

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Senta of Attention

#### Senta's Ballad

##### I.

**SENTA:** Traft ihr das Schiff im Meere an,  
blutrot die Segel, schwarz der Mast?  
Auf hohem Bord der bleiche Mann,  
des Schiffes Herr, wacht ohne Rast.  
Hui! – Wie saust der Wind! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Wie pfeift's im Tau! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Wie ein Pfeil fliegt er hin,  
ohne Ziel, ohne Rast, ohne Ruh'!  
Doch kann dem bleichen Manne  
Erlösung einstens noch werden,  
fänd' er ein Weib, das bis in den Tod  
getreu ihm auf Erden!  
Ach! wann wirst du, bleicher Seemann, sie finden?  
Betet zum Himmel, dass bald ein Weib  
Treue ihm halt'!

Have you ever encountered the ship on the sea  
with the blood-red sails and black mast?  
High up on deck, a pale man—  
the ship's captain—watches without rest.  
Hui! – How the wind screams! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – How it whistles in the rigging! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – He flies forth on the sea like an arrow,  
without a destination, without rest, without peace!  
Salvation can only come  
to the pale man  
if he finds a woman who will remain true  
to him even unto death!  
Oh! When will you, pale sailor, find her?  
Pray to heaven, my friends, that he'll soon find a woman  
who will remain forever true!

##### II.

**SENTA:** Bei bösem Wind und Sturmes wut  
umsegeln wollt' er einst ein Kap;  
er flucht' und schwur mit tollem Mut:  
In Ewigkeit lass' ich nicht ab!  
Hui! – Und Satan hört's! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Nahm ihm bei'm Wort! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Und verdammt zieht er nun  
durch das Meer ohne Rast, ohne Ruh'!  
Doch, dass der arme Mann  
noch Erlösung fände auf Erden,  
zeigt' Gottes Engel an,  
wie sein Heil ihm einst könnte werden.  
Ach, könntest du, bleicher Seemann, es finden?  
Betet zum Himmel, dass bald ein Weib  
Treue ihm halt'!

Through wicked wind and the wrath of storms  
he once wanted to sail 'round a cape;  
he cursed and swore with great confidence:  
I'll sail 'til Judgment Day if I must!  
Hui! – And Satan heard – Yohohe!  
Hui! – And took the sailor at his word! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – And now he must sail forever,  
through the sea, without rest, without peace!  
But in order that the poor man  
might still find salvation on earth,  
one of god's angels showed him  
how he could be saved.  
Oh! Can you, pale sailor, find it?  
Pray to heaven, my friends, that he'll soon find a woman  
who will remain forever true!

Her friends are deeply affected by this story, and they sing the final rhyme softly with her.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

#### III.

**SENTA:** Vor Anker alle sieben Jahr',  
ein Weib zu frei'n, geht er ans Land:  
er freite alle sieben Jahr',  
noch nie ein treues Weib er fand.  
Hui! – Die Segel auf! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Den Anker los! – Johohe!  
Hui! – Falsche Lieb', falsche Treu',  
Auf, in See, ohne Rast, ohne Ruh!

