

IRONY IN DANIEL CATÁN'S *SALSIPUEDES*:  
GENRE, NARRATIVE, AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLITICS

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An Essay

Presented to  
The Faculty of the  
Moore School of Music  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts

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By  
Jacob Daniel Sustaita  
December, 2016

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## ABSTRACT

Daniel Catán (1949–2011) sought to synthesize classical tradition with Latin idioms to create original and distinct compositions. His Caribbean-inspired fourth opera, *Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies* combines elements of comedy, irony, and tragedy in a satirical and moral story. This analysis identifies how Catán uses ironic strategies and narrative transformation to comment and reflect on the issues that he believed plagued contemporary society. Catán uses two secondary characters as his platform for delivering his message, and he relied on slow and methodical character development to transform the overall narrative from comedy to tragedy.

I argue that the temporal rupture created by these two characters is reflected musically, textually, and dramatically. By drawing on the scholarship of irony in music and musical narrative analysis, this paper demonstrates how Catán deploys ironic methods and a secondary dramatic thread to support the opera's dramatic intention and intensify the dishonest practices of society's leaders.

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## Introduction

Inspired by his Latin heritage and culture, Daniel Catán's (1949–2011) connection to his Hispanic background exerted a deep influence over his compositional output. He is known primarily for his four published Spanish-language operas that embody the synthesis of classical traditions with Latin idioms. Recognized as a scholar of literature, philosophy, and music, Catán sought to assimilate multiple art forms and styles in his operas. Each of his operas is a distillation of his view of humanity. They are meaningful expressions of life, music, and poetry, and each opera conveys an important message about human existence.

A satirical allegory on contemporary society, *Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies* (2004) is a Caribbean-inspired opera that combines aspects of comedy and tragedy with ironic strategies.<sup>1</sup> Ostensibly, the opera's primary narrative follows two sets of lovers as they try to reconcile misinterpreted actions and emotions; underneath the primary narrative unfolds a deeper layer, second dramatic thread driven by two seemingly ancillary characters, General García and his personal assistant, Sergeant Guzmán.

García and Guzmán represent the corruption that Catán believed plagued the twentieth century, and these characters operate as a vehicle for the deployment of ironic strategies to reflect on contemporary issues. The following analysis examines how

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Catán, *Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies* (Milwaukee: Associated Music Publishers, 2008).

General García and Sergeant Guzmán create a rupture in the opera's discourse through a series of events framed and characterized by the use of ironic strategies, resulting in the opera's narrative shift from comedy to tragedy.

The opera's title alone evokes humor and irony with its absurd juxtaposition of the words love, war, and anchovies.<sup>2</sup> The title develops interest and invites the listener to imagine the possible associations among these elements. Catán's satirical title personifies how he uses comedy and serious social issues to expose and criticize the corruption of society's political leaders. To that end, the opera's seeks to improve humanity by stressing certain characters' shortcomings and the resultant effects on society.

The premiere of *Salsipuedes* received an unenthusiastic reception, unlike the critical acclaim and successful premieres of Catán's framing operas, *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996) and *Il Postino* (2008–2010). This indifference toward *Salsipuedes* stems from an emphasis on the surface-level comic narrative and Caribbean theme of the opera; however, the opera's overall narrative archetype is a function of a more profound and subtle dramatic thread driven by two ancillary characters.

Catán described how he and Eliseo Alberto, the opera's primary librettist, formed the idea for the opera:

As Eliseo Alberto and I developed the libretto, we realized that – outlandish though it seemed – it captured the essence of much of the twentieth century. Political ideologies, corruption, and a generous mixture of both have caused more displacements, more misery, and more pain than ever before in our history. It is

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<sup>2</sup> The librettists for *Salsipuedes*, Eliseo Alberto and Francisco Hinojosa, are primarily responsible for the humor and use of comic textual and dramatic elements in the opera. Catán, email messages to Gockley, March–September, 2003, Demme Archives Resource Center. The title for *Salsipuedes* was a creation of Catán and the artistic staff at the Houston Grand Opera. A company-wide competition was created by David Gockley to create a title that encompassed the essence of the opera. In the end, Catán pieced together various proposals to come up with the final title, *Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies*.

ordinary citizens, however, whose wedding plans and honeymoons get interrupted, who pay the enormous bill. This was a complicated story to tell, for it is simultaneously tragic and ridiculous. We wanted to keep those two qualities in the opera and at the same time deliver a serious message.<sup>3</sup>

Catán's intention of delivering a message about dishonesty and the subsequent effects it has on society operates as a political satire concealed in a Caribbean-inspired opera.

Catán perceived corruption and greed as a threat to modern society, and through *Salsipuedes*, he sought to warn audiences of the dangers in contemporary politics and to change societal opinions on these matters. Catán realizes this goal by mixing comedy and tragedy with ironic techniques.

This analysis identifies the variety and implementation of ironic strategies used for musical, textual, and dramatic ends, and this analysis explores how these strategies strengthen the opera's moral significance by ridiculing and criticizing the dishonest practices in contemporary society. This project offers information and insight designed to guide a more nuanced understanding and realization of the opera.

Most published accounts of Catán's contributions to opera focus on the "magical realism" in *Florencia*, the success of *Il Postino*, and Catán's death.<sup>4</sup> A few remaining sources merely describe *Salsipuedes* as Catán's dark comedy set in the Caribbean, infused with Latin dance rhythms.<sup>5</sup> Though little published scholarship is available on

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Catán, "The Creation of *Salsipuedes*," *Playbill*, October 19, 2004, 38–42.

<sup>4</sup> "The Yellow Trolley Car in Barcelona and Other Visions: An Interview with Gabriel García Márquez," by William Kennedy, *The Atlantic*, January 1973, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1973/01/the-yellow-trolley-car-in-barcelona-and-other-visions/360848/>. "Magical realism" was not an invention of Gabriel García Márquez, but his works are quintessential examples of "magic realism." The term refers to a work of fiction that integrates elements of fantasy into realistic, everyday settings. A few examples include García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Mark Helprin's *Winter Tale* (1983), and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981).

<sup>5</sup> A biography by Sean Bradley provides a thorough background on Catán's life and compositions, and a doctoral dissertation by Andrea Flores focuses on analyzing two arias from *Florencia*. A master's

*Salsipuedes*, valuable information and correspondence regarding the premiere and conception of the opera are housed in the Demme Archives and Resource Center (DARC) at Houston Grand Opera (HGO).

Recognition of Catán's use of irony presents a new opportunity to explore the political implications of *Salsipuedes*, an unobserved connection thus far. By exploring how Catán transforms the opera's overall narrative through characterization, ironic techniques, and musical narrative, his social commentary manifests in a profound way.

### **Background and Synopsis**

Born in Mexico City, Catán received classical piano training at an early age. When he was only 13, Catán moved to England to attend boarding school and continue his piano studies. He later received a degree in philosophy at the University of Sussex and a degree in music at the University of Southampton before moving to the United States in 1973. Catán received a Ph.D. in composition from Princeton University in 1977, where he studied with Milton Babbitt, James Randall, and Benjamin Boretz.<sup>6</sup> His compositional legacy covers a wide range of genres, but composing for the voice was always at the forefront of Catán's creative output.

Regarding his operatic compositions, Catán said the following:

In my work, I am proud to say, one can detect the enormous debt I owe to composers from Monteverdi to Alban Berg. But perhaps the greatest of my debts is having learnt that the originality of an opera need not involve the rejection of

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essay by Renee Rulon Cortez explores the preparation, premiere, and reception of *Il Postino* in the wake of Catán's death.

<sup>6</sup> Sean Bradley, "Daniel Catán: A Brief Biography," *Daniel Catán Foundation*, <http://www.catanfoundation.com/bio> (accessed January 12, 2013), 2.

our tradition – which would be like blindly embracing the condition of an orphan – but rather the profound assimilation of it, so as to achieve the closest union between a text and its music.<sup>7</sup>

Catán's operas achieve this union by setting Spanish texts and Latin idioms with classical musical conventions.

Catán considered his first opera, *Encuentro en el ocaso* (1979), a failure.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, his second opera, *La hija de Rappaccini* (1989), catapulted Catán into the international opera scene when the San Diego Opera launched a successful production. It was during this production that David Gockley, General Director for HGO from 1972 to 2005, took an interest in Catán.

Catán believed that Gockley would ask to produce *La hija* in Houston; instead, Gockley and HGO commissioned a Latin-inspired opera. The result was Catán's third opera, *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996), which was one of HGO's most successful premieres of a new opera.<sup>9</sup> Months after the premiere of *Florencia*, Gockley approached Catán and asked him to create another Latin-inspired opera, and Catán immediately set to work writing a "Caribbean-themed opera with salsa undertones."<sup>10</sup> In the early stages of the opera's conception, Catán described his vision to Gockley:

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<sup>7</sup> "Daniel Catán, 62, Composer of *Il Postino* and *Florencia en el Amazonas*, Has Died," *Opera News*, April 11, 2011, <http://www.operanews.com/operanews/templates/content.aspx?id=19545>.

<sup>8</sup> Catán withdrew this opera from publication, and in lectures he did not acknowledge this as his first opera.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Breslauer, "Into Uncharted Waters: Daniel Catán, Mexico's Leading Opera Composer, Offers a New Work that Provides a Glimpse into the next Century of the Art Form," *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 1997, <http://articles.latimes.com/1997/oct/05/entertainment/ca-39314>. The opera became the largest-grossing premiere in the history of the company at the time. Sales for six performances totaled more than \$712,000.00, and it played to a 90% capacity house, a figure almost unheard of for a new work.

