



Luisa Passerini

In Defense of Don Giovanni

A Feminist Mythobiography

Translated by Stella Tillyard

IN DEFENSE OF DON GIOVANNI

BEFORE YOU START TO READ THIS BOOK, take this moment to think about making a donation to punctum books, an independent non-profit press,

@ <https://punctumbooks.com/support/>

If you're reading the e-book, you can click on the image below to go directly to our donations site. Any amount, no matter the size, is appreciated and will help us to keep our ship of fools afloat. Contributions from dedicated readers will also help us to keep our commons open and to cultivate new work that can't find a welcoming port elsewhere. Our adventure is not possible without your support.

Vive la Open Access.



Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

IN DEFENSE OF DON GIOVANNI: A FEMINIST MYTHOBIOGRAPHY. Copyright © 2024 by Luisa Passerini. This work carries a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 International license, which means that you are free to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format, and you may also remix, transform, and build upon the material, as long as you clearly attribute the work to the authors (but not in a way that suggests the authors or punctum books endorses you and your work), you do not use this work for commercial gain in any form whatsoever, and that for any remixing and transformation, you distribute your rebuild under the same license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Luisa Passerini, *In difesa di Don Giovanni. Mitobiografia di una femminista* (Roma: manifestolibri, 2020).

First English translation published in 2024 by punctum books, Earth, Milky Way. <https://punctumbooks.com>

ISBN-13: 978-1-68571-144-3 (print)

ISBN-13: 978-1-68571-145-0 (ePDF)

DOI: 10.53288/0485.1.00

LCCN: 2024932061

Library of Congress Cataloging Data is available from the Library of Congress

Book design: Hatim Eujayl

Cover design: Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei

 punctumbooks
spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion



HIC SVNT MONSTRA



Luisa Passerini

In Defense of Don Giovanni

A Feminist Mythobiography

Translated by Stella Tillyard



Contents

OVERTURE

First Imaginary Dialogue · 15

VENICE

Theological Jokes · 23

A Venetian Dinner · 35

Don Giovanni's Lover · 45

Second Imaginary Dialogue · 51

Douglas Fairbanks and Marlon Brando · 55

European Myths · 61

Third Imaginary Dialogue · 69

TURIN

Seduction and Clinical Cases · 75

Byron at the Colle della Maddalena · 83

Fourth Imaginary Dialogue · 89

Confidences on the Train · 93

FLORENCE

Bitter Laughter · 99

G. · 107

Puppets and Comedians · 117

Don Giovanni the Feminist · 127

Mozart's Freedom · 133

Fifth Imaginary Dialogue · 141

RETURN TO TURIN

- Between Two Rivers · 147
Isabella's Tales: Fred · 151
Prequel: Porfirio · 155
The Footballer · 159
The Seducer's Legacy · 165
Don Ottavio Restored · 171
Sixth Imaginary Dialogue · 177

TRAVELING

- The Four Hundred and Sixty-First Adventure · 187
Serious and Playful · 197

PARIS

- Eurocentrisms · 203
Colonial Don Giovanni · 209
Frames · 215
Postcolonial · 219
At the Bottom of the Sea · 227
The Transformation of Elvira · 231
Pan-Politicism · 239

FINALES

- Endgame: *Seventh Imaginary Dialogue* · 247
Second Finale · 251
The Story Told by Don Giovanni · 255
Fade Out · 265

- Notes and Bibliography · 267

Acknowledgments

This book has been made possible by my exchanges with many people: among them I would like to thank Roberta Mazzanti, Romano Màdera, Santina Mobiglia, Stella Tillyard, Claudio Canai, Michele Dantini, and Francesco Borio (Bodo). I would not have made it without the collaboration with Teresa Bertilotti, who has been for me a generous and careful interlocutor, especially during the last phase of my writing. Simona Bonsignori's encouragement has been crucial in order for me to complete the book and speed up my separation from it. Corrado Agnes has endured with patience and irony Don Giovanni's persistent presence in our daily life over a long period of time. Stella Tillyard has generously translated the Italian version into English, in a collaborative effort of discovery and reflection out of our friendship and thanks to a joint passion for words and languages. Claudio Fogu has acted as invaluable supporter and mediator for the anglophone publication. I am grateful to punctum books, and particularly to Eileen A. Fradenburg Joy and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, for their expertise and availability in the course of this book's publication.

For the images, I am very grateful to Eva Wiederkehr Sladeczek and Heidi Frautschi of the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern, and to Susan Wamsley of the Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Finally, I would like to thank the Odin Teatret Archives for having made accessible to me their materials concerning "Don Giovanni in Hell," the play directed by Eugenio Barba and joint-

ly produced by the Ravenna Festival and the Odin Teatre/Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium for the 2006 Ravenna Festival.

