sprech.*

But for this and a - ny o - ther po - tions in fu - ture, you

D
Allegretto (♩ = c. 108)
play behind the bridge
(creaking door sound)

Vln.

f

36 Perc. Guiro (sustained roll) To W.B. **mp**

A (Bar.) *gliss* *ord.*

must find al - ter - - na - tive ways of pay - ing.

Vla. **mf**
play behind the bridge
(creaking door sound)

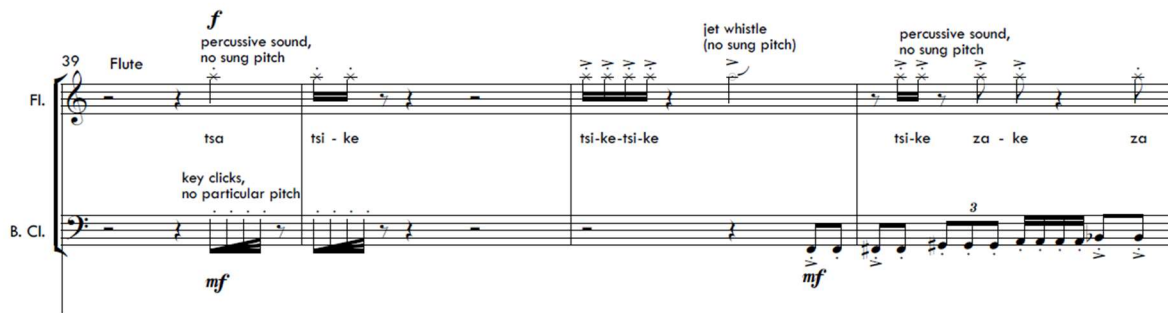
Vc. **mf**
play behind the bridge
(creaking door sound)

Cb. **mf**
play behind the bridge
(creaking door sound)

Example 27: Glissandi and *sprechstimme* for the apothecary’s threats. Scene 5, bb. 33-38.

Crankshaw adds further to these percussive effects by also writing lines for the flute that include speaking while playing and jet whistles (example 28). These are performed as the apothecary prepares the love potion in scene 5; this potentially demonstrates the control he appears to have over Madeleine, not only while preparing the potion but also because of how he hints at payment with sexual favours.

(The Apothecary prepares a red phial of love potion and puts it on the counter)



The musical score for Example 28 consists of two staves: Flute (Fl.) and Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.). The Flute part is in treble clef and includes lyrics: "tsa", "tsi - ke", "tsi-ke-tsi-ke", and "tsi-ke za - ke za". Annotations above the Flute staff include: *f* percussive sound, no sung pitch; jet whistle (no sung pitch); and percussive sound, no sung pitch. The Bass Clarinet part is in bass clef and includes the annotation: key clicks, no particular pitch. Dynamics include *mf* and *mf*. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it.

Example 28: Percussive effects in flute writing. Scene 5, bb. 39-42.

The apothecary's desire for Madeleine is evident with rhyme in scene 7, as he notes her fury that the love potion did not work: "Such passion in her dark eyes / Her jealousy makes my own blood rise!" These lines demonstrate his objectification of Madeleine by fixating on aspects of her physical appearance, and how he is aroused by the intensity of her emotions. His reply to her, in the form of an aggravated rhyming couplet filled with plosive consonants (underlined in the following quotation), reinforces how he aims to use Madeleine for his own gain and pleasure: "First things first, you are already in my debt / And remember, your affection is your greatest asset".

Male objectification of female characters

It is also important to note that both men in *The Apothecary* are criticised within the opera itself, as they objectify the women characters and only appear to value what they can get from them sexually. François, for example, is depicted as vain, unfaithful and driven by lust for the women both musically and textually.

Crankshaw uses glissandi to reinforce themes of sensuality. This can be seen in scene 4 (example 29), when François longingly calls for Elise; the glissandi mostly take place between intervals of a third to reinforce his desire for her.



1

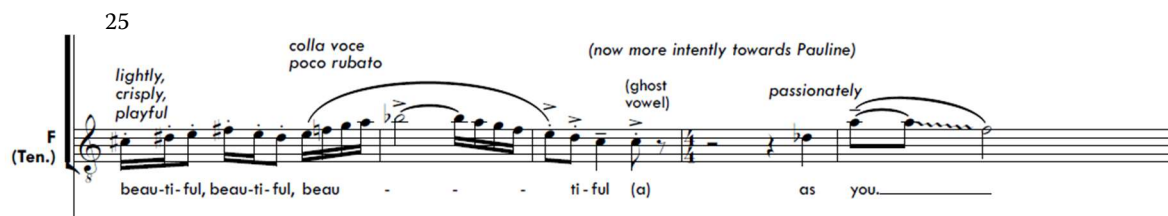
mf *mp* *mf* passionately *p* tenderly

F (Ten.)

E-lise my beau - ty, are you rea- dy? I am ach - ing for you...

Example 29: Use of glissandi in melodic lines to reinforce sensuality. Scene 4, bb. 1-2.

In these extracts from scene 6 (examples 30 and 31), when François’s attention is fixed on Pauline, his lust and arousal are evident through the use of fast coloratura passages, showcasing the tenor’s high register to emphasise his excitement. Once again, there are many scoops and glissandi to reinforce sensuality and desire.



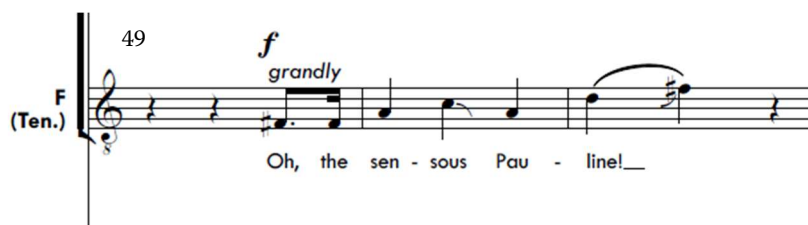
25

lightly, crisply, playful *colla voce poco rubato* (now more intently towards Pauline) (ghost vowel) passionately

F (Ten.)

beau-ti-ful, beau-ti-ful, beau - - - ti-ful (a) as you...

Example 30: Coloratura vocal passages and glissandi for Francois’s desire. Scene 6, bb. 25-29.



49

f grandly

F (Ten.)

Oh, the sen - sous Pau - line!_

Example 31: Glissandi emphasising Francois’s desire. Scene 6, bb. 49-51.

Similarly, François’ fixation on Pauline’s earlobes, which the text describes as “plaything[s]” (example 32), highlights his fixation on women’s physical appearances for his enjoyment, thus showing elements of the male gaze (which is reinforced by the continuation of such visual fascination in his descriptions of her wrists, hair and gown).



71

F (Ten.)

Each ear - lobe is a play - thing,

Example 32: Francois’s emphasis on the female characters’ physical appearances. Scene 6, bb. 71-73.

4.3.4 Theme 4: The realisation of femininity and sensuality

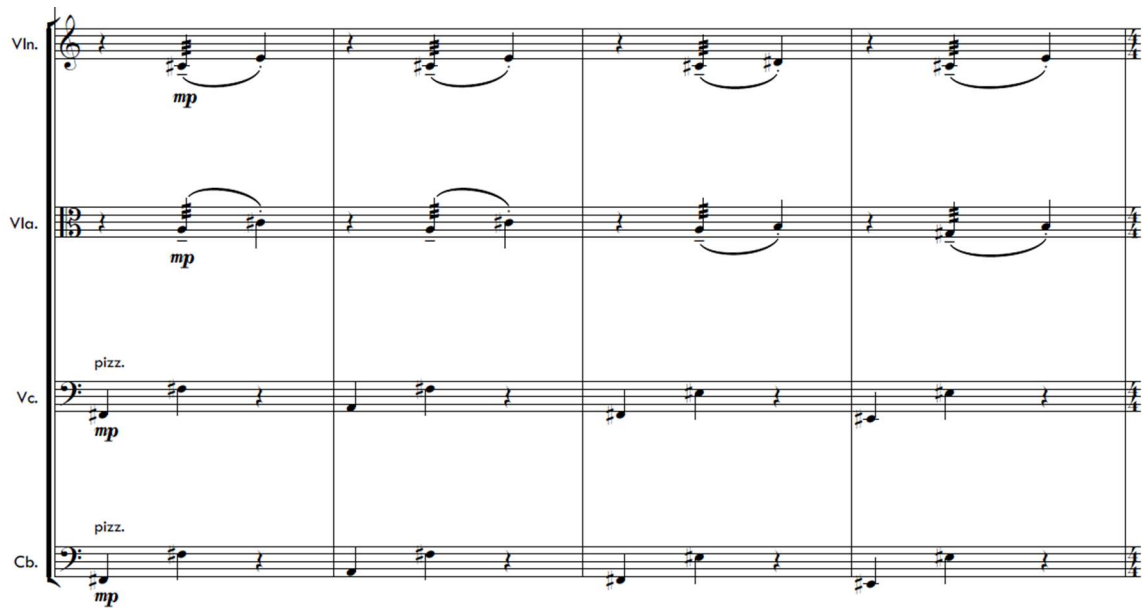
Theme 4 explores the realisation of femininity and sensuality throughout the opera. Best's text and Crankshaw's musical decisions demonstrate a keen focus on the performances of femininity and sensuality, which can be seen effectively in an analysis of scene 4, "Dressing Room". The sub-themes discuss reinforcing feminine sensuality through instrumentation, text and melody reinforcing sensuality, and Madeleine's performance of femininity.

Reinforcing feminine sensuality through instrumentation

Crankshaw's use of instrumentation and meter showcases themes of passion and sensuality, specifically in how the women interact with the spaces they inhabit and the people around them.

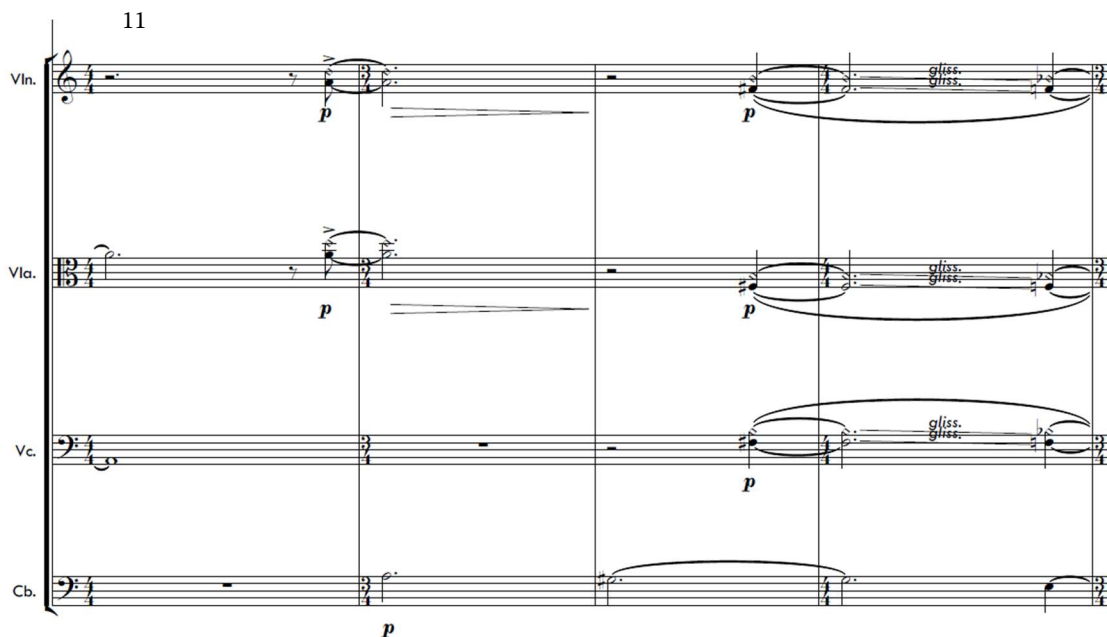
In example 33, there are many instances of waltz-like accompaniment from the strings, which involves the violins and viola playing tremolos on the second and third beats and the cello and double bass playing pizzicato on the first and second beats. The use of the waltz rhythms is effective in emphasising themes of sensuality, as the waltz was considered a scandalous dance, due to the close proximity of the two dancers. The waltz was seen to symbolise physical intimacy and passion, and it became increasingly popular throughout the nineteenth century. Crankshaw's use of meter is effective as it emphasises the desire and sensuality of the three women as they prepare for a romantic evening. Using the waltz rhythms outside on an actual ballroom context seems to foreshadow Elise's excitement and imminent evening of romance and seduction with François.

19



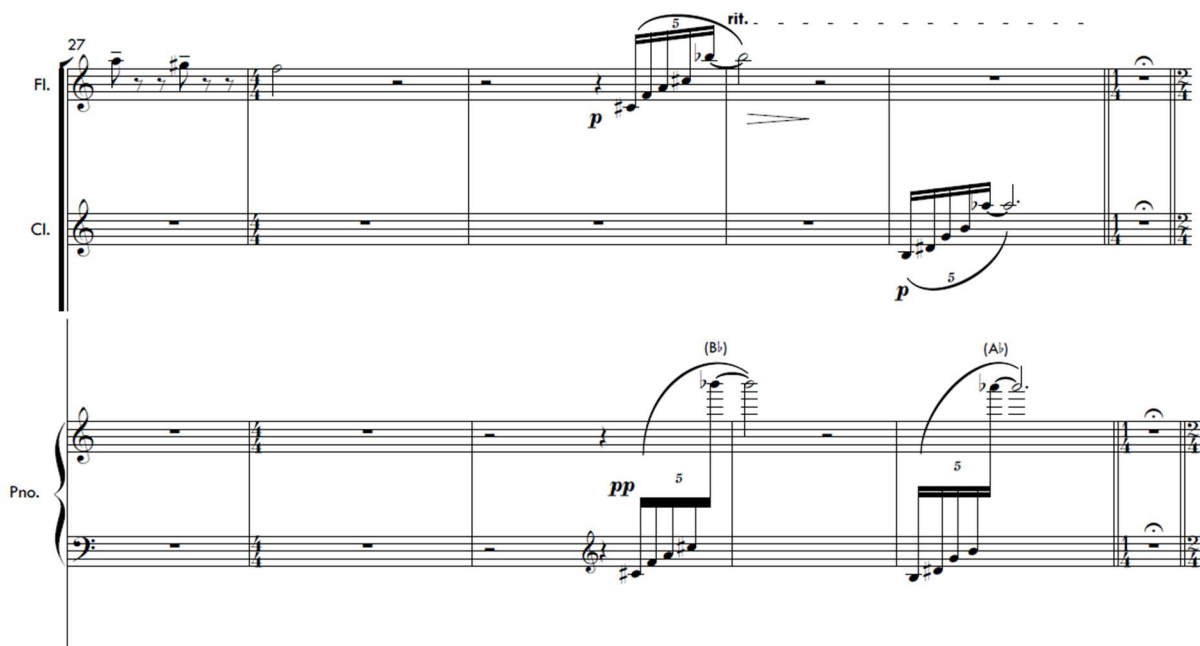
Example 33: Waltz-like instrumentation with the strings. Scene 4, bb. 19-22.

Furthermore, Crankshaw’s instrumentation reinforces the sensuality in this scene, through fast semiquaver flourishes, glissandi and harmonics (example 34). The harmonics and glissandi in the string instruments as Elise sings about her favourite lip colour adds an ethereal, shimmering effect while allowing Elise’s text to be heard clearly. As Elise sings, “Regarde ces lèvres! (Look at these lips!)”, there is a glissando: the smooth gliding between the notes creates a sultry atmosphere as Elise sings the word “lèvres” reinforces how she is admiring her physical attributes.



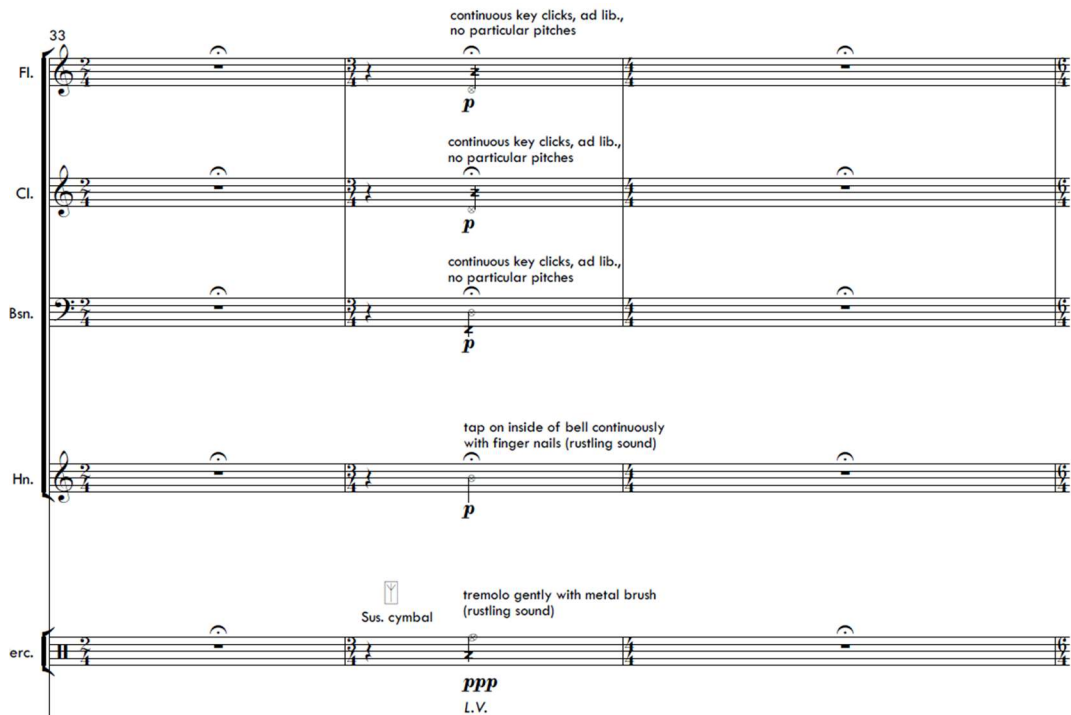
Example 34: Glissandi with the strings to reinforce sensuality. Scene 4, bb.11-14.