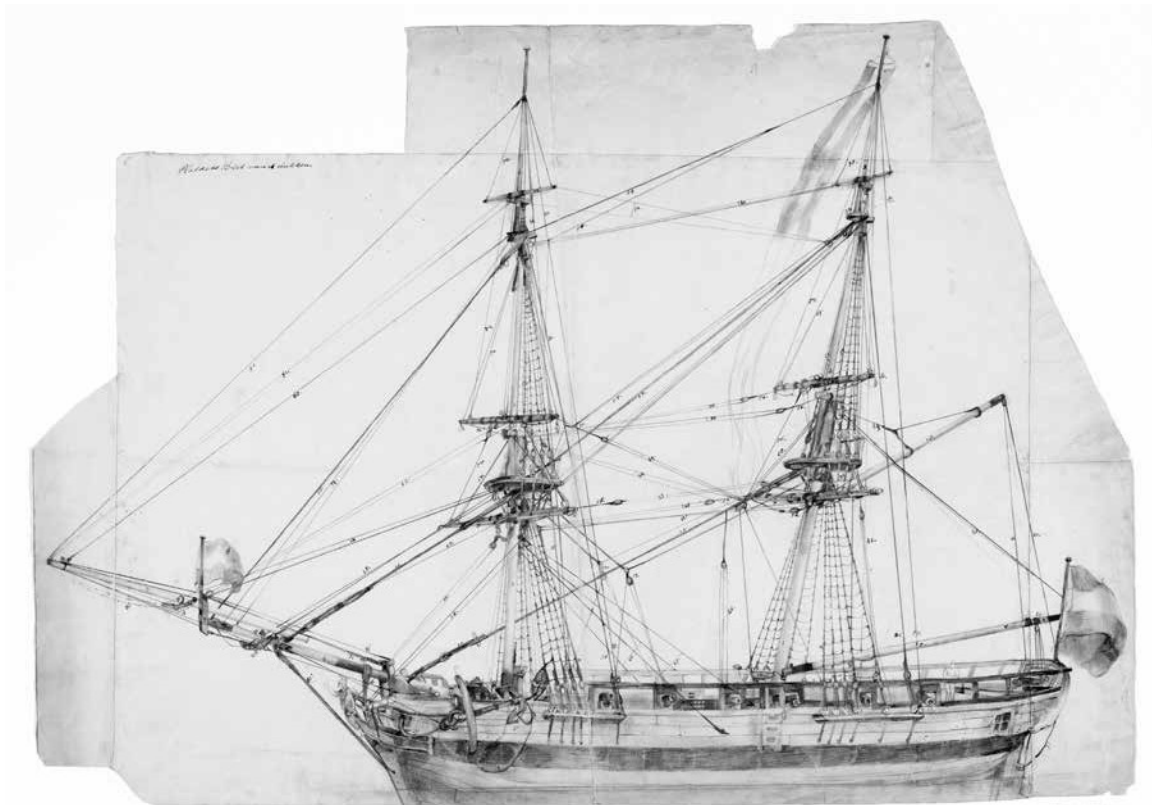
**YOUNG WOMEN:** Ach, wo weilt sie,  
die dir Gottes Engel einst könnte zeigen?  
Wo triffst du sie,  
die bis in den Tod dein bliebe treu eigen?

**SENTA:** Ich sei's, die dich durch ihre Treu' erlöse!  
Mög' Gottes Engel mich dir zeigen!  
Durch mich sollst du das Heil erreichen!

Every seven years he drops anchor and goes on land  
in the hopes of finding a woman.  
Every seven years he has courted women,  
but never has he found a woman who would remain true to him.  
Hui! – Hoist the sails! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – Raise the anchor! – Yohohe!  
Hui! – False love, false fidelity,  
and now it's back to the sea, without rest, without peace.

Oh! Where is she waiting,  
the woman god's angel could show you?  
Where will you meet her,  
the woman who would remain true to you even unto death?

I am she! I am the woman whose faithfulness will save you!  
May god's angel reveal me to you!  
I will be your salvation!



Willem Anthonie van  
Deventer. 1834–1893  
Two-masted schooner.  
Drawing.  
RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

Choose Your Own Adventure #1: The Dutchman and Daland

Read this scene from Act I of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, in which the Dutchman asks Captain Daland whether he has a daughter. This excerpt stops before the end. Write and act out two different endings for the scene. (Bonus points for singing—this is an opera, after all!) Think about which version of the scene you like better and which version is most dramatic.

**THE DUTCHMAN:** (*introducing himself to Daland*)

Durch Sturm und bösen Wind verschlagen,  
irr' auf den Wassern ich umher;  
wie lange? weiss ich kaum zu sagen,  
schon zähl' ich nicht die Jahre mehr.  
Unmöglich dünkt mich, dass ich nenne  
die Länder alle, die ich fand—  
das Eine nur, nach dem ich brenne,  
ich find' es nicht: mein Heimatland!  
Vergönne mir auf kurze Frist dein Haus,  
und deine Freundschaft soll dich nicht gereun!  
Mit Schätzen aller Gegenden und Zonen  
ist reich mein Schiff beladen; willst du handeln,  
so sollst du sicher deines Vorteils sein.

**DALAND:** Wie wunderbar! Soll deinem Wort ich glauben?  
Ein Unstern, scheint's, hat dich bis jetzt verfolgt.  
Um dir zu frommen, biet ich, was ich kann ...  
doch darf ich fragen ... was dein Schiff enthält?

Through good weather and bad, through storms  
and rough winds, I have sailed the seas.  
How long has it been? I don't know—  
I no longer count the years.  
I think it would be impossible to list  
all the places I've been.  
And yet the one place I long to go is the one  
I can never reach again: my homeland.  
Give me, for a little while, a place to stay.  
I promise you won't regret this kindness.  
My ship is full of treasures from every  
corner of the earth, and if you do what I ask,  
I promise you'll be well paid.

How remarkable! Should I believe you?  
It looks like you've suffered greatly,  
I'll do what I can to help you, but ...  
may I ask ... what about these treasures?