*... he gravely bore each woman's glance
that struck and moved him, leaving him amazed*

— Rainer Maria Rilke

Overture

First Imaginary Dialogue

a Sunday morning in mid-September

In idle moments or while walking, the voice of Don Giovanni comes to me. He makes observations and offers comments and questions, generally ironic or acerbic. Most of the time, I don't respond. Today, while I'm walking along the banks of the Po River in sight of Superga Hill, he questions me directly:

- For nearly thirty years you've been following me, collecting every trace of me, from stories to essays to posters for shows — so much so that you've dedicated a whole shelf in your library to me. Isn't it time to pull it all together? Have you kept me separate from your work as a researcher and teacher because you're afraid I'll damage your public image, already strained by some of your books and attitudes? But you retired some time ago. Are you afraid my notoriety is incompatible with your reputation as a feminist?

It's true that my fascination with the Don seems politically incorrect and, on a professional level, reaches into a past way beyond the time I really know something about, which is the twentieth

century. It's no coincidence that this passion has grown since I retired from university teaching. I was convinced that I could stop academic research then and devote myself to more general reading and creative writing. The voice of the seducer has since become more frequent, often right under my feet, or in my head, as it is now:

— I think your fixation has deep roots. When you were grown up as an adolescent or already an adult, when you devoured life, personally and professionally, and wanted to do everything that gave you pleasure — or you believed it would — you were unconsciously imitating Don Giovanni, a prime example of someone who lives life to the fullest.

But I did know him! My dad had the reputation of being a Don Giovanni, something strongly criticized by my maternal grandmother. With anger that I now think was justified, she told me about the love letter addressed to him that my mother found in his pocket a little while after they married. It was normal for me that he was so careless that he left compromising letters around, and the story seemed perfectly understandable given that he was so handsome and fascinating. I had no understanding of jealousy and thought that his success with women was due, at least in part, to his constant cheerfulness.

I don't know if my father's reputation as a ladies' man was justified, and I have never been able to lay my hands on any reliable information one way or the other. He did have one unmistakable characteristic of Don Giovanni, though: appetite. It wasn't just that he was an excellent cook — traditional Ligurian potatoes and salt cod; trofie pasta with pesto, potatoes, and green beans; frittata with whitebait — but he also wanted to try everything. When someone was cooking, he buzzed around the stove and would take a little sample from every saucepan, rolling it around his tongue, offering snippets of advice. To make me swallow something, like the fortifying syrup they gave me every spring, he would try a drop on the tip of a teaspoon, make an indecipherable grimace, and hand me a full spoon with a smile,

which I swallowed without protesting. Perhaps this inherited tendency to try everything was at the bottom of my desire to “devour existence,” as Don Giovanni put it.

As a young woman, I was convinced that life owed me something because, as a child, I had few pleasures, so I took risks with impunity. Only later did my obsession with Don Giovanni become more explicit and less unconscious, like a love that can't be expressed.

The obstacles to this work are not just psychological but also practical. It's an endless task, given that there is a bibliography of thousands of titles continuously growing, compiled by a scholar at a university in Virginia. Giving an outlet to my research, making something of it other than a dreamy pastime, always feels like a difficult and almost shameful idea.

— You are depressed, or rather demoralized. Don Giovanni is the opposite of demoralized because he has never been part of morality. You, and many like you, have sought an audacious balance between the public and private, making private and political choices that seemed radical in each instance, but you feel exhausted and defeated now that you can't do that anymore.

I know he's right. So why not have a go at a genre in keeping with my state of mind, the so-called “depression memoir?” It already has a tradition and is established in various languages and moods, running from the comic to the tragic. Marvelous things have been written in this vein. Why don't I try it, as so many others have done?

— But doesn't it seem ridiculous to grapple with Don Giovanni in a depression memoir? I, the Don, have never regretted or been cast down either by my risky moves or my unfortunate end. So it's time to put a stop to self-conscious memorializing. Distance yourself from your ego: enough with stories of your father! Re-living your childhood is out of place in this context. You need to look for another way. You could assem-