There are also different semiquaver “flourishes” across different instruments as Pauline sings about her nutmeg, rose and juniper scents (example 35). These flourishes in the flute, clarinet and piano emphasise a sense of the characters’ intrigue and excitement. Feminine sensuality is also connected with scent in this scene, which connects to scientific and psychological studies emphasising the link between scent and physical attraction. This intensifies the focus on feminine sensuality throughout the scene, and reinforces the excitement and arousal associated with the different scents.



Example 35: Semiquaver flourishes to reinforce sensuality of different scents. Scene 4, bb. 27-31.

Crankshaw also uses percussive instrumental effects to reinforce the “exciting” effects of these sensual scents (example 36). She writes for soft key clicks with the woodwind instruments, instructs the horn player to tap on the inside of the horn’s bell and for the percussionist to tremolo gently on the suspended cymbals, all to create a “rustling” sound. These soundscapes possibly evoke the image of the juniper leaves, nutmeg tree leaves or rose petals literally rustling. The rustling effect could imply the excitement and physical arousal of the women, while also subtly foreshadowing Madeleine’s sinister intentions for Elise.



Example 36: ‘Rustling’ effects to reinforce the different scents. Scene 4, bb. 33-35.

As Elise sings “Tonight I shall be a princess!” there are rapid scalic patterns in the piano, illustrating her excitement and ecstasy (example 37). The emphasis on the word “princess” possibly implies that Elise is searching for admiration and indulgence from François.



Example 37: Fast semiquaver patterns to reinforce Elise’s excitement. Scene 4, bb. 46-49.

However, Crankshaw’s use of instrumentation also implies that there are underlying sinister elements in this scene. The use of tremolo with the violin and viola creates uneasiness, as Madeleine’s jealousy and ulterior motives are hidden from the other characters but revealed to the audience. There also are ascending flourishes with the vibraphone as Madeleine introduces the “eye drops” (example 38), creating a sense of foreboding in its echoes to scenes with the apothecary, and reminding the listener of the truly destructive, poisonous nature of these eye drops.



Example 38: Vibraphone flourishes, representing the belladonna eye drops. Scene 4, bb. 62-73.

Furthermore, Crankshaw (2021) discussed how she used the orchestra to provide a subtle and deceptive commentary on the events unfolding onstage, particularly in scene 4. After Elise sings “Tonight I shall be a princess!”, the orchestra continues with its cheerful waltz-like rhythms. However, Crankshaw included dissonant harmonies in the waltz rhythms as if to foreshadow that Elise’s excitement will be short-lived. She commented, “It’s almost as though we know what’s going to happen. The audience knows ... this is a poison” (A. Crankshaw, personal communication, June 4, 2021).

Text and melody reinforcing sensuality

Crankshaw’s melodic writing and Best’s text emphasise themes of feminine sensuality and physical attributes. Crankshaw writes numerous triplet and semiquaver patterns in their parts to emphasise the vowels of words such as “lips”, “beauty”, “lakes” of desire (when Madeleine describes Elise’s eyes), “love” and “ravissante”; this reinforces the emphasis on the female characters’ physical appearances and sensuality. The word ‘seductive’ is used multiple times throughout the scene to describe the female characters’ performance directions, reinforcing the emphasis on feminine sensuality.

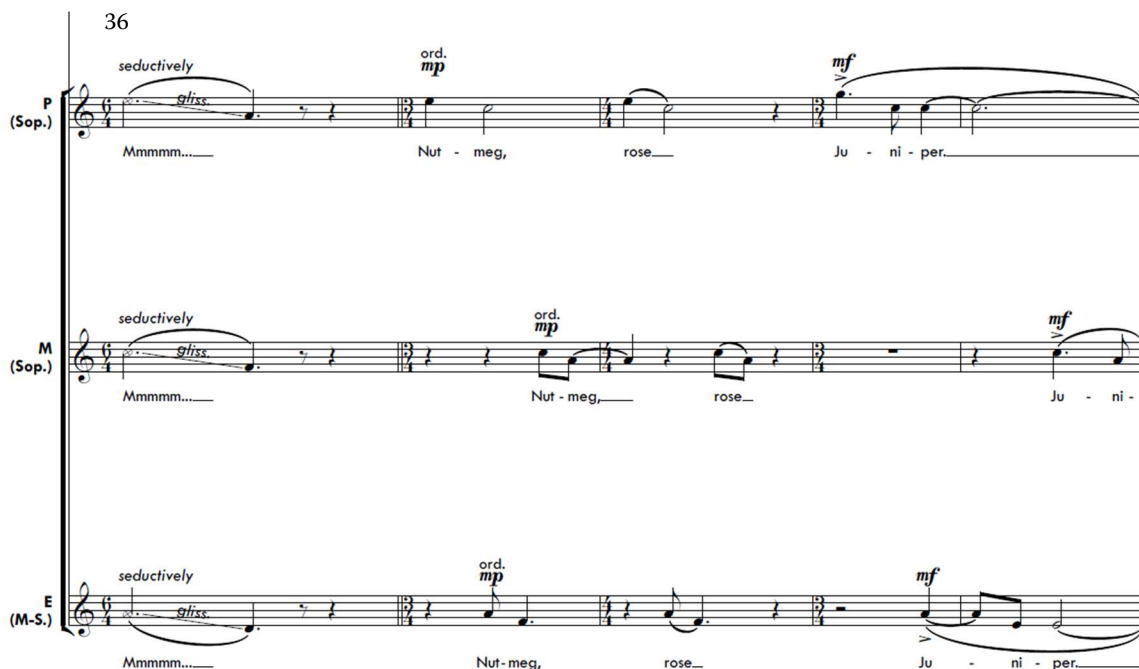
Furthermore, Elise and Pauline’s dialogue mostly involves them discussing their physical appearances and romantic pursuits (such as when Elise sings “This shade looks well with my peach blossom dress”, and Pauline later sings “powder for my face, pink cheeks, no resistance!”), highlighting their vanity and acknowledgement of men’s appreciation of their features.

Crankshaw’s use of diatonic harmonies and contrasting meters throughout this scene arguably reinforces the traditional behaviours that were expected of women in eighteenth-century France, and how Madeleine is dissatisfied with her position. While Madeleine sings more chromatic and dissonant melodic lines in other scenes of the opera, she joins Elise and Pauline in singing more diatonic tonalities. Elise and Pauline mostly sing diatonic harmonies with

intervals of thirds and fourths, and their trio with Madeleine in scene 4 mostly has a waltz-like character as a result of alternating 3/4 and 4/4 meters. In opera, changing meter and tempo often signifies a change of mood or a shift in the narrative, such as notably used in Chin's *Alice in Wonderland*, where a variety of meters are incorporated throughout the opera (Na, 2012). Therefore, Madeleine's contrasting meters and rhythms to Elise and Pauline signifies her changing emotions and her contrasting motives from the other women.

The dressing room thus becomes a space where differing performances of femininity are showcased, where Elise and Pauline's acceptance of societal expectations of women and their non-questioning of François's infidelity is contrasted with Madeleine's hidden heartache, frustration with her situation and deceptive scheming.

The seductive quality of all three women is emphasised through the text and musical directions, also implying that this is a societal expectation for these women. As the women all hum together in bar 36, these harmonies create an A minor chord, gliding down to a d minor chord. Sliding glissandi, according to DeNora (2021) have been used in several compositions to allude to the erotic, so Crankshaw's melodic writing reinforces the women's sexuality.



36

P (Sop.) seductively gliss. ord. *mp* *mf*
 Mmmm..... Nut - meg, rose_ Ju - ni - per.

M (Sop.) seductively gliss. ord. *mp* *mf*
 Mmmm..... Nut - meg, rose_ Ju - ni -

E (M-S.) seductively gliss. ord. *mp* *mf*
 Mmmm..... Nut - meg, rose_ Ju - ni - per.

Example 39: Hummed diatonic chords. Scene 4, bb. 36-40.

Madeleine's performance of femininity

However, it becomes apparent that Madeleine's vocal part is more complex than Elise and Pauline's, as she uses a greater variety of singing styles and more complex meters. As Madeleine convinces Elise that the "eye drops" will ensure "total seduction, the meter changes to a 7/4 time signature, allowing Madeleine to sing the word "seduction" for even longer. The word is further emphasised with alternating triplets on F and A-flat, a minor 3rd interval, which slows down to a triplet and has a small glissando at the end. Madeleine also uses more *sprechstimme* than the other two female characters, which gives her more varied singing styles and allows her text to be emphasised in certain sections. This is effective as it not only reinforces that Madeleine is the main protagonist, but it also emphasises Madeleine's deception, conflicting emotions and contrasting performance of femininity.

66

sprechstimme
pp

M (Sop.)

All the cour-te-sans use it - (t), the la - test fa - shion for to - tal se -

ord. sultry

mf
suggestively, emphatically

f

M (Sop.)

duc - (c) - tion.

Example 40: Madeleine's variety of meters and singing styles. Scene 4, bb. 66-74.

In contrast to Madeleine's more intricate vocal lines in the rest of the opera, the melodies sung by Elise and Pauline are more diatonic and their rhythms are less syncopated, implying a simplicity in their characters (example 41). As Elise enthuses about the colour of her dress (bb. 19-22), Crankshaw anchors the melody in this phrase around G-Sharp, and she mostly sings staccato and on the beat.



Example 41 shows a musical score for a scene. The vocal line (M-S.) is in the soprano register and features a melodic phrase with repeated notes and even rhythms. The lyrics are: "shade looks well with my Peach Blossom dress...". The instrumental accompaniment consists of Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.), all marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The instrumental parts provide harmonic support with repeated notes and even rhythms.

Example 41: Elise's phrase with repeated notes and even rhythms. Scene 4, bb. 19-22.

This melodic and rhythmic simplicity also is evident in Pauline's lines (example 42), as she sings about how she applies her makeup (bb. 54-57). She also sings staccato notes on the beat, and her notes comprise of a major 3rd interval.



Example 42 shows a musical score for a scene. The vocal line (Sop.) is in the soprano register and features a melodic phrase with staccato notes on the beat. The lyrics are: "Pow-der for my face, for my face, pink cheeks, no re-sis-tance,". The vocal line (M-S.) is in the mezzo-soprano register and features a melodic phrase with staccato notes on the beat. The lyrics are: "prin-cess!". The Soprano line is marked *mf* (mezzo-forte).

Example 42: Pauline's staccato major 3rd intervals. Scene 4, bb. 54-57.

While Elise and Pauline seem more accepting of the expectations placed upon them, Madeline does not agree with their sentiments when they sing "we must suffer for love" (example 43). This is evident in the harmonies and rhythms that Crankshaw uses to set Best's text. All three women sing "we must suffer for love" (bb. 105-110); it is first sung by Elise, then Pauline, and Madeleine enters last. When Madeleine starts her phrase, she starts singing short, crisp notes off the beat, and while Elise and Pauline sing major 3rd intervals to create a C major chord for

the word “love”, Madeleine finishes her phrase on an A-flat, creating dissonance. All these aspects imply Madeleine’s reluctance, disapproval or uncertainty. This is echoed in Elise’s first iteration of “we must suffer for love”, although the character seems unaware of these darker undertones. The instrumentation is sparse and mostly in the lower register. The use of pizzicato cello and double bass as she sings implies an ominous quality to the idea of women seemingly needing to “suffer” for love, allowing the instrumentation to counter the sung narrative and complicate the expectations placed on the women.



The image displays a musical score for three vocal parts: Soprano (Sop.), Mezzo-Soprano (M-S.), and Piano (P.).

- Top System:**
 - P (Sop.):** Lyrics: "beau-ty, for beau - - - ty, for___". Musical notation includes a long note with a slur and a fermata.
 - M (Sop.):** Lyrics: "But we must suf-fer". Musical notation includes a note with the instruction "crisply".
 - E (M-S.):** Lyrics: "But we must suf - fer for". Musical notation includes a note with the instruction "mf".
- Bottom System (Starting at measure 109):**
 - P (Sop.):** Lyrics: "love!". Musical notation includes a note with a slur, a fermata, and the instruction "gliss." above it.
 - M (Sop.):** Lyrics: "for love.". Musical notation includes a note with a slur, a fermata, and the instruction "f" above it.
 - E (M-S.):** Lyrics: "love.". Musical notation includes a triplet of notes with a slur, a fermata, and the instruction "gliss." above it.

Example 43: Madeleine’s contrasting rhythms and harmonies and delayed entries. Scene 4, bb. 105-110.


4.3.5 Theme 5: Power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary

This theme explores the power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary. The complex characters of Madeleine and the apothecary, and the interesting power dynamics between them, are demonstrated musically and textually through cyclical elements in the text, melodies,

rhythms and score indications. These together trace the shifting the shifting power dynamics between them and ultimately help establish Madeleine in a powerful position by the end of the opera. The sub-themes are cyclical musical structures and power dynamics, and the use of rhyme for shifts in power dynamics.

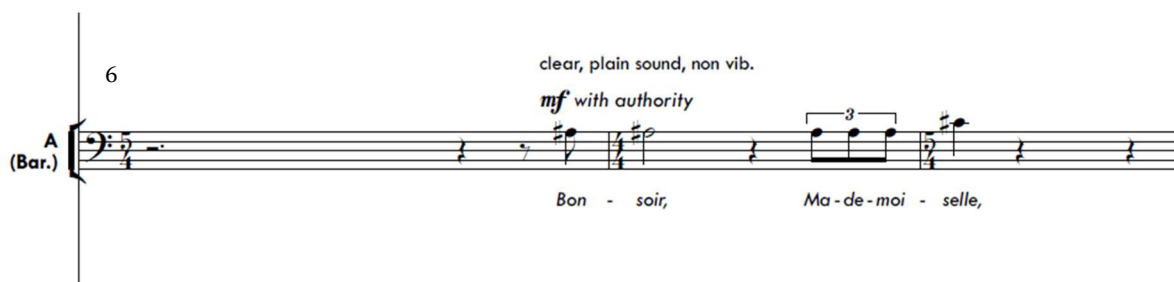
Cyclical musical structures and power dynamics

A prominent cyclical feature in this opera is the use of the apothecary's first greeting (example 44). In scene 2, as Madeleine enters the apothecary shop, the apothecary greets her "with authority" (bb. 6-10).



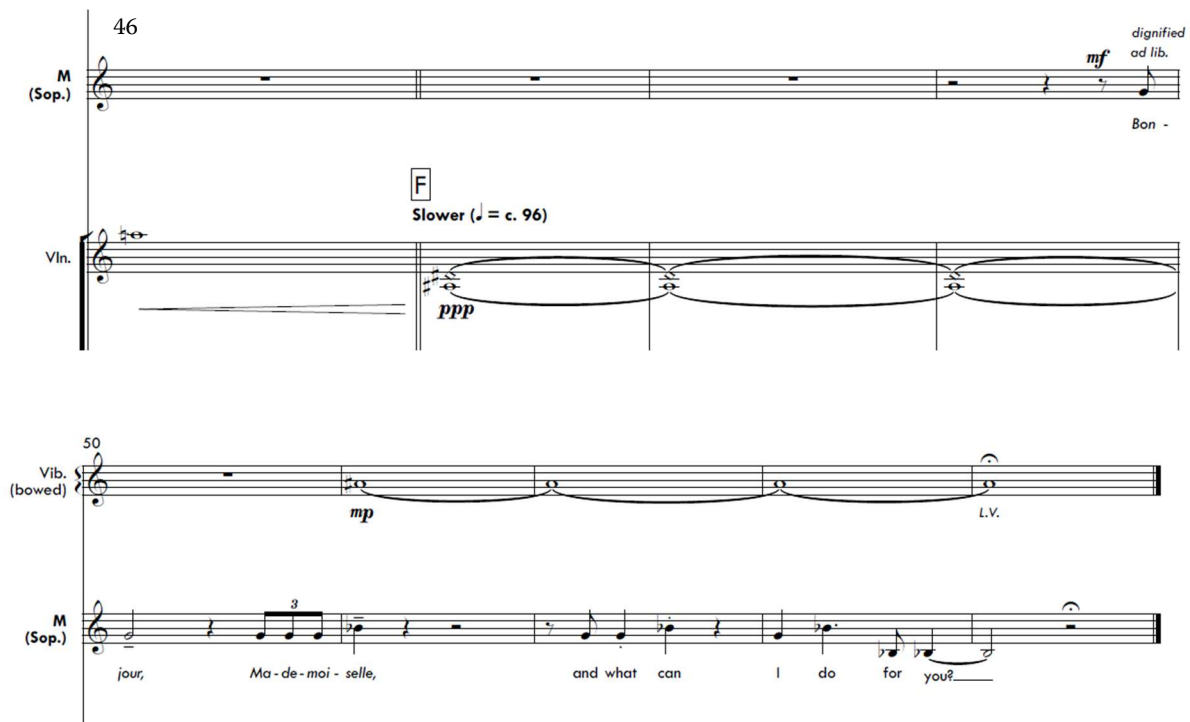
Example 44: The apothecary's authoritative greeting. Scene 2, bb. 6-10.