<sup>10</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, October 13, 1997, DARC. HGO's archivist, Brian Mitchell, has been an invaluable asset during my research for this paper. The Demme Archives and Resource Center houses three boxes of correspondence, documents, and scores ranging in dates from 1996–2004 regarding the commission and premiere of *Salsipuedes*. Most of the information used in this paper is found in the box labeled *Salsipuedes*.

I think a story has now taken shape...It takes place in a Caribbean island...It is very much a comedy of errors, somewhat in the spirit of *Così* or *Figaro*. The Caribbean flavor, visuals, and rhythms, will make it very appealing, I think. Would you like to present the last opera buffa of the Twentieth Century?<sup>11</sup>

Eventually, the opera's genre transformed from *opera buffa* into a dark comedy with elements of irony and tragedy. Andrea Catán, the composer's third wife and widow, describes *Salsipuedes* as "a comedy-tragedy. It is a reflection on Cuba and the war [World War II]. [It's] an artist saying the world is cruel and love is an answer."<sup>12</sup>

The opera's title, exaggerated characters, and seemingly optimistic ending after a series of dark and tragic events reflect the work's embodiment of tragedy and comedy. Catán begins the opera with comical lightness by incorporating elements like satire, parody, and caricature. As the opera progresses, the duality of absurdity and seriousness criticize and enhance the deformations of society and culture.

In *Salsipuedes*, Catán uses gestures and tropes long familiar to comic operas as a platform for assimilating operatic traditions with Caribbean idioms. The result is an opera with lyric intensity, ridiculous characters and events, and a serious and universal message. On his publisher's Website, Catán wrote a composer's note about *Salsipuedes*:

I consider the comic opera a very delicate genre. A comedy in this century cannot be the same as it was in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century. For me, comedy is a very serious matter, because it has to joke about things that are otherwise difficult to discuss, and it must also reflect contemporary issues. You have to draw a smile from the listener and at the same time deliver a very serious message. That is what makes it so very challenging.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, August 9, 1997, DARC.

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Catán, interview by author, Houston, TX, October 2, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Catán, "Composer Note," under Programme Note, *Salsipuedes, A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies* (2004), <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/2261/26758> (accessed June 13, 2016).



Catán approached this challenge by using ironic strategies to provide humor and develop a deep and meaningful experience.

Musically, *Salsipuedes* has an original and distinct sound. Catán mixes lyric, dance, comic, and tragic music genres and topics with Afro-Caribbean dance forms, rhythms, and instruments. Catán employs an onstage indigenous Cuban percussion ensemble known as a *son-montuno* ensemble as part of the drama.<sup>14</sup> Catán also eliminates the use of violins and violas in the score, emphasizing the colors of the wind, brass, and percussion sections to create a sound reflective of indigenous Caribbean music ensembles.

The opera takes place in 1943 on a fictional Caribbean island named *Salsipuedes*, roughly translated as “get out if you can.” Reminiscent of follies found in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, the plot involves two sets of lovers, separated on their wedding night, who struggle to reconcile their trust in and love for one another. Meanwhile, the dictator of Salsipuedes declares war against Nazi Germany while secretly attempting to sell goods to Nazi soldiers.

*Salsipuedes* represents the quintessential Catán style, and in his obituary for Catán, music critic David Patrick Stearns describes and compares the music and use of characterization in *Florencia en el Amazonas* (1996) and *Salsipuedes* (2004):

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<sup>14</sup> Manny Patiño and Jorge Moreno, *Afrocuban Keyboard Grooves* (Estados Unidos: Warner Bros, 1997), 20. *Son* is derived from the Spanish word for song and refers to the verse of a Cuban song known also as a *son*. *Montuno* is derived from the Spanish word for mountain, describes the final fast tempo section or refrain of a *son*, and has an improvisational quality that often accompanies a repetitive vocal chorus. The genre *son-montuno* or Songs from the Mountains began as peasant and farmer’s songs around the late nineteenth century, and grew out of the Spanish guitar and lyric traditions combined with Afro-Cuban percussion and rhythm complexities. The *son-montuno* ensemble is typically made up of multiple percussion instruments, trumpet, guitar, and double bass. The music played by the ensemble is characterized by an intense, restless quality made of strongly syncopated percussion rhythms.

The two works showed that harmonic dissonance was hardly a requirement for dramatic substance, partly because he redefined when dissonance was warranted.... Catán's sense of musical architecture enabled his relatively non-dissonant works to hold audience interest. He favoured short, cinematic scenes...[and] the conviction in his operas came not from words or harmonies, but characters.<sup>15</sup>

Stearns's observations are insightful and allude to Catán's technique of structured and careful character development, and in *Salsipuedes*, he uses two supporting characters, General García and Sergeant Guzmán, to deliver a profound and tragic dramatic thread about the dangers of contemporary ideologies.

### Synopsis

The opera consists of three acts containing scenes of arias, ensemble numbers, and orchestral interludes. After a somber prelude, act I opens at the Hotel *Ambos Mundos* as the citizens of Salsipuedes celebrate the recent marriages of the four main characters, Ulises and Lucero, and Chucho and Magali. The two new husbands, Ulises and Chucho, are well-known singers in the island's popular band, *Los Delfines* (The Dolphins). A military convoy halts the celebration to inform Ulises and Chucho that they must leave their respective spouses to change into their military uniforms and perform the national anthem later that evening at the request of General García.

A poignant quartet about love and heartache precedes the final scene of act I, which takes place at a dock and contains music reminiscent of a rhythmically charged and distinctly Caribbean carnival scene. While Ulises and Chucho sing farewell to the

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<sup>15</sup> David Patrick Stearns, "Daniel Catán Obituary," *The Guardian*, last modified April 17, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/apr/17/daniel-catan-obituary>.

sailors and soldiers, a gun is accidentally fired by Sergeant Guzmán, signaling the reconditioned ship, *El Invencible*, to set sail before the singers have a chance to disembark. Confusion, panic, and jubilation surround the unexpected departure as the crowd cheers and the separated lovers desperately search for each other.

In act II, Lucero and Magali set out on foot to find their husbands. In the presidential palace, General García and Sergeant Guzmán celebrate their declaration of war and reveal their intention to sell supplies, goods, and anchovies to the Nazi soldiers patrolling the Caribbean, rather than confronting them militarily. Later that evening, Captain Magallanes docks the ship at Puerto Alegre, where the owner of the local waterfront bar, Madame Colette, warmly greets the passengers. Madame Colette, sung by a baritone dressed as a woman, serves as the liaison between Magallanes and the Nazi soldiers.<sup>16</sup>

Ulises and Chucho drown their sorrows in Colette's bar, and to their surprise, Magallanes announces his intention to abandon his mission and return home that night. La China and Orquídea, two young groupies who flirt shamelessly with Ulises and Chucho, overhear the Captain's announcement and convince the Captain to allow them aboard the ship for the voyage back to the main city.

As La China and Orquídea fetch their belongings, they run into Lucero and Magali, who question the girls about the two famous singers of *Los Delfines* and the ship where they can be found. The girls remark that they are headed to the ship where the singers await them. Hearing this news and enraged with jealousy, Lucero and Magali

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<sup>16</sup> Colette's character is a subversion of the subverted pants roles common in comic operas. Catán's reversal of the traditional pants role serves as an ironic marker, but it is not a marker relevant to this analysis.

disguise themselves with hats and glasses and board the ship to catch their unfaithful husbands. The act concludes with a nostalgic quartet about love and honor sung by Ulises, Chucho, Magallanes, and Colette.

Act III begins with a party in the ship's cargo hold. Ulises and Chucho, still drunk, fail to recognize their disguised wives. Unable to control her feelings at the sight of Chucho with one of the groupies, Magali leaves the party in tears as Lucero ends the game and reveals her identity to Ulises. Chucho rushes to Magali on the ship's deck, where they reconcile and discover the Captain communicating by Morse code with the Nazis by using the ship's light. The passengers seize Magallanes, and unaware of the General's involvement in the plan, the ship's lieutenant contacts General García to inform him of the Captain's betrayal and capture.

A mad scene follows in the presidential palace as General García comes unhinged, knowing his secret plans are unraveling. Guzmán fuels García's mania, sending the General into a fit of lunacy. Guzmán then seizes an opportunity during García's breakdown to assassinate the General. Moments after murdering García, he announces to the nation that the General has committed suicide and that the Nazis have sunk the ship with all its cargo and passengers.

Aboard the ship, the passengers listen to Guzmán's announcement and realize their lives are in danger. German submarines surround the unarmed ship. Magallanes evacuates the passengers and sings a final aria about sacrifice before ramming his ship into the German submarine, killing his enemies and himself, restoring his honor. Clinging

to floating debris, the escaped passengers swim toward the island as they sing a final ensemble about hope and new beginnings.<sup>17</sup>

### **Irony Terminology and Musical Narrative Concepts**

Described by Gockley as “a wacky comedy on the surface, but one with serious undertones,” *Salsipuedes* illustrates how Catán juxtaposes appearance and reality to develop deeper meaning and guide audience expectations.<sup>18</sup> His synthesis of comedic situations and characters with ironic musical strategies creates an opera that transforms from a narrative of comedic irony into a narrative of ironic tragedy. By using ironic strategies, the opera forces the audience to look closer at life and examine the underlying motivations that drive society’s choices. This paper draws on the scholarship on irony and ironic strategies with narrative strategies and archetypes in music forms.<sup>19</sup> I proceed with the consideration of how irony and narrative apply to *Salsipuedes* with a brief description of the terms used in this project.