- ble a sort of catalog of the various attempts that have been made to encompass and capture me, choosing amongst those that you have found and made in the last few decades.
- What gall! You're requesting that I place myself at your service!
 - Oh, at last, you are replying. No, at the service of your obsession and your craft, rather than thinking, as so many do, of becoming capable of writing stories and novels in the last phase of your life.
 - What do you mean by my "craft?"
 - I mean oral history — being an interviewer, a collector of testimonies and a witness. You can apply it to my legend, mixing your craft with collecting myths about me rather than chasing the illusion of writing something "more creative." In the past, you recorded your thoughts and experiences or reconstructed your memories of people you interviewed. Now you can write another kind of memoir — about me.
 - But the memory of Don Giovanni is so ancient.
 - So there's a lot to explore, especially since the stories are still evolving through lived experience.
 - It's neverending...
 - Naturally, you can't collect everything. I'm not suggesting you make a complete inventory (like Leporello...) or bring to light every story about me — that would be too great a task! However, you could do a slice of oral history centered on the myth of me; reproduce conversations and discussions, keep an ethnographic diary just as you have so often done and taught others to do, and include your voice. You can put together different voices, drawing them into a sort of virtual gathering of which you are also a part. After all, you've gone on and on about subjectivity and intersubjectivity!
 - A virtual gathering?
 - Well, yes, because not only the Internet but also writing is virtual!
 - And you are unreal.

— No, I am imaginary, which is quite different — you should know that!

I take stock for a bit and then reply:

— It's true that attempting to reconcile craft and passion at the end of life, especially concerning Don Giovanni, appears doomed to failure.

— That depends on how you look at it. Meanwhile, we could begin from this point. Next time, I want a real dialogue!

VENICE

Theological Jokes

a Tuesday afternoon at the end of September

Taking the advice of my inner Don, I decided to attend the symposium, “Don Giovanni and Casanova,” which is held every year in a different Italian city, this time in Venice. I go there with a young Polish woman, Emilia, a student of mine from many years ago. She is almost fifty now but is still as playful, and sometimes as acerbic, as she once was. The theater company in Warsaw, she advises, is considering putting on a piece inspired by Don Giovanni. We have wanted to see one another again for a long time, and we have seized the opportunity to go back to a place where we were together for a conference on oral history when she was doing her doctorate.

The symposium takes place at the Cini Foundation on the island of San Giorgio. There are lessons, debates, and seminars in the morning, and in the afternoon and evening, films and plays. The language for the public sessions is English, but in pauses, you can hear languages from all over the world. The first talk we listen to, given by a Jesuit priest of African origin, is about the theological questions in which the myth is rooted. He is a good speaker who ties together his account of the origins of the Don Giovanni myth with a historical analysis of Jesuit herit-

age. Emilia, who describes herself as a Catholic from the radical left, is at once curious and wary.

I knew about the old oral traditions which flowed into the story of Don Giovanni, amongst which is the story of a young man who meets a dead man and invites him to dinner. European folklore has hundreds of variations on this story, circulating everywhere: from Ireland to Spain, from Germany to the Balkans, some of which date from the fifteenth century. I was also aware of the Breton song from that period, but not of the first written version, in Latin — the story of the young Count Leonzio, the protagonist of a play staged by the Jesuits in 1615, which served as an admonition for the masters and pupils of their college at Ingolstadt in Bavaria. Leonzio, who had taken on the materialism and atheism of his teacher Machiavelli, is walking in a cemetery one day and runs into a skull. After he's kicked it, he addresses it, calling it a "dusty skull," and pursues it with theological questions. Is it true that our mortal body encloses an immortal spirit? If the soul survives after death, where does it live? Was he damned or saved? Leonzio asks him to answer the same evening and invites him to dinner.

Presenting the historical context of this monologue, Father Oscar Silveira explains that ten years before 1615, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had come out, which included the address to the skull of Yorick, the court jester who played with Hamlet when he was young. The questions Hamlet asks the skull also emphasize the vanity of life and the common destiny of humanity: to become food for worms. But the particular thing about the drama of Leonzio is to put it into the anti-Machiavelli corpus. In that very same year, 1615, the Ingolstadt Jesuits publicly burned the effigy of Machiavelli as the author of works that had themselves been condemned to the flames half a century before. The fire and the flames, the speaker reminds us, are elements intrinsic to the myth of Don Giovanni.

In the story of Leonzio, Machiavelli is presented as the perverse master and founder of the school of materialism that trained the pupil to obey only his desires on the grounds of rationalism that puts pleasure and utility in the forefront. The

young count is an example of the materialistic tendency in many ways, as the sumptuous feast he offers his guests on the evening of his meeting with the skull shows. When the banquet is in full swing, it is interrupted by a violent banging on the front door: the dead man demands entry, and every attempt to bar his way is in vain. He appears at the feast, and all the guests run away as fast as they can, including Machiavelli, who shows absolutely no interest in the answers to the theological questions posed by his pupil. The dead man reveals himself to be Leonzio's great-grandfather, coming up from Hell to confirm the existence of the afterlife. The young man has no escape: in a gory finale, his ancestor smashes his head against the wall, and leaving his bloody brains stuck there, he drags the corpse down to Hell.