In the final scene of the opera, once Madeleine has become the new apothecary, she uses the same text and melody (albeit in a different key) to greet Pauline as she enters the shop (example 43). It is interesting to note that the character direction given to Madeleine is that she is "dignified" (example 43, b. 49), in comparison to the "authority" of the apothecary (example 45, bb. 6-7).



Example 45: The apothecary's authoritative greeting. Scene 2, bb. 6-8.

While the apothecary is interested in asserting control, Madeleine completes the opera in a position where she feels distinguished and respectable (see score indication bb. 46). Although she has become a serial killer during the opera's course of events, her new position as apothecary is depicted positively.



The musical score for Example 46 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Soprano (Sop.) voice, starting at measure 46. It features a long rest followed by a few notes in measure 54, marked *mf* and *dignified ad lib.*. The middle staff is for the Violin (Vln.), starting at measure 46. It features a long rest followed by a series of notes in measure 50, marked *ppp*. The bottom staff is for the Soprano (Sop.) voice, starting at measure 50. It features a triplet of notes in measure 50, followed by a series of notes in measure 54, with lyrics: *jour, Ma - de - moi - selle, and what can I do for you? —*. The score includes dynamic markings (*mp*, *ppp*, *mf*) and performance instructions (*Slower*, *dignified ad lib.*, *L.V.*).

Example 46: Madeleine's final greeting, echoing the apothecary. Scene 8, bb. 46-54.

Another cyclical structural device (i.e., use of a recurring musical or textual theme strategically in the opera's plot structure) that is used is the section when the apothecary describes his different remedies in scene 2.2 (example 47), which is echoed with some variations by Madeleine in the final scene of the opera (example 49). While Madeleine initially listens in fascination to the apothecary's descriptions and echoes him (example 47), in the final scene of the opera, she sings alone (example 49), reinforcing how she has learned quickly from the apothecary and has come to a place of fulfilment and empowerment.

5

Example 47: The apothecary describes his remedies. Scene 2.2, bb. 5-8.

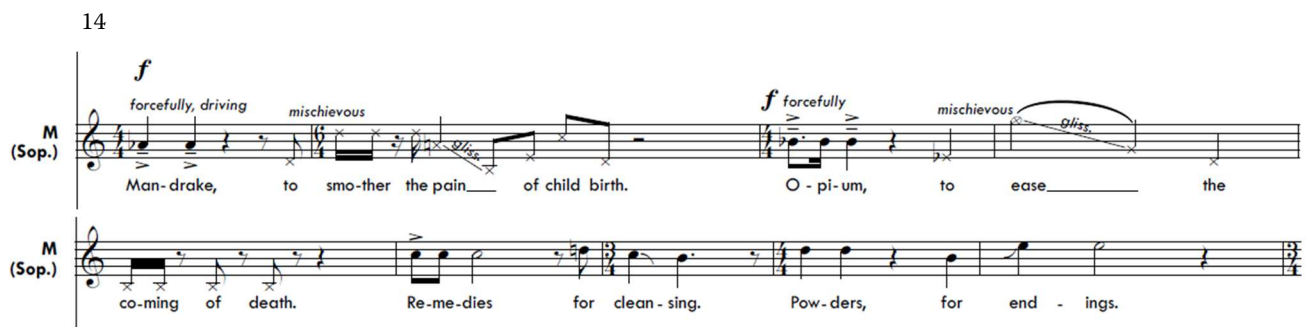
When the apothecary starts listing the remedies with a mixture of excitement and dark authority (example 47, bb. 5-6), Madeleine echoes him admiringly (bb. 8), as if she is trying to absorb all the information. She also begins to reply to his statements to affirm his profession (example 48), in a “sultry” and “flirtatious” manner, also becoming “a little sinister”. She exclaims, “Matters of such fine judgement!” and “Attending to the ills of spirit and flesh!” She seems to realise the power and control that the apothecary yields with his potions.

11

Example 48: Madeleine echoes and affirms the apothecary. Scene 2.2, bb. 11-17.

In the final scene, after Madeleine has killed the apothecary, she takes over with listing the different remedies and potions (example 49), echoing the same text, rhythm and melodic structures as earlier (example 47). Her partial imitation of the apothecary’s text and music reaffirms the power that she feels in her profession, and that she has learned swiftly from the apothecary. The change in performance directions is interesting: while the apothecary sings darkly and “with authority” (example 47, b. 5), Madeleine describes each remedy “forcefully” but also “mischievously” (example 49, bb. 14-17). Madeleine has found the authority of being an apothecary, and her “mischievous” description of her remedies can possibly imply her glee at the newfound authority and control that the remedies give her. While she does not speak in a “dark” manner, like the previous apothecary, her mischief indicates that it is possible that Madeleine may continue using these remedies for unsavoury matters.

14



M
(Sop.)

f
forcefully, driving mischievous

Man-drake, to smother the pain of child birth. O-pi-um, to ease the

M
(Sop.)

coming of death. Re-me-dies for clean-sing. Pow-ders, for end-ings.

Example 49: Madeleine describes her remedies, partially echoing the apothecary. Scene 8, bb. 14-22.

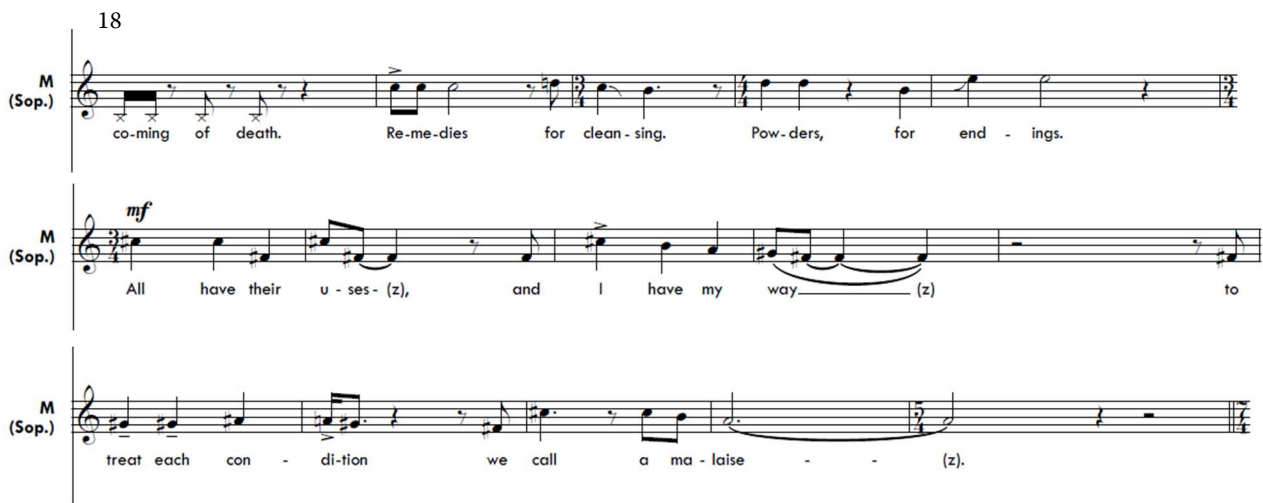
Use of rhyme for shifts in power dynamics

It is interesting to note that Best gives Madeleine progressively more rhyming text as she continues to interact with the apothecary. As Best describes her use of rhyme in the apothecary’s text as a means of demonstrating his controlling nature, this implies that Madeleine gradually asserts more control over her situation. The increasing use of rhyme in Madeleine’s text also demonstrates how she manipulates the apothecary. This is evident in scene 7 (example 49), as she presents the “love potion”: she replies, “I know I owe you / but first take some of your own fine brew” (bb. 33-35). The full rhyme at the ends of the phrases on “you” and “brew” is coupled with internal assonance in this sentence, in the repetition of the “oh” vowel with the words “know”, “owe” and “own”. Together these point to her gradual adoption of both his textual rhythms and the power he holds in the narrative, increasingly tipping the power dynamic to her favour.

Best's use of rhyme to establish Madeleine's increasing power over the apothecary is also observed in scene 8 (example 50), when Madeleine has become the new apothecary and sings about the different potions. While she, like the apothecary in scene 2.2, sings: "Mandrake, to smother the pain of childbirth / Opium, to ease the coming of death" (example 47), she then changes to rhyming couplets, as if to establish her own authority (example 50): "Remedies for cleansing / Powders for endings / All have their uses, and I have my ways / To treat each condition we call a malaise" (bb. 19-32). This deviation views any of these "necessary medical situations" in a more figurative light than the previous iterations by the apothecary.

After describing mandrake, opium and other potions, Madeleine sings: "All have their uses and I have my ways / To treat each condition we call a malaise" (example 50, bb. 23-32). The end rhyme on "ways" and "malaise" achieves a subtle doubling of meaning. On one level, these lines show her increased confidence in her role as apothecary, dolling out various "ways" that would help her customers treat their issues. On another level, however, this rhyme also signals the series of actions she took to gain independence and power for herself, ridding herself of the "malaise" of the male gaze and establishing herself as an independent apothecary.

18



M (Sop.)
 co-ming of death. Re-me-dies for clean-sing. Pow-ders, for end-ings.

M (Sop.)
 All have their u-ses-(z), and I have my way-(z) to

M (Sop.)
 treat each con-di-tion we call a ma-laise-(z).

Example 50: Madeleine, the new apothecary, describes her remedies and potions. Scene 8, bb. 18-32.

4.4 Findings of the video recording

The analysis turns now to the analysis of the video recording of *The Apothecary* for the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2021. It explores the use of lighting, costume design, stage design and blocking to observe how they reinforced performances of femininity. The analysis reflected three main themes, namely the effective use of colour in lighting and costume design; reinforcing sensuality and the male gaze through set design; and reinforcing the music

and text through the singers' body language. The sub-themes explore colour symbolism in *The Apothecary's* lighting choices; performances of femininity with colour choices and costumes; reinforcing feminine sensuality and the male gaze visually; critiquing the apothecary's male gaze through set design; Boen's performance of Madeleine's frustration with societal expectations; and Boen's performance of Madeleine's manipulation and overpowering of the apothecary.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Effective use of colour in lighting and costume design

This theme explores how the use of colour in the lighting and costume designs for *The Apothecary* reinforces the character's emotions and varying performances of femininity. Colours can have a myriad of meanings throughout a production, which is apparent in the Guildhall theatre production of *The Apothecary*. The use of lighting emphasises and foreshadows different themes, as well as the complex intentions of the characters. This theme reveals two sub-themes, namely colour symbolism in *The Apothecary's* lighting choices and performances of femininity with colour choices and costumes.

Colour symbolism in *The Apothecary's* lighting choices

Colour decisions have been used in theatre and film productions to influence the audience's mood and reactions, in addition to reinforcing characters and prominent themes in the plot. Colours are used symbolically and to evoke certain psychological responses, as colour has been shown to affect a person's emotional state in psychological studies (Conway, 2012, in Berens, 2014). Studies of colours and lighting have sought to analyse the impact on a person's mood (Radulescu et al., 2012). Such research has also tracked how different colours stimulate audiences in different ways, with bright, long and saturated wavelengths of light regarded as more stimulating than darker, short and less saturated wavelengths (Berens, 2014).

The stage production of *The Apothecary* uses lighting effectively to emphasise themes of sensuality, jealousy and vengeance. There is an emphasis on the complimentary colours of red and green. As these colours are on the opposite sides of the colour wheel, this provides a strong colour contrast and helps make them appear more vivid (Malpas, 2020).

Red, which is a warm colour, has often been used to symbolise various themes, including violence, anger, love, excitement and passion. It has been used to symbolise traditional

masculine themes, such as war and power; however, more recent films have used red to symbolise what is traditionally feminine, such as romance and pleasure (Pastoureau, 2010). *The Apothecary* appears to integrate various meanings of the colour red throughout the production. The red lighting potentially symbolises love, passion and danger, which is evident as the apothecary gives Madeleine the love potion: there is a splash of red across the set in that moment, indicating the effects of the potion while additionally implying the risk of the potion not working and the apothecary's threatening sexual advances.



Figure 1: Olivia Boen as Madeleine and Adam Maxey as the apothecary in scene 5. ©Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Furthermore, the use of red could symbolise anger. When Madeleine exclaims furiously, “I need more remedies! Remedies of my own”, she is surrounded by red lighting, implying that her anger is all-consuming. As she combines the belladonna poison and the love potion, the lighting remains red, reinforcing the element of danger in Madeleine's actions. The red lighting could also reinforce the themes of Madeleine and the apothecary's power dynamic. The apothecary always is surrounded by red lighting, implying that he is in a powerful position. When Madeleine combines the two potions, the red lighting hints at the transfer in power between her and the apothecary, which is realised in the following scenes as she uses his brews

to kill him and assume his place. When Madeleine becomes the new apothecary, the red lighting continues to affirm her newfound power.

Green, a cool-toned colour, also has multiple symbolic meanings. It is linked to the positive association of nature, but the influential Academy Award-winning cinematographer, Vittorio Storaro, also describes green as “the colour of mystery” (Storaro, 2004, p. 84). The mysterious and possibly dangerous quality of the colour is seen in this opera when the lighting becomes green as Elise is stung by the poisonous belladonna drops. This ominous atmosphere created by this green lighting continues as the women sing “we must suffer for love”, implying that it is a harmful or sinister concept. The green lighting also could symbolise Madeleine’s jealousy, which is the catalyst for her to seek out an apothecary, linking to the metaphor of being “green with envy”. Therefore, the green lighting as Elise is stung by the eye drops could emphasise how this is the result of Madeleine’s spite and bitterness.

Interestingly, the setting of the apothecary’s shop uses both red and green colour elements. As these colours are opposite each other on the colour wheel, this allows for strong visual contrasts and reinforces the simultaneous mysterious and ominous quality of the apothecary’s shop and profession.



Figure 2: Olivia Boen as Madeleine in scene 8. ©Amy Crankshaw and Clare Best

In contrast to the numerous scenes in red or green that include Madeleine and the apothecary, blue lighting mostly is used in the scenes involving François, Elise and Pauline. Blue stereotypically reinforces themes of peace, purity and trust, but it can also represent coldness and isolation. Therefore, blue lighting is possibly used ironically, as the relationships between François and all three women are fickle and unfaithful. Another interpretation is that the blue colours represent Madeleine’s loneliness and despair at seeing her lover have romantic affairs with other women. One could also argue that the blue lighting reinforces the male-dominant society present in the opera. Blue became associated as a masculine colour after World War II, and has also become prominent in modern-day marketing and manufacturing as a “male colour”. Therefore, the blue lighting could place more focus on François, as the adulterous lover, or imply that women were subservient to men’s desires during this period.



Figure 3: Laura Fleur as Elise in scene 4. © Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Performances of femininity with colour choices and costumes

Performances of femininity are represented through the production’s use of colour in the characters’ costumes. While designed following eighteenth-century fashions, the female characters’ dress colours arguably use colours to symbolise different aspects of femininity. For most of the opera, Madeleine wears a green gown, while Pauline wears a yellow gown and

Elise wears a pink gown. These colours are used in various ways in colour theory, employed by film and stage productions.

Green, while also used to symbolise nature, can be used to represent jealousy and often is used for villainous characters. Green dresses are not often used in films, but have been used to signify bold, confident female characters or dark magic. The famous emerald-green dress worn by Keira Knightley's character in *Atonement* is notable for suggesting numerous themes, including “mystery”, “menace”, “sexual power” and danger (Lugli, 2008). These connotations are appropriate with Madeleine's character, as she is cunning and mysterious, manipulating the apothecary with her sexuality and using the potions for sinister means. Madeleine's green gown arguably also represent envy, as she describes herself as “sick with jealousy”, an envy which transforms into villainy when she begins to kill and manipulate other characters.



Figure 4: Olivia Boen as Madeline and Adam Maxey as the apothecary in scene 5. ©Guildhall School of Music and Drama

In contrast, Pauline and Elise's respective yellow and pink gowns potentially represent their conforming to ideas of “traditional” femininity, innocence and immaturity. Pink is known to represent delicacy, romance and sweetness, and has been stereotyped to be representative of femininity since the mid-twentieth century in various aspects of marketing and manufacturing.