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<sup>17</sup> “Love and Anchovies: Catán’s *Salsipuedes*,” *NPR.org*, last modified June 13, 2008, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91309131>; Daniel Catán, “The Creation of *Salsipuedes*,” 37–38; In an email sent from Gockley to Catán in November 1997, Gockley asked Catán, “Is it appropriate in a comedy for a reformed character like the captain to meet such a violent end? Unlike the General, who is a real scoundrel.”

<sup>18</sup> Gockley, email message to HGO staff, March 20, 2003, DARC.

<sup>19</sup> For resources on irony and irony strategies see Katherine L. Turner, *This Is the Sound of Irony: Music, Politics and Popular Culture* (Farnham, G.B.: Ashgate, 2015); Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994), 149–52; Wayne C. Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), Part I: “Stable Irony,” 53–76.

## Irony Terminology

Irony is an abstract concept that is often described with generalizations. Scholars agree that irony in any context is a complicated concept, and the function and purpose of irony in a musical setting further complicates the matter.<sup>20</sup> In Turner's "The Sound of Irony/The Irony of Sound," she summarizes and defines irony terminology found in recent literature. Terms of particular relevance are *ironic marker*, *ironic target*, *ironic intention*, *ironic interpretation*, *verbal irony*, *dramatic irony*, and *situational irony*.<sup>21</sup>

1. *Ironic Marker*—An *ironic marker* can be any "coded preparatory sign or gesture," often marked by a shift or change in tempo, texture, orchestration, or topic.<sup>22</sup>
2. *Ironic Target*—An *ironic target* can be represented by a negatively charged character or situation that is subject to criticism, and an *ironic marker* will typically be found framing and integrated with an *ironic target*.<sup>23</sup>
3. *Ironic Intention*—A dramatic work or creation has *ironic intention* if it is "designed to be understood as pointedly ironic."<sup>24</sup> This essay explores the manner in which *Salsipuedes* declares its intention to be understood as an ironic drama.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Turner, *This Is the Sound of Irony*, 1–3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 8–10.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 9. Turner also states that irony can be an unprompted occurrence.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> The work's title serves as the first marker of ironic intention by combining serious terms like *love* and *war* with *anchovies*. The side-by-side placement of these terms infers an ironic intention.

4. *Irony Interpretation*—An *ironic interpretation* can be viewed as an observer or listener's judgment that a character, action, or musical gesture is perceived as ironic, regardless of whether that was the creator's intention.
5. *Verbal Irony*—*Verbal irony* represents contrasts in the literal and intended meanings of words or musical gestures, forms, genres, and topics.
6. *Dramatic Irony*—*Dramatic irony* illustrates a contrast between the observer and the observed. In literature and music, the observer understands more about a situation or musical context than the characters in the drama or musical discourse. Put another way, the characters are unaware of a situation while the observer is aware.
7. *Situational Irony*—*Situational irony* occurs when the characters and observers are unaware of the implications of a situation or when the observer believes in an outcome and instead the exact opposite occurs. An incongruity between what is expected and actuality occurs, usually including sharp contrasts and complex conflicts. This functions to emphasize important events and provide detail to odd or specific images.

Relating the literary function and musical associations of irony is a process intrinsically built on one's projected desire versus the resulting reality. Like literature, music is a process of development and evolution of ideas over time, and ambiguities, tensions, and resolutions in music create meaning and dramatic intention in a composition. These processes are the essence of musical irony: a series of agreements

and disagreements, congruities and incongruities between the expected and the unexpected in service of the overarching idea.<sup>26</sup>

### Musical Narrative Concepts

In literary studies about narrative, archetypes are paradigmatic patterns describing a work's structure and function. One of the pioneers in this field was literary critic and theorist Northrop Frye. His *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) is considered a classic in the systematic approach to myth-criticism and narrativity. Frye claims that archetypes satisfy four mythoi that correspond to the natural world's cycle of four seasons, which can be imagined as the movement around a circle divided into four sections, with each section representing a season and archetype genre.<sup>27</sup>

Frye's diagram illustrates the two movements of narrative as "a cyclic movement within the order of nature, and a dialectical movement into the apocalyptic world," and Byron Almén, building on Frye's work, states that this can depict "motion from innocence to experience and back, or from happiness to catastrophe."<sup>28</sup> Frye describes the two movements as follows: "the downward movement is the tragic movement, the wheel of fortune falling from innocence toward hamartia, and from hamartia to catastrophe. The

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<sup>26</sup> David S. Bündler, "The Power of Irony: Brahms's Setting of Schiller's 'Nanie'," <http://davidsbuendler.freehostia.com/nenia.htm> (accessed 8 September 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 162.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.; Byron Almén, "Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis," *Journal of Music Theory* 47, no.1 (2003): 15.



upward movement is the comic movement, from threatening complications to a happy ending.”<sup>29</sup>

In his diagram, Frye details the qualities of each archetype and states that these four classifications can combine to create further subdivisions of “phases.”<sup>30</sup>

1. *Romance*—*Romance*, designated by summer, symbolizes the defeat of winter and darkness and represents the birth of a hero in an idealized world in which a quest is successfully completed.
2. *Tragedy*—*Tragedy*, assigned to autumn, serves as the opposite of *comedy*, and parallels the dying stage of the seasonal calendar. It also represents the fall or demise of a hero, often with catastrophic results and provoking destruction.
3. *Irony*—Characterized by winter and darkness, *irony* often mocks the three other archetypes through disillusionment by opposing the audience’s expectations and allowing chaos to prevail. In an *ironic* narrative, the protagonist is often absent or defeated.
4. *Comedy*—Spring and wedding situations represent *comedy* as a defeat of winter and darkness. *Comedies* tend to highlight the birth, revival, or resurrection of a hero, rendering a more peaceful society.

In *The Semiotics of Myth*, James Jakób Liszka describes myth as “a displacement of the rules and values which impose an order on culture,” and he modifies Frye’s four

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<sup>29</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 162.

<sup>30</sup> Seth Monahan, *Mahler’s Symphonic Sonatas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 68. Almén’s 16 “phases” are also borrowed from Frye, who allows combinations between adjacent mythoi in his cyclical framework. Each mythos can be inflected by only two of its siblings, yielding a total of eight phases. Frye does not intend his narrative categories to apply to structures outside of literature and myth, but Liszka generalizes the notion of narrative and allows Frye’s theory to connect with musical narrative.

archetypes by describing them as “the result from the intersection of two oppositions” and the transvaluation found within each archetype.<sup>31</sup> Liszka defines his narrative categories with two parameters. First, the archetypes involve the opposition and alignment of victory and defeat of order and transgressor; second, the archetypes contain a conflict or opposition tied to the listener’s sympathies. Liszka arranges the archetypes based on the outcome of the transvaluation of order and transgressor where comedy and romance represent an emphasis on victory while irony and tragedy represent an emphasis on defeat.<sup>32</sup>

While applying literary narrative theory to music analysis may seem unrelated, the central aspects of narrative—reference points, temporal structure, and archetypes—are present in all music forms, and recent research by scholars like Almén and Vincent Meelberg suggests a variety of ways that expression, form, and function in music can be analyzed using narrative theory.<sup>33</sup>

In his writing on narrative theory and criticism, Almén develops the works of Liszka and Frye in his approach to narrative analysis. Almén’s methodology for the analysis of a musical narrative suggests that Liszka’s characteristics of the four archetypes translate onto music forms. Almén organizes his theory with Liszka’s parameters of opposing forces and sympathies: romance as victory of the order over

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<sup>31</sup> James Jakób Liszka, *The Semiotics of Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 140; Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>32</sup> Liszka, *The Semiotics of Myth*, 189.

<sup>33</sup> For other resources on narrative readings in music see Michael L. Klein and Nicholas W. Reyland, eds., *Music and Narrative Since 1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Vincent Meelberg, *New Sounds, New Stories: Narrativity in Contemporary Music* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2006).

transgression, tragedy as defeat of the transgression by order, irony as defeat of the order by transgression, and comedy as the victory of the transgression over order.<sup>34</sup>

Seth Monahan's *Mahler's Symphonic Sonatas* summarizes Almén's realization:

Following James Jakób Liszka (1989), Almén believes that the ultimate nature of any narrative "crisis" and "confrontation" will depend on the observer's rhetorical or ethical alignment vis-à-vis the elements at play and the system in which they stand to be revalued. Speaking very broadly, his or her sympathies may lie with the initial hierarchical arrangement—the prevailing order of things—or with the transgression that stands to upset it. To track these alignments, Almén adopts Liszka's four narrative *mythoi*—comedy, romance, irony, and tragedy—which serve as superordinate narrative "archetypes."<sup>35</sup>

Almén's definition of musical narrative states, "A musical narrative is the process through which the listener perceives and tracks a culturally significant transvaluation of hierarchical relationships within a temporal span."<sup>36</sup> Almén's statement implies that music analysis, like literary criticism, engages tensions between a series of positive or negative values, resolving either favorably or unfavorably, and he describes in detail how musical characteristics like genre and topic can serve as cues, which can provide a basis for a musical narrative analysis.