According to Father Silveira, the focus on the head in the account both of the meeting with the skull and the death of Leonzio shows that the count's original fault is precisely his rational outlook, a fault, of course, of "the head." The moral of the story is that there are only two options: conversion or damnation. There is no third option for rational materialism or classical Jesuitical doctrine. "For them, it's still true today," Emilia whispers, full of hostility towards the speaker.

Father Silveira is critical of the interpretation that suggests that Leonzio could be an imperfect version of Don Giovanni, which was merged later with the theme of women's seduction. In his opinion, it did not, in fact, comprise an older version that was then modernized with the addition of sex, as if this were a later and secondary element. He insists that for us today, Leonzio can represent free thought in its pure state, not necessarily before, but even more forcefully after or during the era of sexual liberation. As a secondary effect, this could be taken for granted in the world of impiety and the struggle for spiritual power. Leonzio is our contemporary also because sex has lost much of its taboo and religious censure.

While I can warmly welcome the priest's theory, Emilia is very critical. She explains that she detects a kind of triumphalism in his tone, as if he were pleased with Leonzio's damnation and implicitly would like to say to us, "We were right!" I am

aware of Emilia's radical and innovative Catholicism, which I saw signs of in her PhD on Catholic women in Communist Poland, and I know that she looks at other forms of the same faith openly designed to dominate the world with impatience and annoyance. However, I persuade her to go up to the speaker in the interval, if only to give us a better idea of his attitude.

The Jesuit receives us as if praise was his due. He is a compact man, elegantly dressed in ordinary clothes, not very tall, clean-shaven, with a round face, a slightly flattened nose, and frizzy hair. When I greet him, he begins to laugh and barks back at me in Italian, "But I know you!" He explains that he is from Mozambique and that in his youth, when he went to the high school run by Jesuits in Turin, he read my book on the struggle for liberation in Mozambique, published at the beginning of the 1970s. From that, I work out that he must be at least fifteen years younger than me, although he appears even younger. He invites us to join him and his friends for dinner that evening, suggesting that we meet earlier for a drink in his hotel. I accept gladly, while Emilia ducks out, saying she wants to see the day's films.

The conference starts again with a talk on Tirso de Molina's play *The Trickster of Seville*. It's presented by a Dutch Hispanist who takes up most of her allotted time questioning whether the play is really by Tirso or by another author, and whether it was really written and performed between 1620 and 1630, and so on. We are bored, perhaps also because we are ignorant, but when the talk finally ends, the debate suddenly comes alive. A young Egyptian scholar protests sharply about the lack of attention the speaker has given to the conclusion of the drama, maintaining that from the narrative point of view, the whole play is illuminated by its ending: Don Juan Tenorio plans to repent at the end of his life, but he runs out of time.

As the work's title says, the Egyptian scholar goes on — a little frown on his handsome face — Tirso's Don Juan launches one hoax after another, with repeated tricks against women. He appeals to the idea of youth to justify his tricks, but he behaves more as if he were immortal than as if he were young. It's certainly true that he repeatedly responds to those who remind

him of the prospect of divine punishment and the certainty of death, *Tan largo me lo fiáis!* Then I've got all the time in the world! Don Juan shows no fear when the ghost of Donna Anna's father, whom he murdered while attempting to seduce his daughter, returns to seek justice. Instead, he plays his last card, asking to be allowed to call someone who will hear his confession and absolve him. But the dead man refuses, saying, "There's no time; you've remembered too late." Emilia whispers that she fully agrees with the young scholar's objection and the narrative's drama lies in the failure of the final stunt — an exciting outcome, not just from the theological point of view, but also from the point of view of future performances. For this reason, the main themes of the staging in Warsaw and Krakow will be time and age: the age of Don Giovanni, young, old, or immortal.

In the discussion, Padre Silveira points out how the theological purpose and the narrative are intertwined. According to some theologians of the period, it would be possible to escape divine retribution by a simple consciousness of sin or *attrition*; that is, by a fear of Hell equivalent to a damaged kind of love of God. This escape could happen without needing to undergo contrition, which is a perfect form of love of God because it includes repentance. Don Juan Tenorio did not repent or even fear Hell, so he could not be saved. In this way, Silveira concluded, Tirso took a position in the period's debate that supported the Spanish Jesuit Luís de Molina, who denied the possibility of salvation *in extremis*.