The colour pink has also received considerable backlash for arguably reinforcing negative, limiting stereotypes about women (Elan 2014), resulting in some viewing pink as representing weakness and unintelligence. As pink is a lighter shade of red, one could argue that this diluted colour means that Elise's character does not have as much complexity and depth. The yellow shade of Pauline's dress can also have multiple meanings, for while it can represent cheerfulness and sweetness, yellow is also known to represent toxicity. It is also a colour that draws a viewer's attention, which subtly reinforces Pauline's attention-seeking nature: she repeatedly asks François if he likes her *citron* (yellow) gown, and it is noted in the score indications that she "is clearly enjoying the attention" he gives her. Therefore, the colours used for Elise and Pauline's costumes draw on ideas of traditional femininity and emphasises the value placed on women's sweetness and physical beauty as part of an overarching expectation to draw the attention of male figures for affirmation.



Figure 5: Thando Mjandana as François and Laura Lolita Perešivana as Pauline in scene 6.
© Guildhall School of Music and Drama

However, Madeleine's costume in her final aria is akin to that of the apothecary; her costume is black, implying a sense of formality and austerity. The use of black for the apothecary's costume also implies a sense of mystery with the apothecary's profession. Black has been used to symbolise power and authority, and it is still worn by judges and magistrates (Heller, 2009).

This is apt for the apothecary and Madeleine, as the apothecary starts in a position of power and speaks “with authority”; however, as Madeleine gradually becomes more assertive and eventually kills him, she assumes this new position. Madeleine’s change from her green dress to her apothecary costume solidifies this shift in power, and arguably suggests that Madeleine’s new profession as an apothecary gives her more authority than regular women in society would have attained at the time.



Figure 6: Madeleine (Olivia Boen) as the new apothecary in scene 8. ©Amy Crankshaw

4.4.2 Theme 2: Reinforcing sensuality and the male gaze through set design

Theme 2 explores how the stage production of *The Apothecary* used projections of different images to reinforce themes of sensuality and the male gaze. The two sub-themes discuss reinforcing feminine sensuality and the male gaze visually, and critiquing the apothecary’s male gaze through set design.

Reinforcing feminine sensuality and the male gaze visually

The stage production of *The Apothecary* used projections of different images to reinforce themes of sensuality and the male gaze. During the opening and ending scenes, an image of a

Renaissance-style painting of a nude woman is projected on the wall, portraying François's infidelity in a negative light, while also emphasising the intense focus on feminine sensuality. As François liaises with his lovers, there is a slow pan over the image of the woman on the wall behind them, reinforcing the objectification of female physical attributes and themes of desire and sensuality. This is used cyclically in the final scene.



Figure 7: Madeleine laments as François courts his lovers in scene 1. ©Amy Crankshaw

As Madeleine prepares her potions as the new apothecary on the other side of the stage, the image of the nude woman appears again on the opposite wall, with silhouettes of François with another woman, highlighting François' continuing infidelity which motivates Pauline to visit the new apothecary, Madeleine, much as she had visited the original apothecary at the start of the opera. However, the final scene shifts away from the intense focus on François' unfaithful habits by leaving this part of the stage not as well-lit as the section where Madeleine stands. The combination of cyclical elements and a deviation from these allows the set designers to

place greater emphasis on Madeleine's development, going from a scorned lover to becoming an apothecary.



Figure 8: Madeleine enters the shop as the new apothecary, and Pauline observes François's continued infidelity in scene 8. ©Amy Crankshaw

Critiquing the apothecary's male gaze through set design

The set design during the apothecary's aria in scene 3 is also used to critique the male gaze and highlight the apothecary's sinister intentions. A black and white projection of a woman's smiling face, particularly focusing on her lips, reinforces the apothecary's objectification of Madeleine and draws attention to the male gaze. This correlates effectively with Crankshaw's music and Best's text as the apothecary sings, "Such beautiful skin, translucent as porcelain" with the monochromatic film emphasising the stark white-ness of the woman's skin. Arguably, the lack of colour reinforces the apothecary's lust and objectification because it allows the apothecary and the audience to only focus on the physical attributes of the woman's teeth, lips and skin throughout the scene. Furthermore, the huge backdrop and cropped image of the woman's lips occupies most of the stage wall and suggests that the apothecary has a great desire and obsession with Madeleine. The cropped image emphasises the lips and skin, implying that this is what the apothecary's desire for these parts of Madeleine, and more generally points toward his lust and ominous intentions.



Figure 9: Adam Maxey as the apothecary in scene 3. © Guildhall School of Music and Drama

4.4.3 Theme 3: Reinforcing the music and text through the singers' body language

This subtheme describes how the acting decisions of Olivia Boen, the soprano portraying Madeleine, reinforced aspects of Madeleine's characterisation present in the musical score and libretto through body language. Boen described Madeleine as a woman "who's tired of the social hierarchy and has serial killer tendencies" (Boen, 2021), which is apparent in her acting. The two sub-themes reveal how Boen emphasised Madeleine's frustration with the expectations placed on women, and her realisation of the apothecary's sinister motives.

Boen's performance of Madeleine's frustration with societal expectations

In scene 4, Madeleine's disapproval of fixating on physical appearances and "suffer[ing] for love" is evident in Boen's acting throughout the scene. She has a scornful expression while she sings "powder for the face, pink cheeks, no resistance", possibly indicating her jealousy of Elise as well as her annoyance at the fixation on physical appearances. Madeleine also appears to disagree with Elise and Pauline as they sing "We must suffer for love!" While Elise and Pauline seem content with this fate and sing using graceful arm gestures, Madeleine appears despairing and angry. Her fists are clenched and she shakes her head as she sings the word "love".

Boen's performance of Madeleine's manipulation and overpowering of the apothecary

Boen's acting in scene 5 reinforces that Madeleine feels somewhat threatened by the apothecary's warning that she will have to pay him with sexual favours in future. When the apothecary sings "You must find alternative ways of paying", Madeleine replies "*Tres bien* [very well]", smiling widely. However, when she turns to the audience her expression changes, as she appears wide-eyed and solemn, demonstrating the difficult position her character is in, and the underlying possibility of violence in the apothecary's words.

Boen's acting decisions in scene 6 and 7 help display Madeleine's motives and cunning plan regarding the apothecary. In scene 6, Madeleine is visibly mortified and upset when François turns to Pauline. However, there is a moment when Madeleine pauses and leans forward to stare in the direction of the apothecary's shop, as if she is coming to a realisation that the apothecary's motives have not been about genuinely helping her. She then looks down at her bag, which contains her remaining potions. This subtly indicates to the audience that she is plotting something, hinting at Madeleine's true intentions and her increasing manipulation of the apothecary. When the apothecary sings "Your affection is your greatest asset", Madeleine looks slightly over her shoulder at him, her face serious and wary, before she takes the potion and presents it to him with a smile. After the apothecary drinks the potion, there is a silence, and Madeleine waves mischievously as he collapses, dead.

After killing the apothecary, Madeleine sings "Belladonna, belladonna"; while she starts singing sweetly, the second time she sings "Belladonna", she grabs her gown, visibly frustrated, before letting go of it in apparent disgust. This could represent various aspects of Madeleine's frustration. She could be frustrated that she merely is regarded as a beautiful woman, and that the apothecary attempted to take advantage of her because of this. Arguably, she could also be frustrated of the challenges and limitations that she has faced socially and romantically as a beautiful woman. Boen's acting choices reinforce Crankshaw and Best's textual and musical motif, highlighting the possible ambiguity of belladonna (the poison) and Bella Donna (beautiful woman).

Therefore, Boen's acting choices reinforced various facets of Madeleine's performance of femininity. She was able to capture Madeleine's frustration with the societal expectations of women and heartache alongside her cunning manipulation, sensuality and her newfound power through gestures and emphasising areas of the text and music.

4.5 Summary

Chapter 4 detailed the findings of the semi-structured interviews with Crankshaw and Best, as well as the analysis of the score, libretto and video of the Guildhall 2021 premiere of *The Apothecary*. This chapter uncovered four themes from the interview, five themes from the analysis of the score and libretto, and three themes from the analysis of the video recording. Each data set revealed differing themes and sub-themes regarding performances of femininity in *The Apothecary*.

The semi-structured interviews with the composer and librettist explored the conceptualisation of the opera, which delved into Crankshaw and Best's inspiration for the opera, their creative processes, and how they demonstrated musical representations of potions through multi-sensorial experiences. The interviews also shed light on their intentions regarding performances of femininity, which developed gradually and organically. Crankshaw and Best also discussed how to address challenges and social issues in contemporary opera while maintaining authentic storytelling, and Crankshaw elaborated further on these topics in the South African contemporary opera scene. The creators spoke about gender roles and the complexity of characters in the opera as they navigated the opera's historical context and the opera's academic requirements. Crankshaw and Best also discussed the realisation of femininity and sensuality, which including navigating sensuality and multi-sensorial experiences, in addition to Madeleine's performances of femininity, contrasted with the apothecary's reflection of the male gaze.

The score analysis themes demonstrated the realisation of femininity and sensuality, where Crankshaw and Best used music and text to convey sensuality and multi-sensorial experiences, Madeleine's performance of femininity, and the apothecary's characteristics and the male gaze. Theme 1 revealed gendered Romantic opera themes present in *The Apothecary*, particularly Romantic feminine madness and desire and *femme fatale* characterisation with Madeleine's seduction and power. Theme 2 explored the instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements in *The Apothecary*, noting Crankshaw and Best's use of the apothecary's shop theme, 'translucence' theme, instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements and the 'belladonna' theme. Furthermore, theme 3 investigated the male gaze and shaping the apothecary's character intentions, discussing Crankshaw and Best's creation of the apothecary's predatory character and exploring the male objectification of female characters. Theme 4 provided insights into the realisation of femininity and sensuality in the opera, which

involved reinforcing feminine sensuality through instrumentation, text and melody and exploring Madeleine's distinct performance of femininity. The score analysis also interrogated the power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary, which was created through cyclical musical structures and the use of rhyme.

Theme 1 of the video analysis revealed the effective use of colour in lighting and costume design, delving into the colour symbolism with the lighting and performances of femininity with colour choices and costumes. Theme 2 explored reinforcing sensuality and the male gaze through set design by discussing reinforcing feminine sensuality and the male gaze visually and critiquing the apothecary's male gaze through set design. Theme 3 discussed reinforcing the music and text through the singers' body language, delving into soprano Olivia Boen's performance of Madeleine's frustration with societal expectations and her performance of Madeleine's manipulation and overpowering of the apothecary.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings drawn from the three data sets identified from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews with composer and librettist, the analyses of the text and musical score of *The Apothecary*, and the video recording of the opera's 2021 premiere at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, in order to explore elements of performances of femininity and female agency. This chapter explores the composer and librettist's musical and textual intentions and their decisions in shaping the characters and plot in the opera. It also delves into performances of femininity through orchestration, text, and staging, in order to explore the main research question: How is femininity performed in *The Apothecary*?

The main themes of the three data sets are as follows:

Semi-structured interviews

1) the conceptualisation of the opera; 2) intentions regarding performances of femininity; 3) gender roles and the complexity of characters; 4) the realisation of femininity and sensuality; 5) gendered Romantic opera themes present in *The Apothecary*;

Score analysis

6) instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements in *The Apothecary*; 7) the male gaze and shaping the apothecary's character intentions; 8) the realisation of femininity and sensuality; 9) power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary;

Video analysis

10) effective use of colour in lighting and costume design; 11) reinforcing sensuality and the male gaze through set design; and 12) reinforcing the music and text through the singers' body language.

On consideration of the consolidating the data from the three data sets, some of the themes and sub-themes are merged into six overarching themes for the purposes of the discussion chapter.

The revised themes guiding the discussion for this chapter are as follows:

Themes 1 and 2 merged to become '**Theme 1**: The conceptualisation of the opera and intentions regarding performances of femininity';

Themes 3 and 8 will be merged to become ‘**Theme 2:** The realisation of femininity and sensuality through music, text and staging’;

Theme 3: Gendered Romantic opera themes present in *The Apothecary*;

Theme 4: Instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements in *The Apothecary*;

Themes 6, 9 and 10 merged become ‘**Theme 5:** The male gaze and shaping the apothecary’s character intentions through music, text and staging’;

Theme 6: Power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary.

5.2 Theme 1: The conceptualisation of the opera and intentions regarding performances of femininity

An intriguing finding is that the intentions of the composer and librettist regarding performances of femininity were not clearly defined at the beginning of the opera’s creative process. Arguably, the lack of a specific agenda allowed them to create ambiguous and nuanced gender roles and performances of femininity.

Gradual development of themes and performances of femininity

Crankshaw and Best’s creative process was organic and explorative, emphasising authentic storytelling to elicit responses in audiences. While they distanced themselves from any specific political agenda, Crankshaw and Best acknowledged the power that opera has as a genre to explore social issues. In *The Apothecary* they aimed to explore the story of a woman who steps outside of traditional gender roles.

Best’s comment that one of their intentions for *The Apothecary* was to create “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” where she and Crankshaw could explore “the story of a woman who steps outside of what might have been expected roles” (Best, interview, 2023), which is evident in the subtle subversion of feminine gender stereotypes with Madeleine’s character. Best added that they wanted to consider gender roles in the operatic canon and “how we might make something that had a kind of historical context, but didn’t adhere to historical tropes in any particular ways”, particularly noting how she considered that women in the Romantic operatic canon tend to be stereotyped as “victims” or “hysterical mad women”. Various scholars, including Clément

(2000) and Smart (2000), have critiqued the narratives of women in opera being victimised; Price (2020) agrees that women in standard operatic repertoire often are “victims of violence or of abuse of power by male characters”. Price (2020) places a particular emphasis on agency with operatic woman characters, arguing that even if new operas are created by women, it is unhelpful if their female characters continue to lack agency. Price seemingly implies that female composers have a singular responsibility toward other women, and that despite the increasing opportunities afforded to female composers and challenges to the traditional roles of women in opera, there are still women characters in modern operas that conform to limiting operatic tropes.

Both Crankshaw and Best were aware of historical opera narratives and connotations, which later becomes evident in Madeleine’s character development. While they did not have political motives with *The Apothecary*, they aimed to create an ending that could be applicable in both historical and contemporary contexts and that had an element of the unexpected. Despite no clear plans to follow apparent agendas, their production did do so organically. This outcome is interesting because it demonstrates that stories regarding female agency can be created in an explorative and authentic manner, and this does not have to be a contrived process. This also affirms the comments of South African composer Clare Loveday (personal communication, November 17, 2022), who emphasises that composers do not necessarily write for their work to be analysed and that composing needs to come from a genuine intention of exploration.

Hadlock (2012) adds that alongside the women victims in opera, the women in opera with strong characters are depicted with “defiance and seduction” (p. 264). This view has some parallels to Madeleine, the main character of *The Apothecary*. Best and Crankshaw viewed Madeleine as “an ambitious woman who had a very good brain and wanted to do something other than dress up and flirt. So she ended up as a sort of serial killer and an apothecary” (Best, interview, 2023). The main character arguably follows in the vein of defiant and seductive operatic women, but also has a character arc that allows her to have agency, authority and fulfilment.

Gender roles and the opera’s historical context

The historical setting of eighteenth-century France informs some of the narrative tensions present in *The Apothecary*. It is an effective device to demonstrate the main character’s subversion of expected gender roles and her complex performance of femininity. Crankshaw

and Best were accurate primarily in assuming that there were not many women apothecaries in eighteenth-century France, and this historical context allowed them to explore Madeleine's character development in intriguing ways. In France, apothecaries and surgeons were viewed as subordinates of physicians, who had university training and were the only medical professionals who could legally practice diagnosing diseases and prescribing remedies (Brockliss, 1995). In comparison, apothecaries were chemists who mixed and sold their own medicines to surgeons and lay people. Apothecaries were admired for their chemistry skills and their decorative jars, containing ingredients for remedies, made them seem appealing and prestigious (Chapman, 2018); the apothecary trade also served as a means for women to be somewhat involved in the medical profession (Woolf, 2009). Therefore, Crankshaw noted that the fact that Madeleine takes on a professional role in what would have been considered a "man's profession" in eighteenth-century France was a "calculated move" from her and Best (Crankshaw, personal communication, 2021). Best described that although they did not aim to explore gender roles in eighteenth-century France in much detail, it provided a compelling and intriguing background for the main character's story as she breaks out of what would have been considered typical feminine roles at the time. This reinforces that Madeleine's performance of femininity is distinct from the other woman characters in the opera and challenges certain gendered stereotypes.