In *New Sounds, New Stories: Narrativity in Contemporary Music*, Meelberg comments on the absolute quality of narrative: "narrative can be regarded as a means to make sense of the world, to structure the human subject's experiences and to integrate these into a graspable whole."<sup>37</sup> By knowing the qualities that create these four archetypes, an audience member or performer can better identify and understand the patterns associated with each archetype. According to János László, a narrative analysis

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<sup>34</sup> Almén, "Narrative Archetypes," 18, 29–30.

<sup>35</sup> Monahan, *Mahler's Symphonic Sonatas*, 67; Liszka's *mythoi* are adaptations of Frye's, as presented in *Anatomy of Criticism*.

<sup>36</sup> Almén, "Narrative Archetypes," 12.

<sup>37</sup> Meelberg, *New Sounds, New Stories*, 33.

can function within the medium of music because narrative temporality organizes events and characteristics into an integrated whole in a way similar to music.<sup>38</sup>

Nicholas Reyland suggests that music has a “fundamentally plot-like aspect [in its] presentation of sequences of events implying causation, teleology, and a marked degree of change over time.”<sup>39</sup> James Hepokoski’s and Warren Darcy’s *Elements of Sonata Theory*, uses narrative devices when describing the functions of events in Classical sonatas.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Almén states that the task of a music narrative analysis should achieve the following:

Correlate the details of musical activity with a temporal model that describes how the primary conflicting elements influence each other...An effective analysis must attempt to explain why certain musical events seem surprising, interesting, shocking, or otherwise salient.<sup>41</sup>

While Almén’s narrative theory concentrates mainly on tonal music, the focus on the transvaluation of musical elements and events beyond basic tonal framework encourages new and informative interpretations. Rebecca Leydon asserts, “the surge of secondary parameters in post-tonal music could serve as a means of liberating musical narrativity from the structures of common-practice processes...[and secondary parameters] can act as narrative triggers.”<sup>42</sup> In opera, the text provides an important referential point for forming a musical narrative. However, regardless of text, music

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<sup>38</sup> János László, *The Science of Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Psychology* (London: Routledge, 2008), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Reyland, “Negation and Negotiation: Plotting Narrative through Literature and Music from Modernism to Postmodernism,” in *Music and Narrative since 1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 29.

<sup>40</sup> James A. Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Almén, “Narrative Archetypes,” 20.

<sup>42</sup> Rebecca Leydon, “Narrativity, Descriptivity, and Secondary Parameters: Ecstasy Enacted in Salvatore Sciarrino’s *Infinito Nero*,” in *Music and Narrative since 1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 310.

contains events and reference points created through elements like tonality, harmonic function, cadence, structure, form, patterns, topic, and genre. Therefore, the consideration of the techniques of irony and narrative analytic methodology provide the foundation for understanding how Catán employs elements of comedy, irony, and tragedy in *Salsipuedes*.

### **García and Guzmán: Irony Markers, Strategies, and Narrative**

Catán's characters have a depth specifically because he gave extra consideration to their motivations and psychology. Describing this process in a personal communication with me, Andrea Catán reflected on her husband's "obsession with developing the characters in his operas. His compositional process was intrinsically tied to the psychology and meaning of the characters in his operas. With General García, [Catán] wanted to get in the head of a crazy person and convey that."<sup>43</sup>

Catán's characterization of García and Guzmán is a slow psychological process developed over the three acts gradually disclosing the complexity and behavior of the leaders. García and Guzmán represent a duality of comedy and tragedy, absurd and serious interpretations.<sup>44</sup> García's caricature-like portrayal and Guzmán's obsequiousness represent Catán's witty and ironic portrayal of contemporary leaders. Each of their scenes

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<sup>43</sup> Andrea Catán, interview.

<sup>44</sup> In his 2004 interview with Ramon Jacques, Catán described the genesis of the opera: "I had a very clear idea as to how the opera should develop musically, so we started creating the scenes and the characters to fit those [previously formed] musical ideas. Once we have agreed on a musically attractive and convincing sequence [of scenes] then—and only then—are we ready to start working on the dialogue for each scene." Daniel Catán, interview by Ramon Jacques, "Latin Rhythms," *Playbill*, October 19, 2004, 10.

is a dialogue, and these dialogues take the form of a presidential speech, a recitative, and a mad scene. These scenes provide the listener an opportunity to examine the men's motivations, and they provide the core of Catán's message.

In October 1997, Catán sent Gockley an early draft of the synopsis for *Salsipuedes* in which he detailed his ideas for the opera's stage design, aesthetic, and characterization. Catán's message illustrates his vision of the opera:

[The opera's design should have the] exaggerated tone of a comic strip...[and] the comic strip aesthetic seems to fit nicely [with] my conception of the characters: they are frequently presented as caricatures: the owner of the bar [Madame Colette] (represented by a baritone), the General himself a decrepit dictator (looks like a bull dog with nasty sun glasses), the yes-man [Guzmán] and the revolting scene where he makes his speech wiping tears off his face, and so on. This is important to me because it will have musical consequences: the continuity will be somewhat like the comic strip except in those cases where we try to make a tender point. The rest will end abruptly, with the frozen gesture in the face of the singer and the music cutting off suddenly. Some films, like for example Dick Tracy, have tried to do this. But I am not aware that it has been attempted in opera. I would like to try and this plot seems the right one, with its archetypal characters.<sup>45</sup>

Catán's description provides insight into how he uses ironic markers and strategies in the music, text, and actions of General García and Sergeant Guzmán to shape the opera's narrative shift from comedy to irony and tragedy. The exaggerated tone of the character and dramatic development is an essential element in creating a cartoon-like aesthetic.<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, the secondary dramatic thread created by García and Guzmán defeats the primary narrative of the lovers by capitalizing on and exploiting musical and narrative ironies, and in the end, the audience realizes that the leaders' greed, deceit, and corruption cause a violent collapse and catastrophic turn of events.

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<sup>45</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, October 13, 1997, DARC. Often used for social and political satires, caricature serves as a device of exaggeration to create a comic effect.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Evans, interview with author, Houston, TX, December 3, 2016. In his close work with Catán, Evans described the irony of a cartoon character (García) having the power of life and death over an entire country.

The following analysis identifies the primary ironic markers and strategies used in García's and Guzmán's three appearances in the opera (act I, scene 3; act II, scene 3; and act III, scene 3). The intention of this analysis is to show how Catán uses irony to add importance and meaning to the opera's moral lesson. After identifying the central ironic markers, I will show how these strategies transform the opera's overarching narrative; however, this analysis is not an exhaustive list of all the ironic strategies.

### Act I—"Descent to the Raw"

The first two scenes in act I establish the parameters for a comic narrative. General García and Sergeant Guzmán first appear in act I, scene 3 to announce the declaration of war against the Nazis, pledge allegiance to the Allies, and dispatch a reconditioned ship to patrol the waters surrounding *Salsipuedes*. This scene begins the opera's narrative shift from the world of ideology to the world of realism that initiates the beginning of a tragic movement from comedy to irony and tragedy.<sup>47</sup>

In scene 3, Catán juxtaposes musical, dramatic, and narrative characteristics commonly found in comedy and irony archetypes to enhance the estrangement between the citizens of *Salsipuedes* and their leaders, García and Guzmán. The sharp and, at times, extreme contrasts help detail the characters' development and add vividness to the expressive qualities of the men.

Formally, the scene is a juxtaposition of dance and dialogue, framed with dance topics reminiscent of a Caribbean carnival. Humor is created by the entrapment of Ulises

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<sup>47</sup> Almén, "Narrative Archetypes," 15.

and Chucho aboard the ship as it departs the island, by the odd placement of the presidential speech inside of a rousing dance scene, and by the dialogue's sharp contrast of fanfare, lament, and tragic topics. The ironic strategies in the scene include the exaggeration and parody of the characters Chino, the lottery ticket seller, and García, the complex layering of Afro-Caribbean rhythms in the carnival music, and the distortion of two disparate genres.<sup>48</sup>

Catán described the scene in the following manner: "The whole idea of a Carnival has to do with this descent to the raw...it amplifies the sense of being down there."<sup>49</sup> The dance topic relies on the social and cultural conventions associated with Caribbean dances. The topic is a hypnotic summons of the citizens of *Salsipuedes* and is marked with complex Afro-Caribbean rhythmic ostinatos played onstage by the *son-montuno* ensemble, pentatonic melodies sung by Chino, low-style dance forms, and themes of fate and destiny.<sup>50</sup> By combining these elements with the ironic strategies of exaggeration, parody, distortion, Catán evokes a relatedness and social commonality with the listener.

Catán described Chino the lottery vendor and the important role he plays, saying, "[Chino] represents the Carnival. He sings couplets about destiny, life, and death. He is a kind of subconscious figure, a surreal character that plays at that raw, deep level, where you find the very basic things in life."<sup>51</sup> Chino is the first idealized character introduced in the opera, and his syncopated musical motive built on a pentatonic scale and text

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<sup>48</sup> Scene 3 begins with the layering of a 2–3 clave rhythmic pattern played by the onstage *son-montuno* percussion ensemble.

<sup>49</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, October 13, 1997, DARC.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Hatten, "On Narrativity in Music: Expressive Genres and Levels of Discourse in Beethoven," *Indiana Theory Review* 12, (1991): 77–78.