The Hispanist is stung by this and replies that she is well aware that Tirso's ending refers to questions about the relationship between divine grace, free will, and predestination, which had sparked heated debates during the Counter-Reformation period. As if she hadn't even heard Father Silveira's intervention, she launches into a display of erudition, reiterating what is closer to her heart: that even if Tirso did know the Ingolstadt play, his would still be the first in which the seduction of women was put into the story, therefore proving that the figure of Don Giovanni was originally Spanish and disproving every theory of Italian origin.

The Jesuit lets the dispute about national firsts go and replies that not all Jesuits were followers of Luis de Molina and that their adherence was not continuous. In Tirso's drama, the protagonist, who believed he could continue playing tricks while keeping an extreme weapon — the recognition and formal confession of his sins — to the end, is tricked in his turn. In this way, the belief that one can escape punishment by resorting to a sleight of hand is shown to be unfounded because, without a genuine change of heart, one can be neither pardoned nor saved.

We follow the discussion between the Egyptian scholar, the Jesuit, and the original speaker on the theological implications of the drama dutifully, but Emilia gets irritated, and leaves to smoke a cigarette. I follow her, and she tells me the reasons for her impatience.

- They make it a matter of doctrine or narrative, which are inadequate explanations for the ethical-theological problem. They can't hold the tension between the human and the divine —
- This is a man who ignores and refuses to recognize the divine, which therefore destroys him.
- Exactly, that's it. The divine is reduced by those people back there to something worldly and vindictive, reduced to the logic of exchange, once again still part of the ideology of domination.
- But what do you say to the Dutch philologist's claim?

She shrugs her shoulders.

- The old contest between Europeans about Don Giovanni's country of origin. I have done a bit of research on this question from my central-eastern standpoint. The Dutch scholar alluded to Arturo Farinelli's theory about Italian origin. It seems that there is indeed a Roman satire from the sixteenth century, almost a hundred years before Tirso, directed at a certain Giovanni Carafa, the nephew of Pope Paul IV, a "Don Juan" who seduced lots of girls. The date of this satire

must be before the Tirso drama, even if the attack lacks the element of transgression against religiosity — except concerning the Pope, which hardly counts. But there is no definitive documentation either way, so you can think what you want.

- What do you think about it?
- I like the notion that the figure of Don Giovanni was born from the meeting of two different stories of transgression, the folk tradition of the infernal dinner and the stories of seduction. This way, the myth can be seen as joining the Mediterranean to Northern and Central Europe.
- It's a lovely idea.
- A bit abstract, though. There's everything to prove. But the question of repentance is very alive today. Not, of course, in the reactionary Catholic sense of the renunciation of the self. For me, "to repent" might refer to a refusal to renege on the demands of 1968 or radical feminism, while now the responsibility for everything that is bad, including terrorism, is thrown onto the 1960s and '70s by people taking the declarations of those times too literally.
- Two forms of historical stupidity. There is little talk about the appropriation that the new spirit of capitalism made of the claims of the '68 generation. But today, the question is not posed in terms of the consciousness of sin or contrition...
- Why not? The words may not be the same, but the question remains. How to shape the idea of repentance — or at least the consciousness of sin — and possibly pardon in a light that is also acceptable to non-believers? Those of us who are believers have an interest in finding an area of meeting or exchange, not in insisting that we have dissolved the problem in the sacrament of confession. The idea of attrition, an old idea which means a person can regret a sin without demanding a transformation in their heart, is a bit like the notion of *pentitismo*, which in Italy has made it possible to overcome terrorism, especially for the "Red Brigades" and the Mafia. It's fitting that the law is about defeating the

- enemy, not saving souls, but for us, there are problems that go beyond the field of justice. Collective memory —
- If it indeed exists, it's very divided. Fortunately, in Italy, we now have the memoirs of parents of victims, which counter-balance the tendency to valorize the refusal of *pentitismo* as well as defiant unrepentance — which happens particularly in the media — over critical re-evaluation of the histories of groups like Red Brigades or Prima Linea.

Emilia points out:

- I know. There is a pervasive image of ex-terrorists going around that is either heroic or demonic, and sometimes even the term “terrorist” is not accepted because it is judged too harshly. But I believe that the spread of pacifism among many young people is making it obsolete. In any case, it isn't just nostalgia for armed struggle. To repent without betraying your past, you need a positive vision of the future, and for now, there is nothing better to see than the past.
- That's not true — there's Hong Kong, there's ecofeminism. Anyway, in Tirso's time, the future prospect was already in view. You can't bring everything into the present!

She starts to laugh:

- In our doctoral courses you always had it in for anachronisms!

late afternoon

Silveira and I meet in the lobby of his hotel. He knows I am curious about his story and is expecting my questions; it's almost like an interview.

- My mother was from the Makonde people; she came from a village close to Pemba in the province of Cabo Delgado, just south of the border between Tanzania and Mozambique.