The ending of *The Apothecary* was influenced by the creators' decision to focus on Madeleine's character growth and agency. Crankshaw and Best discussed how it took them a long time to decide on an ending for *The Apothecary*. They wanted to focus on Madeleine as a "central force" and wanted an ending that would "fit into both the historical context and a contemporary context" (Best, interview, 2023). In previous discussions about *The Apothecary*, Crankshaw (personal communication, June 4, 2021) mentioned that she and Best ultimately chose to have Madeleine kill the apothecary and become the new apothecary because they thought it would be "very effective" to see Madeleine's development over time and "how she takes things into her own hands". While Crankshaw conceded that it might be "a bit of grim justice," she spoke positively about how Madeleine could get what she wanted and make choices for herself, even though she chose to do so in destructive ways. She also hinted at Madeleine's frustration in her situation, commenting that "the world hasn't been great to her" and that she's "had enough" (A. Crankshaw, personal communication, June 4, 2021). These intentions for the main character provide insight into how Crankshaw and Best contributed to Madeleine's

performance of femininity and female agency through their intentions for the opera's conclusion.

Challenges and social issues in contemporary opera

While acknowledging the monetary and systemic gendered challenges facing opera as a genre, Crankshaw and Best spoke positively about opera's potential to reflect varying nuanced performances of femininity. As Wyatt (2023) discussed the importance of "women having their own voices in opera" and of opera representing multi-faceted women characters with agency, Crankshaw and Best stressed the urgency of opera reflecting prominent social issues and challenges, including those women face today. Best argued for the importance of opera "address[ing] subjects that make people think really hard about issues that are important to us all" (Best, interview, 2023). This aligns with the statements of Royal Opera director Oliver Mears (in Price, 2020), who argued that opera must represent "the widest possible range of people and perspectives" (p. 81). Wyatt, Best and Crankshaw all emphasised the reinterpretation of older operatic works to encourage audiences to reconsider the narratives perpetuated about the women onstage; however, they all discouraged creating opera as a means of pushing an agenda. Instead, they argued that operatic works need to discuss topics that are meaningful to the creator to maintain authenticity, depth of the story and artistic integrity. Interestingly, Best and Crankshaw discussed exploring a greater ambiguity of gender roles in opera; this is something also discussed by McClary (in University of Denver, 2019), who describes that gender androgyny is more accessible to modern artists and has parallels to seventeenth-century Italian opera roles. Gender fluidity is also being explored in contemporary operas such as Neuwirth's *Orlando* (2019), where the main character switches genders (Ross, 2019; Maddocks, 2019).

Crankshaw argued that narratives regarding social issues in opera need nuance and active responses and discussions from the audiences. In line with this, Wyatt (2023) described a potential example of audiences contributing to contemporary opera narratives and social issues: the Royal Opera House held public and private discussion sessions for schools and various groups to provide feedback and contributions to Braithwaite, McDougall and Aboud's new opera *Insurrection: A work in progress*. As this work broached themes of slavery and rebellion in Barbados, the creative team were influenced by the contributions made in the meetings and the meeting's attendees became more curious and willing to follow the opera's progress. This

fruitful experience arguably highlights the nuanced possibilities of audience interaction when opera creators tackle social issues, allowing for multi-faceted perspectives and rich storytelling. Furthermore, Crankshaw's suggestion for audience responses and discussions connects to the themes that are prominent in *The Apothecary*, as its subversions of conventional opera tropes allow for themes regarding female agency and the continuing presence of the male gaze to be explored, relying on the audience's expected resistance to the latter to listen against the grain of the literal meanings of the libretto.

The South African contemporary opera scene

Crankshaw discussed her perspectives on the South African contemporary opera scene, noting that despite its "rich potential" (Crankshaw, interview, 2023), there is a lack of female makers and many financial challenges, which is disheartening. Nevertheless, Crankshaw was optimistic about the efforts of various South African musicians to create and promote South African opera and advocated for South Africans to create operas that are relevant and explore the diverse cultural interpretations of femininity present in South African society. Crankshaw's statements echo those of LaBonte (2019), who argues that audiences "deserve operas that tell stories from all walks of life" (p. 16), as well as those of conductor Kamal Khan (in André et al., 2016), who asserted that "[South African opera singers] should be able to sing their own stories" (p. 2).

Although *The Apothecary* was created and premiered in the UK and was placed in a European setting, it is still a valuable operatic contribution for South African musicians and singers. Crankshaw is an acclaimed South African composer who is venturing into a large-scale genre in which few South African women have been provided the opportunity. Her operatic compositional contribution has the potential to inspire more South African female composers to consider how to amplify and contribute towards South African women's voices and a variety of perspectives on femininity. Furthermore, South African composers such as Hendrik Hofmeyr and Clare Loveday are premiering operatic works that stimulate conversation about their performances of femininity and female agency. This indicates a gradual change in the South African opera scene in terms of depicting these themes.

The perspectives and contributions of female composers and creators are especially valuable, as they allow women to convey their own stories in a myriad of unique compositional styles. The historical limitations that female composers have faced have resulted in female composers

having fewer contributions to larger-scale musical genres, such as the symphony or opera. This focus on smaller-scale chamber music works and the musical canon prioritising larger-scale genres have placed female composers at another disadvantage in terms of getting their work recognised (Martin, 2000; Rusak, 2010). Therefore, female composers writing operatic works gives them an arguably greater platform to be recognised and to share a variety of compositional styles and narratives of varying perspectives. As opera is a form that has been well-established amongst male composers, writing in this form automatically garners interest.

5.3 Theme 2: The realisation of femininity and sensuality through music, text and staging

The discontented Madeleine is clearly distinguished from Elise and Pauline's characters, who embody more traditional performances of femininity in various ways. According to Clément (in Hadlock, 2021), woman opera characters are victimised in various ways. Furthermore, Cowart (1994) describes how the musical, textual and stage elements in an opera production contribute to depicting performances of femininity, which historically has included themes of feminine sexuality, madness, violence and death. As music and libretti in operas have been known to display various views on gender, race and aesthetics (Smart, 2000), the differing performances of femininity in the characterisation of Madeleine, Elise and Pauline are done through the use of melody, rhythms, meter, vocal range, text and costume design.

Reinforcing feminine sensuality through instrumentation, text and melody

Musical features have been connected to supposedly masculine and feminine associations, in terms of instrumentation, cadences, intervals, rhythms and chromaticism. McClary (2007) has commented extensively on gendered associations with cadences, which have been described as either masculine or feminine. She argues that masculine is regarded as strong and objective, while feminine is defined as weak and subjective. Additionally, Leach (2006, in Dill, 2013) describes how music rich in intervals smaller than a tone is considered feminine and morally suspect. The term masculine, therefore, is associated with control and domination (Dill, 2013).

Dill (2013) describes the use of instrumentation to reinforced gendered stereotypes and associations. Feminine instrumentation is linked to historical gender stereotypes about instruments. Musically, men have been associated with power and importance, while women have been associated with romance; this is evident in instrument stereotypes. The violin, flute

and clarinet are considered feminine, as they are small instruments with high pitched ranges and a lower volume capacity; they are also associated with ‘feminine’ romantic themes. In comparison, instruments such as the trumpet, trombone and percussion are associated with masculinity, possibly due to their powerful projection and use in militaristic music.

Therefore, the more traditionally feminine musical, textual and stage elements used to amplify Elise and Pauline’s performances of femininity potentially reinforce “accepted stereotypes about female submissiveness” (Dill, 2013). Elise and Pauline’s diatonic melodies with simplistic rhythms contrast with Madeleine’s chromaticism, dissonance, wide vocal range and complex rhythms. Crankshaw (2021) discussed how she intended to show Madeleine’s difference from the other women through instrumentation, rhythm and dissonant harmonies in this scene. When all the women sing “We must suffer for love!”, Madeleine has a delayed entry, and her intervals create a dissonant harmony with Elise and Pauline. This jarring effect shows how she is struggling to accept societal expectations of women, reinforcing her contrasting performance of femininity.

The differing performances of femininity are also highlighted in the production’s costume design. Elise and Pauline’s traditionally feminine and cheerful pink and yellow gowns are juxtaposed against Madeleine’s green gown, embodying jealousy and mystery (Lugli, 2008). Pink potentially reinforces the stereotypical ‘girliness’ (Elan, 2014) of Elise and Pauline, and Best’s text adds to the colour imagery: Elise’s sings about her stereotypically feminine “peach blossom dress” and she and Pauline also sing about the colour pink while applying their makeup, admiring about their “pink cheeks”.

The differences between the performances of femininity are enforced further in Best’s text, as Elise and Pauline’s dialogue highlights their focus on their physical attributes, such as their eyes, lips, hair, clothing and jewellery. Their text also emphasises their romantic pursuits, reinforcing traditionally feminine musical stereotypes. In comparison, Madeleine seldom discusses such things and joins them reluctantly as the other women sing “We must suffer for love!” Elise and Pauline appear to be content with the status quo regarding women, while Madeleine actively rebels against society’s expectations of women. Crankshaw (personal communication, June 4, 2021) comments that Madeleine is more self-actualised than the other women because she is a more developed character who has an agenda that is more obvious than Elise or Pauline’s.

The main character's performance of femininity in the opera appears to affirm Crankshaw and Best's intentions of creating an opera that would align with historical and contemporary gender themes, as Madeleine simultaneously conforms to and subverts traditional performances of femininity. Madeleine's independence and autonomy, while alluding to *femme fatales*, mad women and the Romantic heroine tropes, conveys a nuanced performance of femininity in *The Apothecary*. This performance of femininity in the opera appears to affirm Crankshaw and Best's intentions of creating an opera that would align with historical and contemporary gender themes, as Madeleine simultaneously conforms to and subverts traditional performances of femininity.

In my interpretation of the opera, although Madeleine is a flawed character who becomes a serial killer through the course of the opera, she garners sympathy from the audience as they witness François's inconstancy and the apothecary's lecherous behaviour. Furthermore, Madeleine's development into a content and self-assured apothecary is a striking conclusion, where her fulfilment and independence are evident. These elements contribute to a nuanced performance of femininity and display Madeleine's female agency, especially as agency involves an individual reflecting on their present situations and the possibilities that are available to them (Parsell, 2017).

5.4 Theme 3: Gendered Romantic opera themes present in The Apothecary

The analysis of the score, libretto and interviews reveal that the main character, Madeleine, is a complex and ambiguous character who simultaneously conforms to and subverts traditional performances of femininity.

Aspects of Romantic feminine madness and desire

Smart (2000) notes that music often lulls the audience into accepting harmful performances of femininity, where woman characters are subjected to madness, violence and death. Romantic opera in particular became known for these depictions of femininity. Madeleine's initial circumstances in *The Apothecary* parallels various operatic mad women who either are rejected by their lovers or who seek vengeance (Jenkins, 2010). Crankshaw reinforces Madeleine's "madness" at François's infidelity by using chromaticism and a variety of time signatures to create a sense of instability and distress. The compositional devices she uses are akin to how

composers used chromaticism, coloratura passages and a variety of form structures to create an element of discomfort and disorder with operatic mad women (McClary, in Hadlock, 2012).

Madeleine's musical and textual characterisation alludes to elements of the Romantic gendered notion of feminine madness (Jenkins, 2010) through text and instrumentation. The chromaticism that Crankshaw writes in Madeleine's score also aligns with Romantic "madwomen" characteristics such as Donizetti's Lucia and Strauss's Salomé, whose madness was reinforced musically through excessive ornamentation, chromaticism and repetition. Crankshaw uses scale patterns and large intervals to express intense emotion, together with composition techniques, such as percussive extended techniques that are reminiscent of Madeleine's distress. Crankshaw writes slap tonguing and flutter tonguing for the woodwind instruments to create percussive effects, which further emphasises Madeleine's intense emotional pain. Furthermore, Madeleine's instrumentation and melodic writing intriguingly incorporates elements of stereotypical masculine and feminine instrument qualities. While the woodwinds evoke elements of stereotypical femininity (Dill, 2013), the slap tonguing and flutter tonguing's percussive effects imitate what is considered stereotypically masculine. This further reflects Madeleine's complex character that displays a unique performance of femininity.

However, while gendered elements of Romantic opera tropes are alluded to, such as themes of feminine desire and madness, they are also subverted to create an unexpected finale where the complex protagonist, Madeleine, is in a position of autonomy and fulfilment, taking up a profession that may not have been expected of women in the eighteenth-century. Furthermore, while Lucia and Salomé die shortly after their mad scenes, which take place near the end of their respective operas, ending their challenges to masculine control (Sharma, 2020), Madeleine's heartache and emotional distress in scene 1 sets her in motion to seek assistance from the apothecary, displaying elements of female agency. This shows a progression from Romantic feminine operatic stereotypes and reinforces Madeleine's distinct performance of femininity.

While the main character's musical and textual characterisation draws parallels to well-known *femme fatale* operatic characters, she also has unique, contrasting characteristics, which contributes to her nuanced performance of femininity. Madeleine's character parallels arguably negative traits of certain Romantic and twentieth-century opera protagonists, including Tosca

and Carmen; however, she also embodies positive aspects of these characters and is unique in that she does not die at the end of the opera.

Femme fatale characterisation with Madeleine's seduction and power

Madeleine shares particular musical traits with Romantic *femme fatale* characters (Fernelius, 2015), including Carmen (Dams, 2013). Madeleine's characteristics of sensuality and independence are indicated through chromaticism, echoing Carmen: according to McClary (2002), the infamous *femme fatale* Carmen, of Bizet's titular Romantic opera (1875), has melodic lines that are highly chromatic, as if to reinforce her sensuality. Madeleine's complex vocal lines, with many instances of chromaticism, could subconsciously reinforce her sensuality as a "beautiful woman". It is interesting that although Carmen is a character constructed by a male character and has been described as a "male fantasy", Carmen is depicted as having an element of agency and sexual power. Carmen ruthlessly manipulates her lover, Don José, and resists his attempts at "possessing" her. This characterisation has some parallels with Madeleine's increasing sense of agency throughout *The Apothecary*, and how she manipulates the apothecary with her sexuality and ultimately resists his threatening advances.

Further parallels between Madeleine's character and elements of the Romantic heroine are Puccini's Tosca. The similarities are that they both have elements of jealousy, and villainous men take advantage of their jealous traits. In addition, both Tosca and Madeleine also display female agency in their ultimate responses to these men by murdering them, mainly as female agency specifically discusses women's ability to have control and make decisions (Morwani, 2016). They use murder to gain control, displaying elements of female agency and overturning narratives that might conceive of women as only acting as a result of hysterical emotions rather than calculated risk.

Nevertheless, despite Madeleine's many narrative and musical parallels with the *femme fatale*, mad woman and Romantic heroine stereotypes, she displays contrasting characteristics that enable her to display a nuanced performance of femininity. This unconventionality is evident in how Madeleine goes against the narrative operatic stereotypes where the women die at the end of the opera, and she becomes more independent throughout the opera. For example, McClary (2002) notes that while Bizet's Carmen is "given extraordinary power" within the opera, the problematic nineteenth-century cultural conventions regarding gender and ethnicity (Carmen is a Romani woman) and the narrative that Bizet employs, result in Carmen's death. Carmen seems to be punished for her unconventionality, autonomy and sexuality through her

death. However, Madeleine in *The Apothecary* has a different fate, as she kills the apothecary and thus gains more independence, thereby revising the problematic aspects of the *femme fatale*.

Madeleine's use of seduction to gain power over the apothecary and the male gaze is reminiscent of musical strategies used in Strauss's *Salomé*. As the apothecary lusts after Madeleine and she uses that to gain what she wants, there is a similar dynamic with the characters Salomé and Narraboth (Cho, 2016). Salomé is gazed upon in a lustful way by Narraboth, but Salomé pretends to submit to his desires and charms him into getting what she wants: she pleads to see the prophet Jochanaan. She seemingly gives up her power and offers herself as an object of the male gaze; ironically, she now has power over Narraboth and achieves her goal. This deceptive power dynamic and manipulation of the male gaze is evident with Madeleine's manipulation of the apothecary. Taking advantage of his lust for her, Madeleine tricks the apothecary into drinking the belladonna poison, resulting in a new powerful position in a respected profession.

Although Madeleine is a complex protagonist who uses immoral means to achieve her agenda, she ends in a position where she has knowledge and control over the potions, she is no longer under the influence of either François or the apothecary and has found contentment in a profession unusual for women at the time and challenges socio-cultural expectations. Therefore, the title of this opera reflects Madeleine's growth as a woman who cunningly gains authority and autonomy, while also providing a warning of the apothecary's sinister intentions and his desire to control Madeleine for his own gain.

In my interpretation of the opera, the manner in which *The Apothecary* tackles these themes of the male gaze and feminine objectification, and Madeleine's responses to them, is suggestive of the opera's response to elements of the #MeToo movement, which aims to amplify the voices of sexually harassed or assaulted women in the entertainment industry. Madeleine's struggles with the apothecary's overtly sexual nature and her gradual overcoming of her lover's disrespect may resonate with audiences who have experienced infidelity and sexual harassment. Furthermore, Madeleine's gradual character development in choosing to take matters into her own hands and making decisions to pursue what she is passionate about – the skill of being an apothecary – regardless of gender expectations at the time may be appreciated in contemporary audiences. It must be noted that Madeleine is a flawed and morally ambiguous protagonist, as she commits murder and uses her sexuality to her advantage, which potentially

reinforces *femme fatale* operatic tropes. Nevertheless, her pain at her lover's infidelity, her ingenuity in manipulating the lecherous apothecary and her contentment and power at the opera's conclusion are sympathetic attributes. Despite her questionable methods, her manipulation of the apothecary in spite of his supposed "authority" allows her to ultimately win control of her own situation and displays aspects of female agency.