<sup>51</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, October 13, 1997, DARC.



representing fate and destiny provides a clear ironic marker (see Ex.1).<sup>52</sup> Chino's character is a satire and parody on the Chinese-Cuban immigrants who practiced a version of *santería* and divination.<sup>53</sup> This strategy adds exoticism and humor to this character and emphasizes the themes of destiny, fate, and sacrifice.

EXAMPLE 1. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act I, sc. 3, mm. 30–37 (vocal score).

The musical score for Example 1, measures 30–37, is presented in a multi-staff format. The top four staves represent the percussion ensemble: Clave, Palitos, Congas, and Bongos. The fifth staff is the vocal line for Chino, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the tempo/style marking 'Misterioso'. The lyrics 'Cóm - pre - le al Chi' are written below the vocal line. The bottom two staves are for Piano I (Pno I) and Piano II (Pno II). Pno I features a melodic line with triplets and a sextuplet, while Pno II provides a harmonic accompaniment. The score is written in 2/4 time and includes various musical notations such as rests, notes, and dynamic markings.

<sup>52</sup> The pitches outline a pentatonic scale built as C–D–E–G–A; the pentatonic scale adds to the elemental and folk quality of Chino's character.

<sup>53</sup> "In the nineteenth century a syncretic religious tradition known as *San Fan Con* developed, mixing elements of Afro-Cuban *santería* with the cult of Guan Gong, who was transformed into a protector of Chinese immigrants in Cuba." Kathleen López, "Remaking Havana's Barrio Chino," in *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 163.

34

Clave

Palitos

Congas

Bongos

Chino

- no ca - se - ra su bi - lle - ti - co de suer - te Y rí - a - se

Pno I

Pno II

*p*

*mp*

CHINO:           Cómprele al Chino,           Buy from Chino,  
casera su billetico           he will hunt your little [lottery] ticket  
de suerte.                   of luck.

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Chino sells lottery tickets, and to the citizens of *Salsipuedes*, he is a direct access to luck. His text focuses on the wheel of fate and destiny, and these themes become central to the unfolding of the large-scale temporality of the opera. Catán is careful to construct the scene with Chino's repetitive motive and text to emphasize the importance of the themes to the listener because this scene sets in motion the unfortunate series of events that will result in death and destruction.

Chino's verses form the basis of a pentatonic scale beginning on C, while the orchestral accompaniment implies A minor with a drone in the bass voices built on A and E (see Ex. 2). Chino's motive is a repetition of the pitches C–D–E–A, and in measure 49 the pentatonic scale is complete with Chino's first vocal climax on G<sub>3</sub> (see Ex. 2).

EXAMPLE 2. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act I, sc. 3, mm. 46–49 (vocal score).

46

Clave

Palitos

Congas

Bongos

Chino

— cin - co con el tre - ce que es pa - voreal Jue -

Pno I

Pno II

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

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Catán uses temporal ruptures as an important ironic strategy leading up to García's address. Four of these temporal ruptures occur before García's speech and serve

to interrupt Chino's couplets. These temporal fractures add dramatic importance to the scene and are defined by a chord, from here on described as the interruption chord, containing the pitches C–F-sharp–B.

The interruption chord functions as a topical, harmonic, and textual ironic marker. Harmonically, the chord is built using two intervals, a tritone and perfect fourth that create harmonic ambiguity and humor. The tonal ambiguity adds depth and complexity to this ironic marker, and the multiplicity of possible interpretations of the harmonic uncertainty promotes active participation and exploration from the listener. Almén describes the tritone as intrusive, and in this context, the tritone C to F-sharp “intrudes” on the carnival's momentum and prepares the listener for the dramatic and narrative importance of García's upcoming oration.<sup>54</sup> Topically, the interruption chord marks a sudden shift from lively dance music to rhythmic stasis (see Ex. 3). The extreme opposition of lively dance rhythms to rhythmic stasis is jarring and signals possible danger in the upcoming proclamation.

Catán presents four varied statements of the interruption chord (see Ex. 3). For contrast and added dramatic importance, each rupture becomes longer and more chromatically saturated until the ruptures temporarily end the carnival and launch the introduction to the General's speech. Each interruption is an abrupt stop in the carnival's rhythmic momentum, and the importance of the chord continues to gain value and significance as the chord marks the narrative movement toward irony because of its

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<sup>54</sup> Almén, “Narrative Archetypes,” 26. The (016) interruption chord contains a stable perfect fourth interval between F-sharp and B and an unstable tritone between C and F-sharp. The chord can be interpreted as intentionally ironic because of its multiple possibilities of function and resolution. Regardless of the function, the listener experiences a harmonic shock, and the sudden rhythmic stasis creates an extreme rupture in the dance temporality;

distortion of temporal constancy and parody of harmonic stability found in the pentatonic melody versus the instability of the interruption chord.

EXAMPLE 3. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act I, sc. 3, Interruption chord (vocal score).

a. Mm. 54–58.

54

Clave

Palitos

Congas

Bongos

Chino

por vo - ca - ción

Pno I

sub *p*

*mp*

Pno II

*mp*

b. Mm. 82–90.

82

Clave

Palitos

Congas

Bongos

Chino

cin - - - co pie - dra fi - na

Pno I

Pno II

*sf*

*mp*

86

Clave

Palitos

Congas

Bongos

Chino

Si sue - ña con e - le - fan - te

Pno I

Pno II

*p*

*pp*

*p*

*mp*

*p*

c. Mm. 110–114.

110

Chino

y el Chi - no a pri - me - ra ho - ra le trae - rá el nue - ve a - ma - rra - do

Pno I

Pno II

d. Mm. 184–187.

184

Chorus

Clave

Palitos

Congas

Bongos

Coronel

Capitán

*ff* Cuidado!!!

*f* Cui - da - do con e - sa car - ga!

Pno I

Pno II

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Apart from the harmonic and topical dimensions, Catán stresses the importance and foreshadowing function of the chord by transforming it into a linear motive assigned to the chorus. The textual variation of the interruption chord begins in measure 115 as the chorus begins to sing a repeated musical phrase containing the text “El destino está en el juego” (Destiny is in play) (see Ex. 4). This repeated motive foreshadows and emphasizes the opera’s themes of sacrifice and destiny. Catán’s motivic treatment and assigned text describing destiny gives this version a high-rank value of ironic implication and large-scale narrative outcome.

EXAMPLE 4. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act I, sc. 3, mm. 115–119 (vocal score).

115

Chorus *p* El des-ti - no es-tá en el jue - go El des-ti - no es-tá en

Clave

Palitos

Chino

Pno I *p* *mp* *marcato* *p*

Pno II *p*

CHORUS: El destino está      Destiny is  
en el juego      in play/in the game

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These ironic elements announce the opera's shift away from comedy. Catán's strategies develop the listener's expectations, create suspense, and build dramatic tension. Ultimately, Catán is laying the foundation to amplify the opera's bizarre and catastrophic turn toward tragedy.

García's pompous and empty political speech begins the unfolding of the opera's secondary dramatic thread, and it divides scene 3 formally and topically. Catán described to Gockley the transition into the monologue, saying, "[The] carnival is interrupted by the rational, presidential business ... it is a huge disruption."<sup>55</sup> García claims that his war declaration will be a historical moment for all of *Salsipuedes*; ironically, his announcement propels a series of events that result in his inevitable death.

The odd placement of the speech marks the ironic importance of García and his speech. Though a speech delivered by an official figure should be serious in tone and delivery, García's disruptive announcement is both comical and tragic due to its abrupt shifts in topic, harmonic stability, and textual wordplay. Catán commented on the humor of framing a serious presidential speech with an exotic carnival scene, and this juxtaposition of high and low music genres creates an elevated value of dramatic and ironic importance.<sup>56</sup>

By placing these two genres side-by-side, Catán uses comparison and contrast to portray García's motives and behaviors in detail. The juxtaposition provides the listener with a logical connection between two opposing ethical and social motivations, and the juxtaposition acts as a caricature of style and musical transition.

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<sup>55</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, October 13, 1997, DARC.

<sup>56</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, November 13, 1997, DARC; William E. Caplin, "On the Relation of Musical *Topoi* to Formal Function," *Eighteenth-Century Music* 2, no.1 (March 2005): 117.

A *forte* military-style fanfare in E major introduces García's opening text, and a C major syncopated fanfare response is provided in the orchestra at a *mezzo piano* dynamic, providing a humorous and ironic first impression to the president's call to order. The fanfare's unison trumpet call establishes García's sense of heroism and marks the beginning of a civic ceremony. The simplistic fanfare is repeated a whole step up on F-sharp, this time lacking a complete triad in F-sharp major (see Ex. 5). Although trumpet calls and military fanfares aimed to embolden the soldiers and invoke heroism, García's command signal satirizes him as a caricature of a presidential figure. The fanfare begins his speech, but the two calls are exaggerations resulting in simplicity and emptiness. By announcing García in this manner, Catán paints him as a presidential toy soldier. The lack of expressive qualities also points to García's lack of empathy and regard for the citizens of *Salsipuedes*.

There is also an irony of perception in García's introduction. As Catán stated, García's pompous and self-centered personality reflect the shallow expression of the opening fanfares. While García perceives himself to be a respected and loved leader to the citizens of *Salsipuedes*, the crowd laughs, scoffs, and mocks him as he enters.

EXAMPLE 5. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act I, sc. 3, mm. 254–268 (vocal score).