- That area was already liberated by the Mozambique Liberation Front by the end of the 1970s. But I know that it is now in serious difficulty...

He shakes his head with a pained expression:

- Very serious, unfortunately. Poverty and conflict — not only the historic conflict between the two main political parties but also with new parties, and now the area is under attack from violent Islamic extremists. All this despite, or better, because of, the wealth of resources in the province up there, including the vast reserves of natural gas discovered in recent years.

Anyway, we lived in Beira, in the middle of the country. I went to the Mission School run by the Consolata Missionaries, then I went to Turin, then Rome to the Jesuits' Gregorian University, then to Brussels and other centers like Louvain in Belgium. Now I am in Rome again, although I continue to travel a lot, and I always keep up my links with the Jesuit High School in Turin.

This is all very interesting, and I ask him to tell me about his time in Turin when that school was already inspired by its policy of anti-discrimination and now by its mission to “educate the world.” He shows me the school website, which presents Ignatius Loyola as “revolutionary” and “counter-cultural” figure and showcases the reports of women students on their school trip to China. The languages taught at the school are English and Mandarin.

- I'm beginning to see why Leonzio interests you, I tell him.
- While I still don't know why he interests you.
- That's a good question; I don't really know, either. You wouldn't go first, would you, and explain your reasons?
- Of course. Do you remember the tussles between the humanist Settembrini and the Jesuit Naphta in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*? They are about humanism,

Romanticism, health, and disease; in short, about history and the world. And they are all really a competition for the souls of two young people, Hans Castorp and his cousin Joachim. Ours is the same struggle. Leonzio is different from many young people today in the intellectual and theological cast. He gives his gestures of revolt, but he is similar to them in his extreme and provocative acts, like kicking the skull — in other words, in the challenge to life and death. For Leonzio, as for our young people, excessive sex or food or wine — to which today we must add drugs and general ennui — are not interesting in themselves but because they fill the space created by degraded versions of materialism. Of course, Machiavelli is not simply one site of a general degradation. He is our historical antagonist, the progenitor, not so much an enemy as a fellow contestant in the struggle for control, first and foremost, over people's minds. Leonzio loses his head after kicking the "dusty skull" because he committed the sin of intellectualism under the influence of the master Machiavelli, which shows that he carries inside a hereditary stain, the negation of the transcendent. The ancestor who smashes his head could resemble Settembrini...

- Don't forget that I have always been on Settembrini's side!
- I know that very well; it's just that today you don't have a spokesperson of his intellectual caliber...

At this point, he can't resist hectoring me a bit:

- I know that you have shared the tradition of the left and of a particular generation, both of which have harbored the delusion of being able to deny the divine completely. You have denied anything that might go beyond physical and social matter, whether this is defined as the relationships of historical production or the individual's physical and psychological uniqueness. In the 1970s, you relegated spirituality to the realm of superstition, and reduced transcendence to a sort of collective imaginary shared by living human

beings, but only by them, since for you, existence was limited to the relationships between living people. That can also be a noble ideal, although it's inadequate concerning all the rest of creation, but you pursued it with the same foolish naivete that Leonzio did.

- Not everyone can be as sophisticated as the Jesuits.
- Quite right! Please forgive my pushiness.
- I'm not offended; you have put it in a friendly way. But Settembrini is neither vindictive nor completely damned like Leonzio's ancestor. Anyway — it seems you have already drawn out why I am interested in Leonzio.
- More or less — but I am not clear whether you still share that way of thinking.
- Certainly for me, and perhaps for all of us, cracks in the argument have opened up. Denying the divine — if you define it as transcendence — gets dodgier if you add in the dead...
- The dead?
- If humanity encompasses past and future generations, as I hope it does, humanist spirituality trespasses into the divine. The living are surrounded by the dead, who are best seen not as former individuals but as part of one large whole that includes those living now.

He smiles:

- That's from John Berger's essay, "Twelve Theses on the Economy of the Dead."
- Yep, but with Berger you end at a sort of "memory of the dead," an imaginary close to God.
- Is it this conclusion — the only possible logical one — that makes you uncomfortable?
- Yes, because it's neither really logical nor really needed. I still think it may be possible to find something you might call divine inside the self or between you and others that can unite the secular and the spiritual. "The only possible conclusion!" It's precisely this sort of reductive attitude that

makes new interpretations impossible, so that in the discussion of Tirso's final speech, for example, it's either damnation or conversion: there's no third way. Today we have to concern ourselves with the opportunity to find new third ways.