The Dutchman gives his crew a sign, at which they bring a large chest from the ship to the land.

**THE DUTCHMAN:** Die seltensten der Schätze sollst du seh'n;  
kostbare Perlen, edelstes Gestein.  
Blick hin, und überzeuge dich vom Werte  
des Preises, den ich für ein gastlich Dach  
dir biete!

**DALAND:** Wie? Ist's möglich? Diese Schätze!  
Wer ist so reich, den Preis dafür zu bieten?

**THE DUTCHMAN:** Den Preis? Soeben hab ich ihn genannt:  
dies für das Obdach einer einz'gen Nacht!  
Doch, was du siehst, ist nur der kleinste Teil  
von dem, was meines Schiffes Raum verschliesst.  
Was frommt der Schatz? Ich habe weder Weib noch Kind,  
und meine Heimat find' ich nie!  
All meinen Reichtum biet ich dir, wenn bei  
den Deinen du mir neue Heimat gibst.

**DALAND:** Was muss ich hören!

This ship contains the rarest of treasures:  
priceless pearls, the most perfect gems.  
Look here, and you'll soon be convinced of their value.  
And I'm offering you all this in exchange for a simple  
place to stay.

Really? Is it possible? All this treasure!  
Who could possibly afford to buy all this?

I've already told you the treasure's price:  
a place to stay for a single night.  
What you see is only the smallest part  
of what my ship contains.  
And besides, what is money worth? I have neither wife nor  
child, and I can never return home.  
I offer you all of my wealth, if only  
you'll give me a new place to call home.

What do I hear!

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

THE DUTCHMAN: Hast du eine Tochter?

DALAND: Fürwahr, ein treues Kind.

THE DUTCHMAN: Sie sei mein Weib!

DALAND: (*happy, but perplexed*) Wie? Hört ich recht?  
Mein Tochter sein Weib! Er selbst spricht aus den Gedanken!

Do you have a daughter?

I do! A faithful daughter.

Let me marry her!

What? Did I hear correctly?  
My daughter his wife? Does he mean what he says?

The Dutchman and Daland Version #1

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The Dutchman and Daland Version #2

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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

#### Choose Your Own Adventure #2: Senta and The Dutchman

Read this scene from Act II of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, in which the Dutchman asks Senta to marry him. This excerpt stops before the end. Write and act out two different endings for the scene. (Bonus points for singing—this is an opera, after all!) Think about which version of the scene you like better and which version is most dramatic.

**THE DUTCHMAN:** Wie aus der Ferne längst vergang'ner Zeiten  
spricht dieses Mädchens Bild zu mir:  
wie ich's geträumt seit bangen Ewigkeiten,  
vor meinen Augen seh' ich's hier.  
Wohl hub auch ich voll Sehnsucht meine Blicke  
aus tiefer Nacht empor zu einem Weib:  
ein schlagend' Herz liess, ach! mir Satans Tücke,  
dass eingedenk ich meiner Qualen bleib'.  
Die düstre Glut, die hier ich fühle brennen,  
sollt' ich Unseliger sie Liebe nennen?  
Ach nein! Die Sehnsucht ist es nach dem Heil:  
würd es durch solchen Engel mir zuteil!

**SENTA:** Versank ich jetzt in wunderbares Träumen?  
Was ich erblicke, ist's ein Wahn?  
Weilt' ich bisher in trügerischen Räumen,  
brach des Erwachens Tag heut' an?  
Er steht vor mir, mit leidenvollen Zügen,  
es spricht sein unerhörter Gram zu mir:  
kann tiefen Mitleids Stimme mich belügen?  
Wie ich ihn oft gesehn, so steht er hier.  
Die Schmerzen, die in meinem Busen brennen,  
ach', dies Verlangen, wie soll ich es nennen?  
Wonach mit Sehnsucht es dich treibt—das Heil,  
würd' es, du Ärmster, dir durch mich zuteil!

**THE DUTCHMAN:** Wirst du des Vaters Wahl nicht schelten?  
Was er versprach, wie—dürft' es gelten?  
Du könntest dich für ewig mir ergeben,  
und deine Hand dem Fremdling reichtest du?  
Soll finden ich, nach qualenvollen Leben,  
in deiner Treu' die langersehnte Ruh'?

When I look at this young woman, I feel like  
I've waited for her forever.  
What I've dreamed of for eons is suddenly here,  
in real life, right in front of my eyes.  
In the darkest nights, full of desperate longing,  
I'd often raise my eyes to see a woman standing before me—  
but it was never anything more than a devilish trick,  
a dream brought about by my torment and loneliness.  
The faint spark that I suddenly feel glowing within me—  
is this what they call love?  
No, it cannot be! This is nothing more than longing for the  
salvation that a woman like this could perhaps offer me.