254

García

Com - pa - ñio - tas! la

Pno I

Pno II

mp

258

García

gue - rra ha lle - ga - do has - ta no - so - tros vi - vi - mos tiem - pos di -

Pno I

Pno II

mf

261

García

fi - ci - les po - co va - len las la - men - ta - cio - nes la His - to - ria sa - brá re -

Pno I

Pno II

mp

mf

265

García

co - no - cer nues-tro mo - des - to a - por - te

Pno I

*mp* *f*

Pno II

GARCÍA:	Compatriotas!	Compatriots!
	La guerra ha llegado	The war has arrived
	hasta nosotros.	for us.
	Vivimos tiempos difíciles.	We live in difficult times.
	Poco valen las lamentaciones.	Of little value are lamentations.
	La Historia sabrá reconocer	History will recognize our
	nuestro modesto aporte.	modest contributions.

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After a single beat of rest, the topic changes to lament with contrary, chromatic motion in the accompaniment (see Ex. 5). The sudden shift in topic and tonal ambiguity creates a sharp contrast from the previous fanfare. The humorous mixture of fanfare and lament topics is further undercut by the abrupt move to E-flat minor in measures 269–283, signaling a narrative movement downward toward tragedy and foreshadowing García’s mad scene in act III (see Ex. 6). Marked by a switch to a recitative topic in the minor mode and with a slower tempo, the tragic undertone of the text establishes an expectation of García’s destiny.

EXAMPLE 6. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act I, sc. 3, mm. 269–273 (vocal score).

269 Solemnly

García *p* Sa - be - mos el va - lor del sa - cri - fi - cio el pre - cio que hay que pa - gar por

Pno I *p*

Pno II

272

García la So - be - ra - ní - a Na - cio - nal Só - lo la Dig - ni - dad ha - ce

Pno I *p*

Pno II *mp*

GARCÍA:	Sabemos el valor del sacrificio, el precio que hay que pagar por la Soberanía Nacional.	We know the value of sacrifice, the price that must be paid for National Sovereignty.
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García encourages the brave soldiers to fulfill their duty with their consciences, and he reminds the citizens of the value of sacrifice and the price that must be paid for sovereignty. The text marks and foreshadows an important tragic transformation.

Unknowingly, his declaration of war and order for the soldiers to patrol the waters surrounding *Salsipuedes* results in a tragic twist of events in act III.

After thirty measures of recitation, insulting shouts and outbursts of carnival music derail García's speech. It is clear that the citizens are more interested in Ulises and Chucho, and that they do not value García or his appeals for war, sacrifice, and honor. The listener begins to understand that the citizens do not respect García. After seven measures of carnival music, García and Guzmán manage to restore order and continue with the monologue for ten measures, but García is quickly overwhelmed by a strong return to the carnival in measure 301. Both leaders struggle to maintain order and Guzmán fires his pistol into the air in measure 309 to silence the citizens. Unfazed by Guzmán's warning shot, the citizens begin dancing and singing as the carnival music emerges. García continues his speech on top of the carnival interruption, but the gunshot serves as an important ironic and foreshadowing device. While a crowd-controlling gunshot by a military leader would not be suspicious, the importance in this moment is who shoots the gun. The three appearances of García and Guzmán each contain a single gunshot fired by Guzmán, and the final gunshot in act III will be the culmination of multiple ironies.

The stop-and-start nature of the dictum satirizes the ethics of presidential and military leadership. Catán uses this technique to portray García in a disparaging light. By exaggerating the overly militaristic trumpet call with a tragic topical environment, Catán sets up the listener's view of García.

As a parody of presidential speeches, the monologue appeals to the listener's sense of humor, and although García declares war and speaks about serious national

concerns, the topical and narrative distortion provides an ironic lightness to the speech. The vividness of the ironic strategies force the listener to imagine the deeper implied meaning behind the comical appearance of García and his speech. The constant change from comic to ironic in scene 3 heightens its dramatic and narrative importance in the opera's large-scale narrative trajectory, and the elements presented in this scene forecast the tragic downfall of García in act III.

In a personal communication, Joseph Evans, Professor of Voice and Voice Division Chair at the University of Houston's Moores School of Music, comments on García's complete narcissism. Evans premiered the role of García in HGO's 2004 production and performed the role in the Moores Opera Center's 2012 production. Throughout the scene, García is unaware of the crowd's attitude towards him. Convinced the citizens love and adore him, García delights in his control over everyone's destiny.<sup>57</sup>

García's speech is an example of verbal irony. In act II, scene 3, García reveals his true intentions for declaring war and launching the ship, *El Invencible*, but in this scene, the listeners and citizens of *Salsipuedes* do not completely understand the context and motivation behind García's declaration of war. In act II, the listener will learn that García means the opposite of what he says; therefore, García's mandate is a contrast of his literal declaration of war against the Nazis and his plan to help the Nazis.

The different experiences related to the oppositional views of the General and the citizens achieve a fundamental dichotomy inherent in narrative analysis. The primary opposition between the genre of carnival and speech creates a hierarchy of transgression and order. From a comic narrative view, the monologue and García represent an older

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<sup>57</sup> Evans, interview.

generation's attempt to block a younger generation, but inevitably, the older society gives way.<sup>58</sup> The carnival's syncopated and complex rhythmic ostinatos contrast starkly with the rhythmic consistency and simplicity of the speech. García's order functions as an established order in contrast to the carnival's youthful, vivacious qualities. The fanfares and recitative topics of the monologue imply a hierarchy over the dance topics in the carnival. A victory of the transgressive carnival over García's order-imposing monologue contributes to a comic narrative. As well, the blending of ironic elements with comedy helps call attention, humorously, to García's weakness and inequities. Therefore, act I, scene 3 can also be viewed as a comic irony.

## Act II—Fantasy and Megalomania

García and Guzmán appear in act II, scene 3 in a recitative that provides crucial information to understanding the motive behind the declaration of war. The recitative functions as a genre and a form. It moves the action forward and reveals García's motivation of declaring war. This decisive scene is integral for the listener's comprehension of the opera's narrative shift toward irony and tragedy.

From the Baroque to the Romantic era, the recitative evolved into "a symbol of instability, transition, and fateful change."<sup>59</sup> Catán applies the uncertainty of the recitative with parody, exaggeration, and distortion to highlight García's volatility and weakness.

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<sup>58</sup> Almén, "Narrative Archetypes," 30.

<sup>59</sup> Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 23.



By correlating topic, genre, and narrative, Catán articulates the significance of this scene in relation to the narrative trajectory.

Though comic elements are present, the focus becomes the world of reality rather than act I's emphasis on the world of ideology. By presenting an authentic look at García and Guzmán, Catán reveals the insufficiency of the island's leaders and protectors, emphasizing the men's corruption and greed by capitalizing on exaggerating gestures, distorting shifts in text and topic, and mocking García's mental capacity. The recitative reveals that the leaders of *Salsipuedes* are deceitful and self-serving, and by the end of the scene, the listener is aware of a possible tragic outcome.

Catán described the scene to Gockley as follows:

García is standing in front of a table that shows a map of the island and the sea surrounding it. There are little flags to mark the position of various boats...It all looks like a child playing with an electric train. García is extremely pleased with himself. He has done an excellent deal; he'll be full of glory and history will reward him. Speaking of which, he can't wait to get his "reward". He feels so clever! As he sings you begin to realize that there is something fishy in the whole thing. You will eventually realize that he is selling contraband to the Nazi submarines, but has disguised the whole operation so as to make it look [like] he is on the side of the allies. So he hopes to benefit from playing both sides.<sup>60</sup>

In his description, Catán identifies greed, power, and naiveté as the defining characteristics of the recitative and the two leaders. Similar to act I, Catán juxtaposes genres by mixing recitative with lyric singing, highlighting the two faces of García, one being fantasy and the other megalomania. Catán's digression from conventions of one genre to another adds extreme contrast in the scene.

While the primary narrative of the lovers continues an emotional journey to a happy and romantic conclusion, Catán shifts the opera's tone with the recitative for

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<sup>60</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, October 13, 1997, DARC.

García and Guzmán. He described García as follows: “The General, meanwhile, lives in a fantasy world of his own, following the distant war on maps and feeling every bit the world figure.”<sup>61</sup> Catán portrays García’s childlike character by juxtaposing his naiveté (fantasy) with his distorted and power-hungry view of world leadership (megalomania). Evans recalls Catán asking for that García view Salsipuedes and its citizens as toys in his game of world domination, power, and greed.<sup>62</sup>

García’s simpleminded view of the war, his narrow vocal range, the unobtrusive orchestral accompaniment, and the overall moderate tempo characterize the recitative. These simple elements represent García’s naiveté and fantasy of becoming a godlike world leader. García’s megalomania is marked with three appearances of an exaggerated musical gesture that parody the outbursts of a mentally unstable individual and genre shift into an aria-like closing. The parody gesture mimics and conveys the constant chatter in García’s head, which Catán described as, “a crazy man swatting flies circling his head, only there are no flies there.”<sup>63</sup> Catán pronounces this feature by overstressing the contour with a dynamic swell and *stringendo* (see Ex. 7).

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<sup>61</sup> Catán, email message to Gockley, November 13, 1997, DARC.

<sup>62</sup> Evans, interview.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Evans states the gesture evolves from muttering to nonsensical craziness.

EXAMPLE 7. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act II, sc. 3, Parody gesture (vocal score).

a. Mm. 7–9.

7

García

pren-de Guz - mán a - pren - de!