He looks at me closely for a moment with his deep dark eyes — *occhi che bucano*: eyes that pierce, as they say in Piedmontese — and shakes his head, a smile playing around his lips. I understand that he doesn't want to go on arguing with me about this, because there is no chance of reconciling our positions, at least at present. He excuses himself politely, saying he is expecting Skype calls and looks forward to seeing me later at the trattoria.

A Venetian Dinner

It's late evening when I arrive at the trattoria close to the Arsenale, famous for its fish dishes. We've reserved a quiet private room. Silveira introduces me to the other guests, amongst whom is, as I expected, the Egyptian scholar Ahmad H., a handsome and elegant man who introduces himself as a novelist and teacher of creative writing at a university in the Midwest. I'm placed between him and the Jesuit, while in front of me are Kornelia, a blonde woman of Baltic origin and Father Silveira's assistant, and her friend Lydia, a Neapolitan actress. They make a good contrast: Kornelia is in her forties, tall and slender, and Lydia is about ten years older, full-figured with a strong profile and chestnut hair with a dark part. Kornelia is placid but with a determined air, whereas Lydia is pushy, despite an almost child-like smile. Between them sits Etienne B., a Belgian friend of Silveira and a Don Giovanni expert from the Collège d'Europe in Bruges who wrote a dictionary on Don Giovanni myths.

I realize I have interrupted a discussion between Kornelia and Lydia and apologize for doing so, but Lydia says they can pick it up any time, and meanwhile she would like to know who I am and what I do. Without deviating from his reserve, Father Silveira quickly resumes the conversation we had before dinner, saying that he and I have Mozambique in common and that I

have done research focused on the anti-Portuguese liberation movement in the 1960s and '70s.

— She also worked with Frelimo before it took power in 1975.

Lydia asks whether it was in those years that Bob Dylan wrote the song “Mozambique,” which was on his album *Desire*.

— Yes, but the album had nothing to do with independence, says Ahmad. Mozambique is welcome, it's time to talk about something relevant to the present, such as colonialism.

This gives me the chance I was waiting for to ask Padre Silveira if he ever returned to Mozambique. His face clouds over and he purses his lips before responding succinctly:

— Certainly. Many humanitarian and commercial initiatives have started in Italy and carried out with Italy from Rome, but also from Turin, Vercelli, and other cities. The ENI energy company develops gas fields and promotes sanitation, road building, and environmental protections. The Catholic relief organization, Caritas, is active in helping farmers and vulnerable people. We, of course, are concerned with social development and education.

Ahmad reacts forcefully:

— But the agreements between ENI and the Mozambican government for liquid natural gas are unsatisfactory! And the tax regime the oil companies have been given is too favorable. Exxon, Total, and Sasal are the companies, which means the USA, France, South Africa, Qatar, and China. All in addition, of course, to Italy with ENI and others. You probably know that ENI's development plans put forward a reduction in oil extraction but also an increase in natural gas without any investment in renewable energy. As for Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth —

Kornelia interrupts him impatiently:

- Go and tell people who are dying of hunger that they can't exploit their own country's resources in order to start experimenting with renewables!

Lydia supports her indignantly:

- Yes, while we continue to use gas for heating, cooking, and everything else! And what would happen in Mozambique if these investments were stopped?

Everyone is getting fired up. The diners once again find themselves in opposing camps, split between the bitterness of Silveira on the one hand, which conjures up the coexistence of the various religions, including Islam, and on the other hand, the discomfort of Etienne, which I share. Silveira insists that peace depends on solidarity between religions. Ahmad snorts nervously and reminds us about the destruction jihadists are bringing to northern Mozambique. Etienne and Kornelia, after exchanging a knowing look, try to divert the conversation toward other subjects. With calm authority, Etienne explains how all this is, in part, a consequence of colonialism, not in a direct cause and effect way, but as an undeniable form of historical legacy. He and Ahmad discuss this idea while Kornelia and Lydia resume their dialogue on Don Giovanni, and I join in. Silveira sits in silent thought. The two separate conversations run on, dividing the table in two, until the Jesuit rouses himself and tries to reunite the two factions, mentioning the relevance of the colonial context for the figure of Don Giovanni. Tossing up this ball produces instant harmony. Lydia and I want to know more, and Ahmad, who has been lending an ear to our conversation, immediately gives us a brief review of the colonial elements of the myth, happy to fill in the gaps in our knowledge.

- Staying with Tirso for the moment, the theme of colonial conquest is very prominent, describing the preparations the

King of Portugal makes for conquering Goa and the sieges of two African port cities, Ceuta and Tangiers. Tirso spent three years, between 1615 and 1618, on a missionary voyage to Santo Domingo to convert the inhabitants of the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean. A version of *The Trickster of Seville* was put on in Lima in 1623, perhaps as a dress rehearsal for its staging in the metropolis.