Am I dreaming?  
Is this just my imagination?  
Until now, I've lived in a world of illusions and dreams;  
perhaps dawn is breaking and I'm finally waking up?  
He stands before me, his face full of pain.  
He speaks to me of his unthinkable sorrow.  
Could a voice so full of feeling tell a lie?  
And now he's standing in front of me,  
the man from my dreams. The pain I feel burning in my chest,  
this longing, what should I call it?  
Oh, my desperate man, it is  
the salvation that I will offer you!

Will you accept your father's choice?  
What he promised me—will it happen?  
Would you really agree to marry a stranger,  
promise to be mine forever?  
Can I hope to find in your faithfulness, after a life so filled with  
sorrow, the peace I've dreamed of for so long?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

**Senta of Attention** (CONTINUED)

The Dutchman and Senta Version #1

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The Dutchman and Senta Version #2

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

Choose Your Own Adventure #3: Senta and Erik

Read this scene from Act III of *Der Fliegende Holländer*, in which Erik begs Senta to stay with him. This excerpt stops before the end. Write and act out at least two different endings for the scene. (Bonus points for singing—this is an opera, after all!) Think about which version of the scene you like better and which version is most dramatic.

**ERIK:** Was mußst' ich hören? Gott, was muss ich sehen?  
Ist's Täuschung? Wahrheit? Ist es Tat?

**SENTA:** O frage nicht! Antwort darf ich nicht geben.

**ERIK:** Gerechter Gott! Kein Zweifel! Es ist wahr!  
Welch' unheilvolle Macht riss dich dahin?  
Welche Gewalt verfuehrte dich so schnell,  
grausam zu brechen dieses treuste Herz!  
Dein Vater—ha—den Bräut'gam bracht' er mit ...  
Wohl kenn' ich ihn, mir ahnte, was geschieht!  
Doch du ... ist's möglich? ... reichst deine Hand  
dem Mann, der deine Schwelle kaum betrat.

**SENTA:** Nicht wieter! Schweig'! Ich muss! Ich muss!

**ERIK:** O des Gehorsams, blind wie deine Tat!  
Den Wink des Vaters nanntest du willkommen,  
mit einem Stoss vernichtest du mein Herz!

**SENTA:** Nicht mehr! nicht mehr! Ich darf dich nicht mehr seh'n,  
nicht an dich denken—  
hohe Pflicht gebeut's!

**ERIK:** Welch hohe Pflicht? Ist's höh're nich zu halten,  
was du mir einst gelobtest, ewige Treue?

What do I hear? What do I see? Am I imagining things?  
Is it real? Is this really happening?

Don't ask! I can't give you an answer.

Oh, god! There's no doubt: It's true!  
What unholy power is pulling you away?  
What power has you so completely in its thrall that you would  
break this—my!—heart that loves you so completely?  
Your father brought this bridegroom with him ...  
I saw it in my dream, I knew what would happen!  
But you ... is it possible? ... you promise yourself to  
this man who has only just crossed the threshold of your home.

Not another word! I must go with him, I must!

Oh, you are as blindly obedient as you are blind to what  
you are doing! You do this out of love for your father,  
while breaking my heart, which loves you so dearly!

No more! No more! I can't see you anymore,  
I can't think of you anymore—I made a promise,  
I must do what I said!

What promise? Do you no longer feel any of that love you once  
promised me?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

**Senta of Attention** (CONTINUED)

Senta and Erik Version #1

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Senta and Erik Version #2

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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

from *Opera News*, "Senta's Choice," by Philip Kennicott

EXCERPT 1: It's easy to agree with Erik, her jilted lover, who can't comprehend how a young woman can fall in love with a picture and, in a matter of hours, commit herself to a man who is certainly sketchy and likely demonic: "But you—is it possible—offer your hand to a man who has hardly crossed your threshold!" [It] feels today more like a schoolgirl crush on a celebrity, with fatal consequences.

- What is Kennicott's argument here about Senta's "schoolgirl crush"? Based on what you've read and seen, do you agree with Kennicott? Why or why not?
- According to Kennicott, how does Wagner's music support Kennicott's argument that Senta might not fully understand what she's doing?

from *Opera News*, "Senta's Choice," by Philip Kennicott

EXCERPT 2: [With the first photographic cameras,] widely reproducible images soon made possible a new cult of celebrity, a new mythologizing of great men (and women) on a mass scale. In retrospect, Senta's obsession feels painfully adolescent [...] in a particularly modern way: She hasn't fallen in love with a legend or a narrative, and certainly not with a man, but with an image, a picture on the wall, like something in *TigerBeat* magazine.