Guz

Sí mi Ge-ne-ral

Pno

*mp* stringendo

*f*

b. Mm. 13–16.

13

García

plén - di - do!! es - cu - cha Guz - mán es - cu - cha!

Guz

Sí mi Ge-ne-ral

Pno

*mp* *mf* *mf* stringendo

Liberamente

c. Mm. 56–57.

56

García

d b d b d b d b co - mo si fue - randia

Pno

*f* stringendo

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García begins the recitative by boasting of his achievements. Then an important moment combines aspects of comedy (fantasy) and irony (megalomania). García grabs a newspaper and begins to read Guzmán a story. It is unclear if García is reading a newspaper or improvising a story to serve his immediate need. Evans stresses the likelihood that García would have approved the story since he controls all aspects of the news and press in Salsipuedes, and all news would praise his power and greatness.<sup>64</sup>

EXAMPLE 8. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act II, sc. 3, mm. 24–27 (vocal score).

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<sup>64</sup> Evans, interview.

The distortion is due primarily to the change of tense and shift in singing style from recitative to lyric. Catán mirrors García's view of himself by amplifying these features, but the distortion is also present when García quickly loses his grandeur and returns to the recitative style. This event informs the listener of the importance of the scene and the instability of García's mental state.

The storytelling also functions to call attention to the following information revealed by García. Immediately succeeding the return to the recitative, García explains the truth behind his declaration of war. First, García affirms his position against injustice. The twist occurs in his next statement when he claims that he is against cruelty and cannot deny supplies and food to the Nazis. This ironic twist of reasoning explains García's motivation and reveals the danger he is willing to put his citizens in for personal gain. García also comments that he will sell anchovies at a high price because he knows them to be the most coveted product.

Two significant ironic events follow García's disclosure. Catán adds vividness and humor when García remarks that the Nazi general, Joseph von Goebbels, loves the anchovies from *Salsipuedes*. Catán develops the irony in this crucial moment in measure 49 when García mispronounces the Nazi general's name and says, "Fongo Bels" instead of "von Goebels" (see Ex. 9). Other than García's lack of knowledge regarding his business partner, the development of this humorous moment is enriched with Guzmán's sharp correction, "von Goebels, mi General," which is musically emphasized with an accent on the downbeat, increased dynamic, and tritone in the orchestral accompaniment (see Ex. 9).

EXAMPLE 9. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act II, sc. 3, mm. 46–50 (vocal score).

46

García

ria so-bre to-do con las an-cho-as A-sí que Fon-go Bels E-so!

Guz

von Goe-bels mi Ge-ne-ral

Pno

*mf* *p* *p* *p*

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By correcting García, Guzmán reveals his knowledge of the Nazi leader, and this moment foreshadows and points to Guzmán's motivation of personal ambition. Though García is oblivious to the deeper meaning of this correction and the listener is not entirely aware of Guzmán's secret dealings with the Germans, the correction serves as an important ironic marker helping to build anticipation by hinting at the upcoming bizarre events. Rationale implies that a presidential assistant would be aware of the names of the president's associates, but Guzmán is disguising his real intention. Meanwhile, García continues playing with his war maps, unaware of Guzmán's slip-up. His excitement grows as he describes the high price he will charge for the anchovies. After his third outburst of mental instability in measure 56, García begins to ascend from  $G_4$  to a climactic  $G_3$ . While Guzmán's accidental and revealing correction adds a lightness and humor, Catán's strategy highlights the multiple layers of deceit and corruption embedded in the two leaders.

In another moment of ironic foreshadowing, Guzmán fires his gun in the air in mock celebration of García's triumph (see Ex. 10). While the gunshot in act I was surprising and comical, this second shot emphasizes the satirical and dangerous nature of Guzmán. In this crucial scene, the seemingly weak Guzmán reveals his connection to the Nazi leader and fires a gun in mock celebration of García's achievements, opening the listener's awareness to his corruption and malice.

EXAMPLE 10. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act II, sc. 3, mm. 56–60 (vocal score)

The musical score for Example 10 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the vocal part, labeled 'García', and the bottom staff is for the piano part, labeled 'Pno'. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 56, marked 'stringendo'. The vocal line starts with a series of eighth notes: d, b, d, b, d, b, d, b. This is followed by a triplet of eighth notes: co, mo, si. The lyrics continue: 'fue - randia - man - tes'. There is a 'loud pop!!!' annotation above the vocal line at measure 58, corresponding to a gunshot. The vocal line then continues with 'Sa- lud! \_\_\_\_\_ Guz'. The piano accompaniment features chords and single notes, with a forte (f) dynamic marking at measure 58. The score ends at measure 60.

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The gunshot briefly interrupts García's growing vocal climax, but García continues with his lyric climax, seemingly unaffected by the disturbance. The music and vocal shift from recitative into lyric marks the closing section of the scene, and the dramatic conclusion signals García's loss of childlike simplicity and fantasy. The powerful and lyric closing to this scene upsets the pace established by the recitative. This emotional and musical turn of events builds anticipation involving the consequences García will encounter in the next act, leaving the listener to wonder if García's need for power and wealth will result in comic success or tragic defeat.

The fantasy and innocence of the recitative are disrupted twice by García's megalomaniac, lyric outbursts, and these outbursts are strongly marked by the shift in topic, genre, vocal quality, and orchestration, as well as the second gunshot. The increased dynamic and vocal lyricism creates the sense of defeat over the order-imposing, child-like recitative. By adding a completely different vocal topic, Catán breaks expectations and marks a turn toward situational and dramatic irony. The irony, characterized by disguising information and miscommunication, mirrors García's secret plan and Guzmán's hidden relationship with the Nazi leader.<sup>65</sup>

One primary difference between the verbal irony in act I and the situational and dramatic irony in act II is the involvement of the listener. While the dynamic between the men remains the same from act I through this scene, the situation creates suspense and humor for the listener. The dramatic irony of both men revealing the truth about their intentions and motives cues the listener to the underlying condition created by the leaders. When García tells the truth about his plan, he means what he says, and the audience begins to understand more than the characters in the opera do.

Catán furthers the unexpected and dramatic consequence of this scene with Guzmán's gunshot and subtle revelation of his relationship with General von Goebbels. This event shifts the dramatic irony to tragic dramatic irony, which will be fulfilled in act III. Catán creates the sense of defeat of the recitative with the triumphant yet tragic lyric closing section of the scene. After shifting into third person, García quickly contains his brief outburst before erupting into complete madness and hysteria. This interpretation

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<sup>65</sup> Turner, *This Is the Sound of Irony*, 10.



follows the pattern of an ironic comedy, where the transgressive element (the lyric music) effects a transvaluation after difficulty and defeats the order (recitative).

In the recitative, the listener understands the scene is about gathering information. The defeat of the recitative overturns the expectation regarding the genre. Therefore, the listener begins to understand the substance of both men, and this results in a new way of listening and assessing one's judgments about the situation.

### Act III—Fury and Desperation

Act III, scene 3 provides balance to act I, scene 3 and completes the information revealed by Guzmán and García in act II. The mad scene in act III fulfills the themes of destiny, sacrifice, and fate. In the act II recitative, the listener could only imagine the outcome, and the two possible futures are determined in this important and tragic scene.

Act III turns to the question of causation. The previous acts provided information and revealed the hidden motivations that sparked the opera's narrative. Now, the listener is made aware of the significance of the previous actions and foreshadowing events in acts I and II. In García's mad scene, a tragic and ironic turn of events achieves Catán's social message.

Catán signals the importance of the scene with a genre miscue. Though the opera has continually slipped away from comedy, the incorporation of a mad scene is unorthodox and ironic inside of a comic narrative.<sup>66</sup> The mad scene functions to impact

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<sup>66</sup> Mad scenes are traditionally given to leading female roles, but as opera developed, mad scenes were assigned to male leading roles, i.e. *Peter Grimes*.

García's previous deceit, and there is a fundamental irony in giving García, a secondary character, a mad scene with such dramatic importance.

The mad scene genre is traditionally a product of nineteenth-century *bel canto* opera and is usually given to a leading female role. Catán combines the quick vocal pattern common in *opera buffa* with the dramatic enactment of insanity from the mad scene genre to create a unique and tragic turn of events. The mad scene's isolation of the two leaders brings the listener close to the opera's core message. Though the problems that trouble García are relatable and understandable to the listener, Catán strengthens the depiction of García going insane by presenting the scene as a double-crossing murder.

The topics and text used in this scene result in a juxtaposition of tragic and ironic characteristics. First, the scene begins and ends in E-flat minor, and this is one of the opera's only extended scenes with just one tonal center.<sup>67</sup> In previous scenes, Catán used harmonic ambiguity, dense chromaticism, bitonality, and incomplete triads to represent García's character and disguised motivation, and now Catán remains in E-flat minor to emphasize the scene's climactic importance.

García begins the scene with slow, lamenting vocal sighs (see Ex. 11). García retreats into questions about his leadership and approval rating, which causes his vocalism to become more animated and agitated. The sigh and lament topics, as well as the slow tempo and minor mode, signal a tragic archetype, and Catán uses repeated gestures and rhythms to add a hypnotic element to the ritual.

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<sup>67</sup> Almén, "Narrative Archetypes," 20. Almén states the minor mode is a characteristic of tragic archetypes.