5.5 Theme 4: Instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements in *The Apothecary*

According to Cusick (1994), an area of study for women's compositions involves investigating what makes the female composer's work "eccentric" and how it challenges conventional compositional structures, in addition to exploring how a female composer's experience of difference impacts her compositional style. Cusick also notes how narrative elements in music require a sense of anticipation or expectancy. These are present in conventional Western music form structures, in which phrases conclude with a cadence. I would argue that *The Apothecary's* "eccentricity" and unexpected-ness lie in Crankshaw and Best's subtle subversion of Romantic gender stereotypes through the use of cyclicity and various musical and textual themes, which is reinforced by the opera's staging.

The Apothecary has several examples of structural and thematic cyclicity, notably the 'translucence' motif and the 'belladonna' motif, which reinforce elements of Madeleine's multi-faceted performance of femininity. Crankshaw and Best's use of cyclical musical and textual elements in *The Apothecary*, through use of recurring instrumentation, melodic and rhythmic motifs and textual imagery, suggest Madeleine's gradually increased agency through the course of the plot and highlight the shifting power dynamics between her and the apothecary. Feminist musicological studies have noted that cyclical musical elements have been regarded as a part of a feminine musical aesthetic or *l'écriture féminine*, as certain feminist scholars began to propose a style of writing and composition that was separate from what was perceived as traditionally male, aiming to push back against negative stereotypes about women's creative outputs (Goh, 2019). Although this school of thought has been criticised for potentially reinforcing gender essentialism and assumes that all women's experiences are universal, it is intriguing to see how Crankshaw and Best, as woman creators,

use cyclicity to reinforce Madeleine's character development and increasing power over the apothecary.

Leitmotifs in opera have been used to represent characters, emotions and events to integrate the music and the drama further. The use of motifs in contemporary operas featuring woman protagonists is apparent in Unsuk Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* (2007). Chin wrote Alice's 'adventurous' motif and Alice's 'frustration' motif, which appear in the second, fourth, and final scenes and create a sense of cyclicity. Chin states each motif in its basic form and then adapts them by varying the instrumentation, meter, rhythm and dynamics (Na, 2012). The development of musical themes and motifs is evident in South African operas, namely Hofmeyr's *Saartjie* and Ndodana-Breen's *Winnie: The opera*, both of which feature South African woman protagonists, use recurring musical themes and gestures to demonstrate evolving emotions and character development (Spies, 2014; André et al., 2016). Different musical motifs or themes can be adjusted over time to imply character development or changing emotions. In Hofmeyr's *Saartjie*, the three-note Saartjie motif undergoes transformations of rhythm, tempo and dynamics to reflect the characters changing mood. Arguably, this approach to musical motifs is apparent in *The Apothecary*, as Crankshaw subtly varies the motifs to potentially reflect Madeleine's curiosity and developing female agency. Spies (2014) showed score examples to illustrate how Hofmeyr adapted the melodic gestures in *Saartjie* with changes in dynamics, tempo and rhythm to demonstrate Sara Baartman's tempestuous emotional state. A former composition student of Hofmeyr, Crankshaw adapts the different musical themes in *The Apothecary* with augmentation and modulation, which is evident with both the 'belladonna' and 'translucence' themes. The use of the 'belladonna' and 'translucence' themes in *The Apothecary* arguably demonstrates Madeleine's changing intentions and how she gradually gains more agency throughout the opera.

Crankshaw and Best used the 'belladonna' musical and textual theme to show Madeleine's gradual assertion of control while also reflecting how Madeleine's beauty and sensuality allow her to manipulate the apothecary so that she can achieve her plans. The creators explore all connotations of the word "belladonna" in order to discuss elements of the male gaze, *femme fatale* operatic elements and how Madeleine gains power over the predatory apothecary. This relates to the research themes discussing female agency and how this is reinforced through the composer and librettist's musical and textual decisions.

Madeleine's resourcefulness and cunning reinforce themes of unexpected female agency in the historical context of the opera, which is evident through the use of the 'belladonna' theme. The 'belladonna' theme is first sung by the apothecary in scene 2.2 as he prepares the poison, with Madeleine listening attentively and musing "fascinating!" repeatedly, displaying her eagerness but also possibly stroking the apothecary's ego. However, once Madeleine kills the apothecary, she sings using elements of the apothecary's original melody: "Belladonna, belladonna / For the longest, deepest sleep", transforming from attentive learner to master. The "belladonna" theme also reinforces *femme fatale* operatic tropes, as the apothecary's lust for Madeleine, the beautiful woman, contributes to his downfall. The theme highlights Madeleine's understanding of the apothecary's possible assumptions that as she was a less-educated beauty, she would not be able to defy his control; however, Madeleine's resourcefulness, sexuality and manipulation allow her to unexpectedly exert control over him. This shows a differing performance of femininity in comparison to most Romantic operas, where performances of femininity (such as those of Carmen, Lucia and Salomé) often were subdued and silenced (Sharma, 2020).

Specifically, the 'translucence' theme represents Madeleine's early fascination with the apothecary's work and her contentment in her new profession at the close of the opera. The 'translucence' theme may be connected to the 'belladonna' theme as it draws on similar juxtapositions between her interactions with the apothecary and her later assumption of his role. Madeleine recognises that the potions are a means for her to take control of her circumstances. The differing instrumentation and Madeleine's broadening vocal range in each iteration of the 'translucence' theme are indicative of Madeleine's character development and increasing power. However, the connections between the 'translucence' theme and the simultaneous literally and symbolically opaque glass jars could also imply Madeleine's ongoing ambiguous motives and hints at a future where she potentially continues his dubious remedies and solutions. It is interesting to note that although Madeleine becomes a serial killer during the course of the opera, her position as the new apothecary is shown in a positive light and as an example of female agency. Both Crankshaw and Best spoke positively about Madeleine's position at the end of the opera, emphasising her independence and fulfilment. Although they noted that Madeleine was an ambiguous heroine who used immoral methods to get what she wanted, Best commended Madeleine's "arrival as the person that she seems to want to be. ... She has fulfilled something". Crankshaw viewed Madeleine as "ambitious" and "adventurous" and commented that "Madeleine takes agency over her actions and her life and her future" (A. Crankshaw, personal communication, June 4, 2021).

It is also striking that although Madeleine also embodies *femme fatale* characteristics of seduction, sensuality and manipulation, she does not succumb to the same fate as most *femme fatale* operatic heroines. Bizet's Carmen and Berg's Lulu are both killed by men in their respective operas, seemingly punished for their sexual independence and non-conformity. However, *The Apothecary* concludes with Madeleine alive and in a more powerful position than she was at the beginning of the opera, after killing the sinister apothecary.

The ending of the opera, where Madeleine kills the apothecary and assumes his profession, both alludes to elements of Romantic opera heroines and provides a surprising twist. It reflects a progression in the fates of operatic heroines while also depicting a complex, morally ambiguous performance of femininity. Once Madeleine has assumed the new role of the apothecary in scene 8, she sings "All have their uses and I have my ways/To treat each condition we call a malaise". This shows a double meaning of Madeleine's increasing confidence as an apothecary while also implying that she was able to take steps to establish her own agency and power.

Although the main character of *The Apothecary* draws parallels with Romantic opera heroines' *femme fatale* characteristics and themes of madness and jealousy, a striking difference is that Madeleine concludes the opera in an unexpectedly powerful position in comparison to the stereotypical deaths of *femme fatales*, Romantic heroines, and mad women in the operatic canon. A narrative difference is that Madeleine's emotions serve as a catalyst for the action in the plot, rather than a means for the composer and librettist to sabotage or criticise her. In contrast to *femme fatale* Carmen, madwomen Lucia and Salomé, and Romantic heroine Tosca, Madeleine does not die at the end of *The Apothecary*, and she becomes an apothecary herself; a profession that Crankshaw and Best assumed to not be typical for the time period. While the deaths of characters such as Carmen, Lucia and Salomé seem to serve as punishments for their behaviour and emotions, Madeleine's emotions and increasing assertiveness potentially reflects a positive view on the character's independence and ambition.

5.6 Theme 5: The male gaze and shaping the apothecary's character intentions through music, text and staging

In my interpretation of *The Apothecary*, an interesting finding is how the apothecary's character represents the objectification of femininity and serves as a criticism of the male gaze through musical, textual and visual elements. Both Crankshaw and Best described the apothecary as

“controlling”, with an element of being a “dictator” (interview, 2023), and they enforced this characterisation through deliberate musical and textual decisions.

The apothecary’s characteristics and the male gaze

The male gaze, coined by Mulvey (1975) involves female characters becoming objectified spectacles for the male creator or spectator’s to project fantasies of desire and pleasure. The male gaze can be constructed with various techniques in film and music. The male gaze codes female bodies as “inherently sexual” in a way not done for male bodies, and female characters bear the meanings given to them by male characters instead of creating their own, limiting their female agency and creating an unequal power dynamic (Mwedzi, 2021). Arguably, the apothecary embodies elements of the male gaze, but these are constructed in ways that create an implicitly critical view of his actions, and of the trope more generally. This is done in various ways throughout the opera, such as the production’s set design, Best’s use of rhyme and emphasis on Madeleine’s physical attributes, and Crankshaw’s use of instrumentation, rhythm, tempo and melodic writing.

The set design for the apothecary’s aria in scene 3 emphasises his erotic fascination and objectification of Madeleine through a large monochromatic projection of a woman’s smiling face behind the apothecary’s shop, which dominates the stage and emphasises the scale of the apothecary’s obsession and desire for Madeleine. The cropped image accentuates the woman’s lips, further highlighting the apothecary’s lust. The monochromatic film emphasises the woman’s white skin as the apothecary sings “Such beautiful skin, translucent as porcelain”, while the text also re-introduces the textual concept of “translucence”. Themes of the male gaze are evident, as the apothecary views Madeleine’s skin as “translucent as porcelain”, much like the ornate jars in his shop, implying that she is an object to possess and merely a beautiful thing to observe.

Best’s use of rhyme deliberately enforces the apothecary’s “assertive” and domineering character. In the lines “such beautiful skin, translucent as porcelain, such charm, but jealousy is Madeleine’s burden”, there is sibilance and elements of rhyme, contributing to his self-assured and sinister tone. Best commented that the aria was connected to a gendered reading of the apothecary, as she viewed his controlling nature as an instance when she was “specifically linking a certain thing to an idea of gender” (Best, interview, 2023).

Crankshaw used instrumentation and tempo to enforce the apothecary’s control, rigidity and self-assuredness, which reinforces the controlling aspects of the male gaze where women are

viewed only through an objectified lens. Her desire that the music be “well-paced” in terms of the tempo and her incorporation of many percussion instruments into the apothecary’s score, evokes the sounds of the glass jars and bottles in his shop and give a sense of his profession (A. Crankshaw, personal communication, June 4, 2021). These percussive elements could also imply a force and an element of danger in his potions, as he has the power to prescribe potentially harmful substances. Furthermore, the percussion reinforces stereotypically masculine instrumentation (Dill, 2013).

Furthermore, Crankshaw’s score indications, instrumentation and melodic writing emphasises the apothecary’s sinister intentions and lust for Madeleine. In scene 5, as the apothecary warns Madeleine that she will have to pay him in sexual favours when she next needs his assistance, Crankshaw writes “slightly threatening” as the performance indication and places tenutos in the sung melody to show the force he is placing on Madeleine. There are also piano chords in the low register, accompanied by woodblocks and the triangle to create extra force. It must be noted that Madeleine does not have another option to repay the apothecary, as she has no money, which emphasises the elements of the apothecary taking advantage of her economic vulnerability and sexuality. This draws attention to the apothecary’s manipulative characterisation and the historical context, where women had little economic power, resulting in compromised situations. Crankshaw writes a chromatic ascending line in the bass clarinet, echoed by piano, to add to the uneasy atmosphere. The strings also play behind the bridge for a creaking effect, adding to the intimidating atmosphere. As the apothecary threatens “You must find alternative ways of paying”, he sings this phrase using *sprechstimme* and glissandi, reinforcing that he is ogling Madeleine musically and textually.

Male objectification of female characters

My interpretation of *The Apothecary* views François’s character as reflective of elements of the male gaze throughout the opera, which is also enforced by the music and text.

François’s male gaze is created using various textual and musical techniques; this also is apparent in Stradella’s oratoria *Susanna* (1681), which uses melismas and coloratura melodies in Susanna’s arias to reinforce sensuality and invite the audience to gaze upon her. Susanna sings as she bathes, observed by two elders, and her own sensuality is emphasised through the elongated individual syllables in her melodies, decorated with elaborate melismas. This not only evokes the water that Susanna is bathing in, but is arguably a musical ogling of Susanna’s

body, constructing the male gaze from the characters, composer, librettist and audience (Dunlap, 2001). Similar musical techniques are used with François, whose objectification of women and his self-serving nature are emphasised by his musical characterisation, especially through his vocal range and virtuosic, ornamented melodies. François is not only depicted as a self-absorbed, extravagant philanderer, but his descriptions of the women in the opera show a fixation on their physical attributes for his own pleasure. As he sings of Pauline's beauty, his repetition of the word "beautiful" rapidly ascends into his upper vocal register and reaches a fermata on a B-flat 4, demonstrating parallels to Stradella's sensual melodic writing and reflecting his ecstasy as he gazes at Pauline (Dunlap, 2001). He also uses glissandi as he sings "Oh, the sensuous Pauline!", which has been used throughout the opera to depict desire. Furthermore, there are elements of the male gaze in François's text; his descriptions of Pauline's earlobes as "plaything[s]" emphasise how he views feminine physical attributes as objects for his own sexual enjoyment and satisfaction.

François also tires easily of his lovers, and his inconstancy is evident as he rapidly transfers his attention from Madeleine to Elise, then to Pauline, and then again to an unnamed fourth woman. His impatient and possessive nature also is evident in scene 4, as he repeatedly calls Elise to join him for their evening tryst, with each call becoming more ornamented and virtuosic.

The voice types utilised in *The Apothecary*, while also prescribed in Crankshaw and Best's project requirements, show a simultaneous conformity and subversion of operatic vocal stereotypes. *The Apothecary* plays into some tropes of the "soprano victim", "romantic tenor" and "authoritarian baritone" (Clément, 2000) with their characters, but with subtle yet effective subversions.

François remains a "romantic" tenor to a certain extent but garners little sympathy because of his serial infidelity and blatant objectification of his lovers. He fancies himself as a great romantic and frequently quotes the French philosopher Voltaire as he pursues Pauline. He sings: "L'homme est libre au moment qu'il veut l'être" (man is free at the instant he wants to be), reinforcing his flightiness and the ease at which he overcomes his grief for the deceased Elise. Although he has admittedly just consumed a love potion, this line emphasises François's view of his lovers as disposable, and the pervasive self-serving nature of his desires. The apothecary conforms to elements of the "law-giver" operatic trope for bass-baritones, as his controlling nature is established musically and textually throughout the opera. However,

although he feels as if he is in control, Madeleine manipulates the apothecary into drinking belladonna poison, thus he loses all sense of control.

The women in *The Apothecary* reinforce tropes of woman operative “victims” (Clément, 2000; Hadlock, 2012) in differing ways, but they also overcome these stereotypes, challenging operative gender stereotypes and reflecting nuanced performances of femininity. Elise is Madeleine’s first murder victim, and both Pauline and Madeleine are victims of François’s philandering. Madeleine, the leading soprano, is also a victim of the apothecary’s ominous advances. However, Madeleine overcomes victimhood with the knowledge that she obtains by isolating herself from François, killing the apothecary and becoming the new apothecary. She seizes control of her situation when she cries “I need more remedies! Remedies of my own”, not only insisting upon solutions for her immediate problems but also demonstrating her broader passion for the apothecary profession by calling the potions “[her] one constant love” and finding fulfilment and power in her new career. Furthermore, Pauline, while not to the same extent as Madeleine, also begins to seek a sense of agency as she enters the apothecary shop in the final scene, implying that she is unhappy in her situation and wants to improve something in her life.

5.7 Theme 6: Power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary

The title of the opera, *The Apothecary*, arguably has a dual interpretation which not only establishes Madeleine and the apothecary as the main focus of the plot but also comes to represent their gradual shift in power throughout the opera. The opera’s title initially appears to refer to the apothecary whom Madeleine discovers in scene 2 and seeks for advice. He initially appears to have authority by influencing Madeleine to buy his remedies and by threatening her to pay him in sexual favours; however, it is Madeleine who concludes in a position of authority and displays female agency.