- In this excerpt, Kennicott is describing how the composition of *Der Fliegende Holländer* corresponded with the invention of the first photographic cameras. Why does he bring this up? What does it have to do with Senta?
- Kennicott compares Senta's obsession with the Dutchman's portrait to a teenager in love with a magazine cutout. Can you think of other modern comparisons for Senta's feelings for the Dutchman?
- Do you think it's possible to fall in love with someone through a picture?

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

from *Opera News*, "Senta's Choice," by Philip Kennicott

**EXCERPT 3:** Recent critics have also found in Senta far more substance than Wagner, at first, seems to allow her. The starting point for this act of redemption is Senta's ballad, which Wagner claimed (after the fact and somewhat self-servingly) was the genesis and germ of the entire work. The ballad is, in any case, a magnificent piece of music, in which Senta not only tells a story but commits herself to redeem a man she has never met. What some would call a crazy celebrity crush, others recognize as a powerful woman staking out her own sense of identity.

**VOCABULARY:** "genesis" = origin, "germ" = a tiny part of something capable of growing into a whole

- How might Senta's ballad show her to be creating her own identity?
- Do you think Senta's love for the Dutchman is a "crazy celebrity crush" or "a powerful woman staking out her own sense of identity"? Why?
- What does it mean to redeem someone?

from *Opera News*, "Senta's Choice," by Philip Kennicott

**EXCERPT 4:** [Female opera characters like Senta] emerge from male fantasies and are punished horribly for embodying them. Yet they don't lack agency, and if sung by a great soprano, each seems much more the author of her own drama than the composer and librettist who supposedly "created" her.

- What do you think Kennicott means when he says that female opera characters like Senta "are punished horribly for embodying" male fantasies?
- How can a character be "more the author of her own drama" than the people who created her?
- Do you agree that a great performer can change the way an audience understands a character who was created a long time ago?

## SOURCE

Philip Kennicott, "Senta's Choice," *Opera News*, April 2017,  
[https://www.operanews.com/Opera\\_News\\_Magazine/2017/4/Features/Senta\\_s\\_Choice.html](https://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2017/4/Features/Senta_s_Choice.html).

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Senta of Attention (CONTINUED)

from *The New York Times*, “Operatic Codependency? We Put Wagner On the Couch,” by Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim

EXCERPT 5: Amber Wagner, the soprano who sings Senta at the Met, argues for her character’s clarity of intention. She said in an interview that while Senta may seem more passive than the warrior Brünnhilde [from Wagner’s opera cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung*], she understands that in choosing the Dutchman, she is choosing death. “She talks about her holy duties,” said Ms. Wagner—no relation, it should be said, to the composer. “She does say, ‘Here’s my hand, without regret, unto death.’” It’s her way of saying, ‘I understand the gravity of what I am doing.’”

- What is Amber Wagner arguing about Senta’s actions?
- Can a performer change the way the audience feels about a character who was created a long time ago?
- Do you agree with Amber Wagner’s arguments about Senta’s choice?

from “Remarks on the Performance of *Der Fliegende Holländer*,” by Richard Wagner

EXCERPT 6: It will be difficult to mess up Senta’s role. In fact, I want to give performers only one piece of advice: Make sure that her “dreamy” qualities don’t turn into a modern, sickly sort of sentimentality! To the contrary, Senta is a healthy young woman, and the main thing about her is that she is naïve. In fact, only a totally naïve young woman could come up with an obsession like saving the cursed captain: This explains her apparent craziness, which can happen only with truly naïve people. [...] It has been said that Norwegian women have such powerful feelings that their hearts sometimes suddenly stop beating [from sheer emotion] and they die. That’s what the pale Senta’s “craziness” should be like.

- What does the word “naïve” mean?
- Do you think it’s true that Norwegian women can die from their emotions? Why would Wagner mention this nationality in particular? Why might statements like this be problematic?
- Do you think Senta is “crazy”? Why or why not? Why might calling her “crazy” explain her behavior? Why might it discount her experiences?

## SOURCES

Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, “Operatic Codependency? We Put Wagner On the Couch,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/24/arts/music/dan-savage-wagner-the-flying-dutchman.html>.

Richard Wagner, “Bemerkungen zur Aufführung der Oper *Der Fliegende Holländer*,” in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 2nd edition (Leipzig: E. W. Fritzsch, 1888) 5:167–68. Translation by Kamala Schelling.