Evans describes the event as “García’s pathetic devastation. He has lost everything and still cannot deal with reality. He really does not understand how the situation has turned.”<sup>68</sup> Governing with the belief that the citizens cherish and revere his leadership, García, a true narcissist, cannot see beyond his hunger for power and greed. This is the moment he recognizes the citizens intend to subvert his authority.

EXAMPLE 11. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act III, sc. 3, mm. 1–4 (vocal score).

A single voice comes from the orchestra pit.  
 The chorus is off stage.

1      ♩ = 54

Percussion

García

Guzmán

Voz

Coro

Piano

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<sup>68</sup> Evans, interview.

In this scene, Catán uses the extended orchestra percussion section, particularly the djembe, djun djun, and ruta, to create a sense of a ritual sacrifice.<sup>69</sup> In addition, Catán uses an offstage solo voice and textless chorus to create a mood of ominous terror (see Ex. 11). In the vocal score, Catán inserts a note explaining how the solo voice and chorus should vocalize, “Chanting, like a sacred ritual,” and these compositional techniques advance the tragic tone and narrative of the mad scene.<sup>70</sup>

The fragmented and malleable nature of García’s opening sighs in combination with syncopated entrances create a sense that García is mumbling through his text (see Ex. 11), and these sighs correlate with topics of lament, fate, and sadness support a tragic unfolding.<sup>71</sup> In measure 40, García’s music begins on beat four, and this is the first occurrence in the scene when García sings on the beat rather than as a syncopation. As well, in measure 47, Catán expands the ironic musical implications by placing a *portamento* from E-flat to G-flat (see Ex. 12).<sup>72</sup> By integrating tragic and ironic features, Catán obscures the narrative interpretation and prevents any sense of predictability.

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<sup>69</sup> During his lecture, Catán discussed the music for *Florencia en el Amazonas*, “Every thought, every image of the Amazon suggested timbres, rhythms, melodies. Around that time, I discovered an African drum called a *djembe* that produces the most remarkable sound. It can capture the crisp rhythms of the tropical rain as well as the deepest rumbles of a fearful storm.” The other instruments (djun djun and ruta) are percussion instruments derived from Afro-Cuban rhythm ensembles, and these instruments were frequently used in drumming circles and other types of social and community events. Daniel Catán, “Composing Opera: A Backstage Visit to the Composer’s Workshop,” Lecture, Inter-American Development Bank Cultural Center, Washington, D.C. (August 14, 1997), 2.

<sup>70</sup> Catán, *Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies*, 306.

<sup>71</sup> Almén, “Narrative Archetypes,” 30.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

EXAMPLE 12. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act III, sc. 3, mm. 44–47 (vocal score).

44

Percussion **f** Rub drum with super ball

García **f** Tú no sa-bes! No-sa-bes! lo que due-le el al-ma Cuan-

Voz **p**

Coro

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Catán enhances the irony with the rhythm and text spinning out of control. The spastic melismas and terrifying rhythmic syncopations played by the percussion create an uncontrollable whirl of desperation and complexity. Beginning in measure 70, García's vocal range opens up and reaches a climax on A-flat (see Ex. 13).

EXAMPLE 13. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act III, sc. 3, m. 70 (vocal score).

70

García

ran - - - - - tes! Mal - a - gra - de -

Voz

Coro

Piano

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The demanding rhythmic complexity and vocal virtuosity intensify García's deteriorating disposition. The agitated and erratic melismas introduce a mumbling episode (see Ex. 14). García's mumbling in act II prompted humor and absurdity, but this episode shows a hostile and infuriated García unwilling to accept his certain downfall. Ironically, García suspects the citizens of *Salsipuedes* are invading his presidential palace, but only Guzmán is in his presence. Catán depicts a dramatic account of insanity and shame.

EXAMPLE 14. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act III, sc. 3, m. 78 (vocal score).

The musical score for Example 14, measure 78, features four staves: García, Voz, Coro, and Piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The time signature is not explicitly shown but appears to be 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The piano part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed sixteenth notes. The vocal parts (García, Voz, and Coro) have long, sweeping lines indicating sustained notes or breaths. A bracket labeled '9' is placed above the piano part, and another bracket labeled '9' is placed above the Voz part. A text box labeled 'Mumbling again' is placed above the Voz part.

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In act III, scene 2, Captain Magallanes sacrificed himself to restore his honor in having been a part of García and Guzmán's plan to sell goods to the Nazis. Magallanes had saved all of the passengers aboard his ship and then had rammed his boat into the Nazi submarine. There is an ironic twist to this tragic unfolding of events in the culminating action of the mad scene.

The music, text, and intensity continue to grow as García blames Guzmán for putting the two of them in this situation. In a final act of ironic tragedy, Guzmán shoots García in measure 86 (see Ex. 15). The gunshots fired by Guzmán in acts I and II seemed unimportant at the time, but they served as important foreshadowing markers that lead to this unexpected twist of events.

The musical and dramatic ironies in the scene shock the listener and suppress any expectation of a comic outcome, and the resulting confusion surrounding García's surprising murder provides a platform for situational irony.<sup>73</sup> The scene defies both García's and the listener's García's mental breakdown and complete loss of competency coupled with the bizarre exchange of power contrasts between expected and actual are defining characteristics of situational irony.

Narrative readings are dependent on the listener's assessment and interpretation of events, and García's murder compels the listener to experience a tragic conclusion. In a comic or ideal setting, García would learn his lesson, be punished, and all would have a laugh. Instead, Catán uses irony to enhance the contrast of idealism and reality, in pursuit of a tragic conclusion. The listener's projected desire for justice is destroyed by more corruption and deceit, leaving the audience questioning what humanity stands for and what choices can be made to prevent such a tragedy in the future.

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<sup>73</sup> Turner, *This Is the Sound of Irony*, 10. While García is viewed as a corrupt leader, his demise is a complete shock, and the incongruity between expected and actual represents situational irony. The genre miscue, highly syncopated rhythms, and uncharacteristic show of power by Guzmán are characteristics of situational irony.



EXAMPLE 15. Catán, *Salsipuedes*, act III, sc. 3, mm. 86–89 (vocal score)

86 Guzman shoots General Garcia,  
who falls dead over his desk

Percussion

García

Guzmán

Ya basta, mi General!

Piano

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Guzmán's final text, "Ya bast, mi General" (Stop/enough, my general), is a reflection of the audience's feeling at this moment. Buck Ross, director of the Moores Opera Center and Edythe Bates Old Professor of Music at the Moores School of Music, states, "The scene overstays its welcome and the audience is relieved that he (García) is shot."<sup>74</sup>

### Conclusion

Throughout the opera, and particularly in the three scenes with General García and Sergeant Guzmán, Catán saturates the drama, text, and music with ironic strategies in

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<sup>74</sup> Buck Ross, personal communication to author, Houston, TX, December 2, 2016.

order to transform the overall narrative. The multitude of ironic elements he integrates in the character development and narrative trajectory highlights the major themes of the opera. Catán sought to deliver a message that would capture the essence of the twentieth century, and he assimilates comedy, irony, and tragedy to accomplish his goal.

The determination of archetype depends on how the listener perceives and comprehends the musical events. The musical and dramatic conflicts in García's and Guzmán's scenes provide the possibility of a dual narrative reading, but regardless of individual sympathies, García's catastrophic defeat is a powerful example of both irony and tragedy. In addition, multiple narrative readings are a characteristic of an ironic archetype.

Congruent with the ironic archetype, the listener is denied consolation after García's senseless murder. The unexpected events subvert the listener's expectations, denying any appeasement.<sup>75</sup> Following a tragic archetype, the listener hopes for García to prevail but experiences despair after his brutal murder.

However, if the tragic and ironic archetypes synthesize and combine, a more meaningful narrative emerges. The archetype can be seen as a tragic irony if the listener sympathizes with García and experiences a loss when Guzmán defeats him.<sup>76</sup> This reading links García with the minor mode, topics of lament and sadness, and repetitive rhythms. Guzmán is associated with the ritual that spins out of control. The listener views the citizen's call to the presidential palace reporting the conspiracy as a direct cause of García's tragic murder.

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<sup>75</sup> Almén, "Narrative Archetypes," 30.

<sup>76</sup> Ross, personal communication. This reading is unlikely. Ross points out that the audience does not ever sympathize with García. He states, "It's like feeling sorry for Hitler."

Viewed as an ironic tragedy, the listener perceives horror and confusion when the detestable Guzmán double-crosses the ignorant and weak García. In this reading, Guzmán is assigned the role of undesired order who defeats the failed, confused, and directionless transgressor, García.

Regardless of the listener's sympathies, both irony and tragedy archetypes emphasize defeat and despair, and the opera's narrative shift is accentuated by the selfless sacrifice of Captain Magallanes and the devastating murder of García by his closest confidant. As a result, Catán provokes the listener to think deeply about the consequences of greed, corruption, and deceit.

These ironic and narrative strategies provide Catán with a platform for delivering his message about corruption, greed, and deceit. Catán described his vision of the opera as follows, "I wanted to tell this story from the point of view of the man on the street, the man who has nothing to do with the decisions made by a corrupt politician, but whose life nevertheless gets mangled as a result."<sup>77</sup> His statement targets the importance played by García and Guzmán in the opera's deep meaning, and it is clear that it is the use of ironic and narrative elements that forms the core of *Salsipuedes: A Tale of Love, War, and Anchovies*.

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<sup>77</sup> Daniel Catán, "The Creation of *Salsipuedes*," *Playbill*, October 19, 2004, 42.

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