Cyclical musical structures and power dynamics

Arguably, gendered meanings in musical devices have reinforced unequal power dynamics between what is considered masculine and feminine. Charlton (2009) also notes opera’s ability to display power relations through musical elements. Composers can use rhythms, melodies,

instrumentation or motifs to signify extra-musical connotations; however, an audience may only understand these connotations through understanding cultural meanings. Goh (2019) has noted that historically women creators “tend to diminish power differences” within their work, which reinforces patriarchal structures; as a result, power relations and how these are depicted by female composers have become a major aspect of feminist musicological study. Therefore, it is interesting that Crankshaw and Best choose to demonstrate Madeleine and the apothecary’s shifting power dynamics through music and text, culminating in a surprising ending where Madeleine kills the apothecary. This shows a progression in how female composers have chosen to tackle gendered power struggles.

Crankshaw and Best use various musical and textual devices, including chromaticism, instrumentation, recurring themes, rhythms and rhyme to demonstrate Madeleine and the apothecary’s power dynamics, concluding with Madeleine unexpectedly killing the apothecary and assuming his occupation. McClary (2002) comments about how feminine depictions in literature involves an element of being disciplined or controlled, an aspect that is also prominent in music. For example, femininity is associated with chromaticism which enhances tonal music but must ultimately resolve to the triad. Chromaticism also appeared to symbolise femininity, which evoked the sensuality of operatic *femme fatales* like Carmen (Dill, 2013).

Crankshaw (personal communication, June 4, 2021) acknowledged that she intended for Madeleine to incorporate elements of the apothecary’s musical style towards the end of the opera while still retaining her unique musical style, showcasing her independence and character development. Madeleine’s lyrical melodies are contrasted with the apothecary’s percussive instrumentation and variety of singing styles, which she begins to adopt as the opera progresses, symbolising their adapting power dynamics.

Madeleine echoes some of the apothecary’s melodies from scene 2.2 when he described the potions, demonstrating how she has accumulated information about the different remedies. However, this is done within her own vocal range, at and she soon changes her lyrics and melodic lines, showing that while she has learned from the apothecary, she has ultimately become independent.

As Madelene sings that these are to “treat...condition[s] we *call* a malaise”, it indicates that she has a greater flexibility in diagnosing varying physical and emotional difficulties. Crankshaw (2021) commented that there is “more percussion and a lot more rigidity that comes into her already developed music”, but that Madeleine imitates aspects of the apothecary “in

her own way” so that she maintains her individuality. Madeleine does not totally copy the apothecary, but retains her sense of self while embracing the power that being an apothecary has given her.

Crankshaw acknowledged that she intended to merge the musical styles of Madeleine and the apothecary through instrumentation, rhythm and a variety of singing styles, in order to reflect Madeleine’s growing power throughout the opera. One of the ways that Crankshaw chose to characterise the apothecary musically was through the use of percussion and very fixed tempo indications to reinforce his “controlling” nature. Already, this use of percussive is foreshadowed in scene 1, as Crankshaw’s use of woodwind key clicks in Madeleine’s aria potentially reflects Madeleine’s desire to control her unhappy situation. As the apothecary sings about her inevitable return to him in scene 3, it is as if the woodwind key clicks indicate both the apothecary and Madeleine’s desire for control. This is also evident in Crankshaw’s use of strings playing behind the bridge for a “creaking door” effect and *col legno battuto* playing, which adds to the ominous quality of the apothecary preparing the potions. The apothecary is scored to utilise a wide variety of singing styles, including elements of straight tone and *sprechstimme*. Madeleine echoes these musical elements of the apothecary, such as in scenes 4 and 8, to show how she is beginning to assert control. As she convinces Elise to take the toxic belladonna eye drops, she uses the apothecary’s *sprechstimme* singing style, and she uses this again in when she tricks the apothecary into drinking the belladonna poison.

Use of rhyme for shifts in power

Crankshaw and Best further demonstrated the shifting power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary through the use of rhyme. Best reinforced the apothecary’s authoritarian character with increasing instances of rhyme and as Madeleine adopts some of the apothecary’s controlling tactics to deceive him, she begins to use more rhyme in her text. Once Madeleine has killed the apothecary, she also begins to use rhyming couplets to reinforce her newfound power and autonomy. This is evident in scene 8, as Madeleine describes her different remedies. Best’s use of rhyme in the apothecary’s text also reinforces the notions at the time regarding gender and oratory. Men who were skilled in oratory were considered powerful and influential in broader society, whereas women’s rhetoric was usually interpreted as seduction instead of intelligence and treated with suspicion (McClary, 2002). Therefore, the apothecary’s rhyme is particularly effective at representing the power that he wields, and Madeleine’s adoption of the

apothecary's rhyme in her text showcases both her sensuality and increasing power over him. The use of end rhyme in these phrases helps Madeleine to sound decisive and authoritative, reinforcing her unusual position of strength. Madeleine's increasing use of rhyme is not only used to manipulate the apothecary, but also shows how she gradually asserts control in a similar way to the apothecary. This adds to her complex performance of femininity, as she begins to display the apothecary's traits, which could be interpreted as "masculine" and "controlling" (Best, interview, 2023).

5.8 Summary

The findings have provided thorough and valuable insight into performances of femininity in *The Apothecary* through analyses of semi-structured interviews with the composer and librettist, the opera's score, and the video of its performance. *The Apothecary* allows for discussions on the effectiveness of opera as a form to display differing performances of femininity and female agency. Chapter 5 discussed several main themes emerging from the findings, namely the creators' explorative intentions regarding femininity and gender roles; the main character's multi-faceted performance of femininity; the men of *The Apothecary* as a means to critique the male gaze and feminine objectification; an exploration of operatic stereotypes and gender roles in *The Apothecary*; and contemporary opera's possibilities to explore femininity and female agency.

While Crankshaw and Best were careful not to impose a particular agenda in their work, it is evident that *The Apothecary* displays a variety of performances of femininity, supported through the music, text and staging decisions. Crankshaw and Best's explorative creative processes aimed to create a "wolf in sheep's clothing" (Best, 2023); this has culminated in an opera that navigates themes of agency, ambiguity and sensuality. While gendered elements of Romantic opera tropes are alluded to, such as themes of feminine desire and madness, they are also subverted to create an unexpected finale where the complex protagonist, Madeleine, is in a position of agency and authority. While Madeleine conforms to certain aspects of Romantic and twentieth-century *femme fatale* stereotypes, she also subverts these to ultimately obtain a position of independence and fulfilment. There is also a critical portrayal of the male gaze constructed with various musical and textual devices throughout the work, especially in relation to the apothecary's character. Furthermore, Crankshaw and Best provided insight into the commissioning processes and challenges in the contemporary opera scene, with Crankshaw

contributing commentary on the potential and challenges in the South African contemporary opera scene as a South African female composer.

6 Summary and conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation has investigated how femininity is interpreted and performed musically and textually in the contemporary opera *The Apothecary*. It aimed to explore performances of femininity through a hermeneutic textual analysis of *The Apothecary*'s score and libretto. In order to enable access to the full hermeneutic meaning of the opera, the musical and textual elements were analysed alongside semi-structured interviews with Crankshaw and Best, which served to gain insights on their intentions and interpretations of femininity in this opera. This chapter will systematically discuss how the findings provided answers to the research questions.

There are various issues regarding performances of femininity in contemporary opera. There have been particular unempowering performances of femininity in operas in the canon (although there are exceptions), where women characters lack agency. This is especially prominent in Romantic operas, where the women either are viewed through a sexualised lens, succumb to madness, are victims of violence, or die (Clément, 2000). Women in the operatic canon often are subjected to the “abuse of power by male characters” (Price, 2020). These performances of femininity are curated through music, text and staging.

While there have been developments in female operatic characters and there are various contemporary operas displaying nuanced performances of femininity with feminist perspectives, including Ellen Reid's *P R I S M* (2018), Unsuk Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* (2007) and Du Yun's *Angel's Bone* (2018), there is little academic research available about these operas in comparison to operas in the canon. There are several South African operas featuring prominent woman heroines with differing performances of femininity, including Hendrik Hofmeyr's *Sara Baartman* (2022) and Bongani Ndodana-Breen's *Winnie: The opera* (2011), there is a lack of emphasis on performances of femininity and most of these ideas regarding femininity have been put forward by male composers. Additionally, there is currently no academic research available on operas written by South African female composers; although South African composer Angelique Mouyis' opera *Bessie: The blue-eyed Xhosa* (2015) has been performed and features a female heroine, no formal studies have been completed about it at present.

The following themes were gleaned from the three data sets: the conceptualisation of the opera and intentions regarding performances of femininity; the realisation of femininity and sensuality through music, text and staging; gendered Romantic opera themes present in *The Apothecary*; instrumentation, motifs and cyclical structural elements in *The Apothecary*; the male gaze and shaping the apothecary's character intentions through music, text and staging; power dynamics between Madeleine and the apothecary.

6.2 Addressing the sub-questions and main research question

The main research question addressed in this dissertation was: How is femininity performed in *The Apothecary*? These were the following sub-questions:

- How is femininity interpreted and performed musically and textually in the contemporary opera *The Apothecary*?
- What was Crankshaw's intention regarding female agency in the work?
- In what way did the composer and librettist address gender roles in the opera?
- In what way did the composer and librettist address femininity in the opera?
- How does the music and text challenge and/or reinforce the performances of femininity in the opera?

These questions will be discussed and summarised below, with the main, overarching research question being addressed last.

6.2.1 What was Crankshaw's intention regarding female agency in the work?

Crankshaw's intentions regarding female agency in *The Apothecary* were flexible and explorative, but she and Best still aimed to consider themes regarding the performances of femininity in the operatic canon and were aware of potential operatic stereotypes and narratives that could emerge. Both creators did not want to adhere to any historical operatic tropes in particular ways and aimed to create an appropriate and effective conclusion that would fit into a historical and contemporary context.

The Apothecary displays elements of historical and contemporary contexts by simultaneously conforming to and subverting historical Romantic opera stereotypes. The opera alludes to historical Romantic gendered operatic tropes, such as feminine madness, sensuality and victimisation (Smart, 2000). However, these tropes are subverted to create an unexpected conclusion, where the main character, Madeleine, kills the apothecary and assumes his

profession, which Crankshaw and Best assumed would have been unusual for the time. Madeleine's character arc ends in a surprising position of authority in comparison to Romantic operatic heroines, who typically succumb to hysteria or die. Furthermore, the predatory behaviour exhibited by the apothecary, which alludes to the violent actions of operatic men such as Bizet's Don José, who attempts to control and possess the free-spirited Carmen (McClary, 2002).

Crankshaw discussed how certain themes in the opera became more evident as she and Best further explored the characters. They were reluctant to adhere to a specific political agenda and wanted their opera to be "something that worked on its own terms" (Best, interview, 2023). This sentiment is echoed by Royal Opera House producer Wyatt (2023), who argues against pushing for any particular agenda when creating opera, but encourages women having their own voices in operatic narratives and having multi-faceted woman characters.

6.2.2 In what way did the composer and librettist address gender roles in the opera?

The composer and librettist addressed gender roles in *The Apothecary* by drawing on the historical context of the Robert Browning poem they took as the opera's main inspiration, while also subtly subverting some of the gender expectations of the time. For Crankshaw and Best, eighteenth-century France's historical context provided a compelling setting for Madeleine's story as she challenged expected gender roles, as women were not fully integrated in the medical field at the time (Woolf, 2009). They were also interested in exploring ambiguity in the gender roles of their characters, which McClary (2019) argues is becoming an increasingly popular discussion point amongst modern creatives, especially when one considers how gender fluidity is explored in contemporary operas such as Neuwirth's *Orlando* (2019), where the main character switches genders (Ross, 2019; Maddocks, 2019). Crankshaw and Best chose not to be overly prescriptive about their characters' intentions but aimed to create multi-layered characters regardless of gender by focusing on the characters' voices, personalities and agendas.

The Apothecary's characters initially appear to reinforce historical operatic gender stereotypes, but there are unconventional elements that evoke contemporary notions of gender and performances of femininity. The voice types prescribed in *The Apothecary*'s requirements do allude to vocal stereotypes critiqued by scholars such as Clément (2000) are employed, as Madeleine, Elise and Pauline are all "victims" of philandering, François is a "romantic" tenor

and the authoritative apothecary has elements of the “law-giver” bass-baritone. However, Crankshaw and Best provide subtle subversions of these stereotypes. The philandering François’s serial infidelity and the objectifying text regarding his romantic pursuits are emphasised with elongated, ornamented vocal lines, demonstrating his sexualisation of his lovers musically and through an arguably critical lens. The apothecary, whose controlling nature is characterised musically by stereotypically masculine percussion instruments (Dill, 2013), rhyming couplets, rigid meters and rhythms, loses all control when Madeleine deceptively poisons him.

Crankshaw and Best aimed to navigate “the story of a woman who steps outside of what might have been expected roles” (Best, interview, 2023), which is apparent in Madeleine’s subtle inversion of feminine gender stereotypes. Madeleine draws parallels to Romantic *femme fatales*, such as Bizet’s *Carmen*, who uses her sensuality to manipulate men with chromatic melodic lines (McClary, 2002). Madeleine’s music and text also hints at themes of Romantic feminine madness (Jenkins, 2010), as her melodies parallel the repetition, ornamentation and chromaticism evident in those of “madwomen” Lucia and Salomé. There are also gendered elements in the instrumentation used in Madeleine’s music, as the use of the flute and violin are seen as stereotypically feminine. However, Madeleine’s music and text begins to adopt the rigid and percussive features of the apothecary’s music, which evokes elements of stereotypical masculinity (Dill, 2013). This emphasises a nuanced portrayal of Madeleine, where her performance of femininity defies what is considered stereotypically feminine.

6.2.3 In what way did the composer and librettist address femininity in the opera?

Femininity in *The Apothecary* was addressed in varying ways by the composer and librettist through the music and text. The complex protagonist, Madeleine, seemingly a victim of her lover’s serial infidelity at the beginning of the opera, becomes fascinated with the apothecary’s profession. She takes her unfortunate situation into her own hands and concludes the opera in a position of surprising agency and strength. Her distinctive performance of femininity and increasing power is demonstrated using melodic motifs, rhythm and increasing rhyming text. Madeleine starts to take on the musical and textual characteristics of the domineering apothecary, which emphasises her increasing control. Her performance of femininity also includes an awareness of her sensuality, which is conveyed musically through chromaticism and melismatic melodies, and she uses this to manipulate the apothecary to achieve her agenda.

There are two musical and textual themes associated with Madeleine. The first one is ‘translucence’, which demonstrates her intelligent and cunning methods for achieving independence and contentment while also highlighting the moral ambiguity of her actions, particularly how she uses the apothecary’s remedies. The ‘belladonna’ theme represents not only the danger and force of the remedies, but also signifies Madeleine’s sensuality; although the apothecary attempts to take advantage of her sensuality, she is able to manipulate him because of it.

Madeleine’s performance of femininity is contrasted with the other women in the opera. Elise and Pauline present arguably more traditional performances of femininity, and their diatonic melodic content and romance-themed text reinforce this. Elise and Pauline are prepared to “suffer for love”, while the setting of Madeleine’s text conveys her discomfort and disagreement with these sentiments. Madeleine’s multi-faceted performance of femininity, which includes stereotypically masculine and feminine instrumentation (Dill, 2013), a wider vocal range and a variety of meters, is also evident in her green gown, symbolising jealousy and mystery (Storaro, 2004); this is juxtaposed with Elise and Pauline’s stereotypically feminine pink and yellow gowns (Elans, 2014), and the romance and potential submission associated with depictions of femininity is reinforced with their text, as they sing about suffering for love. However, at the end of the opera, Pauline also appears to be unhappy with her situation, and turns to Madeleine, the new apothecary, for assistance. This shows she also has a sense of female agency by seeking help to change her circumstances.

Interesting findings were revealed regarding the men in the opera, which Crankshaw and Best use to criticise themes of objectification and the male gaze through text and music. The male gaze, initially described by Mulvey (1975), describes male creators’ objectification and sexualisation of female subjects, projecting male fantasies and limiting female agency through various techniques (Mwadzi, 2021). A critique of the male gaze is apparent in *The Apothecary*, as the predatory apothecary’s character attempts to assert control over Madeleine and requests that she repay him with sexual favours; this sinister characterisation is emphasised with Crankshaw’s deliberate use of percussive instrumentation, rigid tempi and rhythm, Best’s specific rhyming couplets, and the set design. These features reinforced elements of a masculine “controlling” (Dill, 2013) nature, which was Best and Crankshaw’s intention. Furthermore, François’s self-serving nature and objectification of his lovers are evident in Best’s text and Crankshaw’s elaborate coloratura vocal writing, which draws parallels to the sensual, ogling melismatic writing in Stradella’s *La Susanna* (Dunlop, 2001). However, the

apothecary's lust for and underestimation of Madeleine leads to his downfall, as she tricks him into drinking the belladonna poison. François and the apothecary are thus depicted in a critical light, providing commentary on the male gaze.

