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## Act One

Carlo Moor has been banned from his father's castle and is now living among a gang of notorious thieves in Saxony. He reads Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, as he is disgusted by the decadence of his contemporaries compared to the ancients. His accomplices give him a letter from his father which, contrary to his hopes, does not bring forgiveness, but an order forbidding him to return home. Carlo reacts by leading a gang to "massacre" the "accursed clay", or perverse humanity.

At the castle of the Moors, in Franconia, Francesco is considering murdering his father, count Massimiliano, to become lord of the manor. It is Francesco who has sent the letter to his brother, Carlo, in place of their father's letter granting his son forgiveness. He orders the chamberlain, Arminio, to disguise himself and take his father the false news of Carlo's death. While assisting the sleeping count, Amalia, the count's niece, remembers her brief attachment to Carlo. The count awakes and asks Amalia for forgiveness in the duettino-cabaletta: he wishes to see his son again, under the impression that he has forgiven him. In disguise, Francesco enters with Arminio, who announces that Carlo is dead. Francesco attempts to convince Amalia to marry him, falsely claiming that this is his dead brother's last wish. Amalia refuses and Massimiliano is overcome with sorrow. The girl despairs; Arminio is full of remorse; Francesco is triumphant: "Morto?... Signor son io!".

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## Act Two

Amalia is alone in the cemetery next to the castle church. She has managed to escape from the rowdy life of the court, and is now kneeling next to Massimiliano's tomb. Banqueting songs can be heard coming from the castle. The repentant Arminio interrupts her prayers to reveal to her that Carlo and Massimiliano are both alive. Francesco bursts onto the scene, confessing his love for Amalia. Since she refuses him, he attempts to take her by force. However, the girl pretends to embrace him and, while doing so, takes his sword to defend herself, despite the risk of being cast in chains into a dungeon.

In a forest in Bohemia, the gang of thieves sees the city of Prague in flames and celebrates Carlo, who returns to the camp after rescuing his companion, Rolla, thanks to the ploy of the fire. Carlo tells the gang to go to bed while he stays awake since feelings of remorse will not allow him to sleep. In the solitude of the night, Carlo meditates on dishonour, the sense of guilt, lost innocence, and his thoughts return to Amalia. In a dramatic turn of events, the robbers can be heard shouting as they realise that they are surrounded and they close ranks around their leader in preparations for their defence.

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### Act Three

Amalia is alone in a deserted place between the castle and the forest. She has managed to escape Francesco, but she falls into the hands of the thieves. Carlo comes forward and the two lovers recognise each other. The girl tells him of his father's death, the aggression to which she has been subjected on the part of Francesco, and her own escape. In the forest, in the middle of the night, the robbers sing of their feats ("le rube, gli stupri, gl'incendi, le morti"). Carlo is bound to them by oath, but he feels an irredeemable sense of guilt and he wishes to remove Amalia from here, before committing suicide. Yet, he chooses to live in order to suffer in the hope that he might therefore atone for his misdeeds. While he is thinking, out of the forest comes a man who approaches the tower to bring food to an unknown prisoner. It is Arminio, who flees when Carlo tries to stop him. Then, Massimiliano, Carlo's old father, now reduced to a skeleton, emerges from the tower. He does not recognise Carlo, but he recounts of how he had been taken for dead and placed in a coffin, and on reawakening, how Francesco had closed him in the coffin and imprisoned him in the tower. Carlo fires his pistol into the air to call the thieves to order and force them to take a common oath: his father must be avenged through the killing of his brother, Francesco.

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### Act Four

At the castle of the Moors, Francesco is prey to hallucinations, arising from his terror of the final judgement and from his awareness of injustices committed. He tells Arminio of a nightmare with apocalyptic visions – the earth in flames, "three resplendent figures", the scales of sin and redemption, the voice of condemnation. He calls for Moser, a minister, and while refusing to repent as the priest asks of him, Francesco is terrified by his words concerning the worst human sins (parricide and fratricide) and the consequent judgement.

In the morning, Massimiliano, still not recognising Carlo, mourns for his two sons. The thieves return and, although they have not succeeded in capturing Francesco, they bring Amalia. At this moment, the father recognises his son. Carlo, however, on revealing that he is the leader of a gang of outlaws and seeing his father's reaction, orders his companions to kill his beloved Amalia, his father and himself. When the girl swears loyalty to him even in his condition as an outlaw, for a moment, Carlo believes that he can begin a new life with her. But the robbers remind him of the oath that binds him to them. As atonement for his misdeeds, Carlo stabs the girl and surrenders himself to justice.

*(Traduzione di Chris Owen)*