6.2.4 How is femininity interpreted and performed musically and textually in the contemporary opera *The Apothecary*?

Femininity is performed musically in *The Apothecary* through Crankshaw's use of meter, instrumentation, rhythm, harmony and the variety of singing styles. This is evident in scene 4, where Madeleine's performance of femininity is contrasted with those of Elise and Pauline. Crankshaw (2021) deliberately intended to show Madeleine's difference from the other women through instrumentation, rhythm and dissonant harmonies in this scene. Madeleine's contrasting meters and harmonies, wider vocal range and greater variety of singing styles distinguish her from Elise and Pauline, simultaneously implying her unhappiness with societal expectations of women and her complex intentions. Crankshaw's effective setting of Best's text emphasises certain performances of femininity, which is notable when the three women sing "We must suffer for love" in scene 4. While Elise and Pauline sing more legato and with diatonic harmonies, displaying their acceptance of societal expectations of women, Madeleine's setting of the text is staccato and fragmented with a minor tonality, indicating her discomfort and frustration. Elise and Pauline's diatonic melodies arguably reinforce their acceptance of the status quo regarding "female submissiveness" (Dill, 2013) as well as the "romantic" themes associated with women (Dill, 2013).

The cyclical musical and textual themes of 'translucence' and 'belladonna' also display aspects of Madeleine's performance of femininity. The development of musical themes has been used in effective ways to show heroine's character development and emotional trajectory in opera, with notable examples illustrated in Chin's *Alice in Wonderland* (2007), Hofmeyr's *Saartjie* (2014) and Ndodana-Breen's *Winnie: The opera* (2011). Crankshaw varies the musical themes in *The Apothecary* with augmentation and modulation, which is evident with both the 'belladonna' and 'translucence' themes. The use of the 'belladonna' and 'translucence' themes potentially showcases Madeleine's changing intentions and how she develops more female agency throughout the opera.

In *The Apothecary*, the 'translucence' theme, marked by descending scales, emphasises Madeleine's fascination with the apothecary's profession and her desire to learn more about

the potions. This, in turn, emphasises the autonomy she feels when using them and distinguishes her performance of femininity from those of the other women. The ‘belladonna’ theme hints at the potentially dangerous aspects of Madeleine’s sensuality and hints at *femme fatale* stereotypes evident with heroines such as Carmen, Lulu and Salomé. While the ‘belladonna’ theme appears to be a comment on Madeleine’s beauty and the apothecary’s sinister intentions towards her, it soon becomes indicative of her manipulation and the way she uses her sensuality to gain power. The use of the ‘belladonna’ theme also displays an interesting progression from operatic *femme fatales*. Although Carmen, Lulu and Salomé are unconventional and alluring and resist control, ultimately they become victims of fatal violence and seemingly punished for their sensuality (Sharma, 2020). Madeleine, while remaining a flawed heroine, lives after murdering the apothecary and resisting his control, reflecting a unique performance of femininity.

6.2.5 How does the music and text challenge and/or reinforce the performances of femininity in the opera?

The Apothecary simultaneously reinforces and challenges performances of femininity through music and text. While the opera does reinforce elements of *femme fatale* opera tropes and themes of feminine hysteria, it also challenges gendered stereotypes about women characters in Romantic opera, notably through Madeleine’s character development.

Romantic stereotypes about feminine hysteria are alluded to in Madeleine’s character. Madeleine’s intense emotions are evident as she laments François’s serial unfaithfulness in scene 1, describing that the pain is as if he has “ripped out [her] heart, [her] liver!” She later tells the apothecary in scene 2 that she is “sick with jealousy” and adds in scene 7 that she is conflicted between her desire for François and her “wish to kill him”. These claims reinforce themes of operatic women seeming hysterical and unreasonable. Madeleine further reinforces Romantic stereotypes about performances of femininity through *femme fatale* characteristics, as she uses her sensuality to bring about the downfall of the apothecary. She takes advantage of the apothecary’s desire for her to manipulate him into drinking the belladonna poison.

However, while many *femme fatales* and Romantic opera heroines have their autonomy taken away from them or die by the end of the opera, Madeleine’s character arc concludes in a position of strength and power. Although she uses morally dubious means to do so, Madeleine’s dissatisfaction with societal expectations of women, her realisation of the

apothecary's sinister motives and her disillusionment with François compels her to take matters into her own hands. The 'belladonna' musical and textual theme reflects how the Romantic *femme fatale* tropes are subtly subverted in *The Apothecary*, as it closes with Madeleine in a place of fulfilment and independence, contrary to *femme fatale* characters such as Carmen or Lulu.

Madeleine's performance of femininity also displays curiosity in a profession, a difference from gendered Romantic stereotypes. The 'translucence' motif not only demonstrates Madeleine's moral ambiguity, but also emphasises her intelligence and the way she finds fulfilment in a profession, aspects that Crankshaw and Best took to be unusual for a woman of the time.

6.2.6 Main research question: How is femininity performed in *The Apothecary*?

Therefore, *The Apothecary* displays nuanced and ambiguous performances of femininity, especially in Madeleine, the protagonist. The ending is a "wolf in sheep's clothing" (Best, interview, 2023) that challenges traditional performances of femininity in opera and allows for reflection on contemporary expectations of femininity and criticisms of the male gaze.

6.3 Limitations of the study

Several limitations of this study are acknowledged. A specific theoretical theory, such as Schenkerian analysis or Neo-Riemannian analysis, could possibly have been implemented in the theoretical analysis of the opera for greater musical insights. Insights from the stage director regarding his vision for the cast in the opera and how this impacts the performances of femininity in the live recording of *The Apothecary* may have also enhanced the analyses.

Another limitation is that the perspective of only one South African female composer and librettist was included; therefore, the findings regarding performances of femininity are limited to this opera and not necessarily generalisable to other works by South African female composers. Furthermore, the interviews with Crankshaw and Best were conducted over Zoom. Although there are many benefits to online interviewing, there is also the possibility that they do not have the same spontaneity and conversational flow as in-person interviews and some social characteristics and cues may not be as perceptible in an online setting.

6.4 Recommendations for future research

The study suggests that it would be beneficial for future research to interview a broader range of South African female composers who have composed opera, to gather more viewpoints about the South African opera scene and how femininity is performed in South African operas. Further studies about performances of femininity in contemporary opera would be a valuable input into musical academic literature, especially for contemporary operas written by South African composers. It would be insightful to analyse performances of femininity in Hendrik Hofmeyr's *Sara Baartman* (2022) and Clare Loveday's *Where does the air go?* (2022), as femininity in these operas is performed in complex and varying ways. A recent contemporary work that may explore performances of femininity in intriguing ways is Conrad Asman's one-act opera *Trial by Media* (2024), which discusses the Oscar Pistorius murder trial. It would be insightful to investigate the themes relating to South African gender-based violence and performances of femininity with the depiction of the late Reeva Steenkamp, whom Pistorius murdered in 2013. A natural progression of this work is to analyse the lead characters in South African contemporary operas and how femininity is performed in them. It also would be insightful to host discussions with the creative teams of South African opera companies, such as Cape Town Opera, for their perspectives and aims regarding performances of femininity in the operas they produce. Additionally, I would encourage more analyses and reflection on musical works by South African female composers, including operas such as *Bessie: The blue-eyed Xhosa* (2015) by Angelique Mouyis.

Furthermore, I would encourage further analyses of Amy Crankshaw's musical output. During the course of writing this dissertation, Crankshaw has premiered more operas in workshops at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, written a song cycle with Clare Best called *End of Season* and orchestrated Pauline Viardot's 1904 opera *Cendrillon*. Research on her output would be a valuable addition to current scholarship, especially as limited academic research is available on the works of prominent South African female composers. Although academic research regarding female composers is increasing, a detailed academic account of significant South African female composers is a valuable contribution to South African musicology that remains to be written.

6.5 Concluding remarks

The Apothecary demonstrates a progression from Hadlock's quote (2012): "opera marshals the power of narrative, theatre and music to make the audience desire the heroine's death as both inevitable and beautiful" (p. 259). *The Apothecary* is an intriguing opera with many themes that are thought-provoking for contemporary audiences. Crankshaw and Best's explorative collaboration created an opera with complex musical and textual elements that simultaneously conforms to and subverts traditional performances of femininity. The focus on Madeleine's character development places her performance of femininity at the forefront of the opera, and her journey from helplessness and despair to independence and fulfilment emphasises her female agency.

This dissertation is the first comprehensive investigation of a South African female composer's operatic work and the first to focus specifically on the performances of femininity. The insights gained from this study may stimulate conversations amongst creatives within the contemporary opera industry and may assist aspiring opera composers who hope to investigate the narratives regarding femininity in opera.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information Letter



Dear Ms Crankshaw and Ms Best

My name is Kate Watson. I am a student at the University of Pretoria: School of the Arts, and I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree. This letter serves to provide information about my research study.

My research study is entitled "Performances of femininity in Amy Crankshaw's *The Apothecary*". I am aiming to investigate how femininity is performed in this opera, and whether this challenges traditional Western ideas of femininity. I aim to do this by conducting interviews with Ms Crankshaw, the composer, and Ms Best, the librettist, of the 2021 Guildhall School of Music & Drama production of *The Apothecary*, to discuss a South African feminist perspective of how femininity is performed in this opera.

Your participation will involve a semi-structured interview which will take approximately 45 minutes of your time. The interview will be audio-recorded. The study will only begin after ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria, has been obtained. For the purposes of this research, it is preferred that your identity is revealed.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. You may also elect not to answer a question posed to you during the interview. There are no risks or direct benefits in participating in this project. If you decide to withdraw there will be no negative consequences to you, nor will you need to explain your reason. You are encouraged to ask any questions you may have about this study.

The research will be used for academic purposes only. The data will be archived at the University of Pretoria: School of the Arts for a minimum of 15 years. If any other researchers would like to use the archived transcriptions during this time they may do so.

Please feel free to contact me if you require more information about the study.

Kind regards



KATE WATSON

twinkatewatson@gmail.com

072 976 3761

Appendix B: Consent Form



LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT: REPLY SLIP

FULL NAME: _____

RESEARCH TOPIC: **Performances of femininity in Amy Crankshaw's *The Apothecary***

I hereby give my consent to participate in the aforementioned research project and acknowledge that the data may be used in future and current research. I give my consent to having my identity disclosed for the purposes of this research. I confirm that I understand what is required of me in the research project. I am aware that I may withdraw from the study at any time, should I wish to do so.

Name of participant Signature of participant Date

Name of student/principal researcher Signature of student/principal researcher

Name of research supervisor Signature of research supervisor

Appendix C: Letter requesting the use of the 2021 performance of *The Apothecary*'s video recording



Dear Ms Crankshaw and Ms Best

My name is Kate Watson. I am a student at the University of Pretoria: School of the Arts, and I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree. This letter serves to provide information about my research study and to request permission for me to use the video recording of the 2021 performance of *The Apothecary*.

My research study is entitled "Performances of femininity in Amy Crankshaw's *The Apothecary*". I am aiming to investigate how femininity is performed in this opera, and whether this challenges traditional Western ideas of femininity. I aim to do this by conducting an interview with Ms Crankshaw, the composer, and Ms Best, the librettist, of the 2021 Guildhall School of Music & Drama production of *The Apothecary*, to discuss a South African feminist perspective of how femininity is performed in this opera. In addition, I will be analysing the score of *The Apothecary* and watching extracts from the 2021 filmed performance to further investigate how femininity is performed in this opera. As the video of the 2021 performance of *The Apothecary* is not in the public domain, I would like to request your permission to use and discuss this in my study. I will ensure that I do not share the video publicly.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. There are no risks or direct benefits in participating in this project. If you decide to withdraw there will be no negative consequences to you, nor will you need to explain your reason. You are encouraged to ask any questions you may have about this study.

The research will be used for academic purposes only. The data will be archived at the University of Pretoria: School of the Arts for a minimum of 15 years. If any other researchers would like to use the archived transcriptions during this time they may do so.

Please feel free to contact me if you require more information about the study.

Kind regards



KATE WATSON

twinkatewatson@gmail.com

072 976 3761

Appendix D: Semi-structured interview questions with composer and librettist (Amy Crankshaw and Clare Best)

1. What inspired you to write this opera, and what were key figures or moments that influenced this opera?
2. Could you describe your creative process when composing an opera score?
3. What inspired and motivated you to write this opera?
4. What do you feel was the intention of this opera?
5. What inspired the choice of libretto?
6. Tell me about your views on gender roles when composing the opera. (It seems to me that this opera touches on ideas of femininity in certain ways.)
7. What felt important to you to convey musically in this opera? How did you tackle issues of music and text in conveying gender issues in the opera?
8. How does it feel to have experienced the performance of your opera? Is there anything that struck you post-composition and post-performance?
9. What are your thoughts on performances of femininity in other operas?
10. What do you think is important for contemporary opera composers to focus on? Which issues are important?
11. In your experience, what are the challenges of writing an opera of this nature (ie. addressing cultural performances of femininity)?
12. How would you describe the South African contemporary opera scene?
13. How would you describe feminist perspectives in South African contemporary compositions?
14. How can feminist perspectives be explored in South African contemporary operas?

Appendix E: Examples of analyses of data sets

Example of interview analyses, using verbatim quotes from composer and librettist

main themes (sentence)	sub themes	amy crankshaw	clare best
the conceptualisation of the opera	generation of idea	poem a key moment. really rich content, various ways that the story could go	straightforward narrative in poem. monologue spoken by a woman think a little bit about operatic canon make something that had a kind of historical context, but didn't adhere to historical tropes in any particular ways make something that appeared a wolf in sheep's clothing. challenges for me in terms of what to do with the language. linguistic toral set of challenges for me as a writer
	intentions & course requirements	Clare and I part of this master's program in opera making. the intention was to make opera together, see what the possibilities were	We knew from the start - maximum cast of five, needing to be a mix. dealing with both male and female singers
	layers of meaning in plot		a few layers already, before you get into it, makes it easier to take something as an inspiration, already has this depth of story, history we worked on certain arias, certain patches to begin with, I would always show Amy something I'd come up with you don't want to impose things on it. You want things to emerge from the space that you've created
	creative collaboration		my process, involved a lot of experimentation, even more because I haven't had experience of writing libretto
	explorative creative process	a discussion between Clare, myself and the actual piece explored the characters more and more, certain themes became more apparent. reflective space, allowing space for imagination opera is different to writing purely instrumental music. narratives, connotations that we might, consciously or not consciously, be tapping into.	an authentic and a good story. the vessel that carries whatever people read into it the unique ability of opera to mess around with time, one of the best things about it in terms of storytelling, focus on something that might be just very discreetly and you unpack it. important that opera does address subjects or talk about stories which address subjects that make people think really hard about issues that are important to us all. there will be layers and layers of meaning
authentic storytelling in contemporary opera	exploring social issues through contemporary opera	issues or stories that are important to the maker. it's a genuine piece, honest opera has this beautiful way of telling a story and leaving things to be explored. the aria that that explores one thought for a long time find a balance between how much you're telling, and how much you're leaving open to interpretation social issues are important, those stories need to be told, through whatever means that they can be Opera wouldn't have the magical sort of open minded power that it could have if makers went into it with a very strong, contrived way of choosing to tell the story, a nuance to be had, where we stop and allow others to take over the discussion	those issues have to come after the story, has to be really good story with convincing characters, and the work has to be really good. then people will find all sorts of stuff in it.

Example of score analyses, detailing different musical elements in each scene

	RHYTHMS	MELODIES	ATMOSPHERE	INSTRUMENTATION	METER	FORM	VOICE TYPE, RANGE
Scene 1: Madeleine's aria	Triplet rhythms Quintuplets	Dissonance Lots of intervals of a 2nd soprano line: Chromaticism, 7 th interval leaps, 1 F- sharp major scale pattern Lots of glissandi with string instruments Extreme swelling crescendos and <u>descrescendos</u>	Uneasy, sinister	Percussive elements with woodwinds and brass – key clicks, double tonguing, tongue slaps	4/4, 5/4, 3/4	Sections A B C D E	Soprano, middle voice and lower register

Example of video analysis

	scene 1	scene 2	scene 2.2	scene 3	scene 4	scene 5	scene 6	scene 7	scene 8
lighting	blue - despair	red		grey, white	White, then blue, then green when Elise is stung by the 'eye drops'. Reinforces jealousy and	Dark, single red light on the apothecary, then red light broadens	Mostly white/yellow light. Red light with intense shadows with Madeleine –	Red light changes to apothecary's desk	
blocking								Madeleine and apothecary circle desk. Later, Madeleine grabs her gown as she sings 'belladonna'. Probably referring to double meaning of word - beautiful woman and poison.	
stage design			Anatomical drawings projected, skeleton etc	Black and white video of woman's face projected - indicative of the apothecary's lust/objectification, male gaze		Red plume as apothecary gives Madeleine the aphrodisiac – ominous. Could symbolise love or danger		Black and white checked tile design on floor and wall – projections.	Francois and lovers – background image of nude Renaissance woman. Reinforces themes of sensuality. Madeleine's apothecary shop - red lighting, green backdrop
costume design	eighteenth century French fashions. madeleine = only character who does not wear a white wig				Madeleine wears green dress – colour associated with jealousy. Elise and Pauline wear pink and yellow –symbolic of traditional femininity, childishness?				Madeleine changes into a plain black outfit, like the apothecary
									effective use of green and red