Etienne, who has listened and nodded repeatedly, adds that the theme of the colonial and postcolonial in *Don Giovanni* was the meeting point between him and Ahmad and is now central to their research for both of them. Silveira observes that we have returned to Tirso and the earlier discussion between Kornelia and Lydia. Lydia quickly picks up his point:

- Until now, no one has mentioned the most important thing, that the *Don Giovanni* of Tirso is, first of all, a trickster, and his most outrageous trick is his fake repentance. The comedy really begins with a joke straight out of the world of the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

Lydia reminds us that the story takes place at the court of Naples, where Don Juan Tenorio has seduced the duchess Isabella by disguising himself as her lover Don Octavio. When he is found out, he is forced to flee by sea with his servant Catalinón, but throughout the play he goes on playing the same sorts of tricks. Shipwrecked on the Spanish coast, and helped by a pretty fisherwoman, he gets back into the groove straight away with a promise of marriage, an especially juicy trick because it's played against a woman who has always ridiculed men. He follows up with what he considers his best trick, meeting Doña Ana while wearing her beloved's stolen red cloak.

- And then the finale, the fake repentance. In our staging at the Naples Theater Festival, we stressed its challenge to the idea of life after death, which is why it is so extreme.

- Or better, *in extremis*, which fails, says Ahmad, a touch sarcastically.
- But many of Don Giovanni's tricks fail, says Lydia with barely concealed annoyance, at least on his last day. And the trick with the cloak doesn't work because Doña Ana sees through the disguise and calls for help, so Don Giovanni has to kill her father. All of this is a part of the cruel web of deception that he weaves, whose central aspect is that it's a game wherein you don't know if you will win or lose.
- You must expect to lose if you are dealing with the afterlife, Silveira notes as an aside.

Lydia doesn't pick up on this needling:

- There can also be a loss because the whole story demands it, to refer to Ahmad's intervention this afternoon, but I would rather call it dramatic logic. What sense would the drama have if it ended with a genuine act of repentance? In terms of burlesque, you have neglected the role of the servant, a central element around which the relationship with the dead man revolves.

She explains to us with enthusiasm and finesse that the central comic role is not that of the trickster, whose pranks are only fun for himself, but of his servant Catalinón, who is one of a long line of Don Giovanni's servants stretching from the *Commedia dell'Arte* to Molière's Sganarelle and Da Ponte's Leporello. Highlighting the comic side of popular speech in contrast to the language and tone of aristocratic society, they speak in different dialects, from the *Bergamasco* of Lombardy to *Napolitano*. In *Burlador*, Don Juan challenges the statue, but it is the servant who sends him the invitation to dinner by throwing out mocking jokes about death. The servant makes jokes all the way through the dinner served to the dead man on a black table decorated with black plates. The whole play is a succession of obscene observations and allusions made by Catalinón that are straight out of the *Commedia dell'Arte* playbook. In this con-

text, only an insincere repentance that fails in its purpose can be an adequate ending.

The actress has talked with the same vehemence that Silveira used in the afternoon when he lashed out at my generation. Now it's Kornelia's turn, and she speaks forcefully:

- Lydia may be correct as far as Tirso is concerned, but in general, the only real solution in both theological and dramatic terms is the absolute opposite: the conversion of Don Giovanni, or rather, a complete change in his character and his life, as happens in the *Don Juan Tenorio* of Zorrilla.

Silveira smiles as if he has heard this discussion before, and almost imperceptibly nods in encouragement. All fired up, Kornelia describes how Zorrilla's Don Juan repents at the moment of death while Doña Ines intercedes for him with God, imploring that the sinner should be sent to purgatory, and succeeding. It's about the mystery of divine mercy that humanity cannot understand, based on the love of a pure and virtuous woman, a love that Don Juan fully returns.

Etienne confirms this idea with his expertise:

- Love works because the Beloved represents a link with transcendence, which is absolute and incomprehensible to humans, who can only experience it through love. Zorrilla is reanimating the tradition of courtly love in which the Beloved represents contact with the divine, that is, with the other, and love is the way to a spiritual reformation that radically transforms the personality. It is no coincidence that Don Giovanni is written during the Romantic period, in the mid-nineteenth century.

Silveira wants to add a final something, a curiosity, almost. In 1948 Salvador de Madariaga wrote a radio play for the South American BBC World Service in which the protagonist was Zorrilla's Don Juan, who was redeemed by the love of Doña Ines:

- Back up Ahmad. I must tell you that Madariaga created Don Giovanni not just as a European cultural archetype but also as a figure representing an imperial conqueror. Thanks to qualities such as his, Europe, which he considered the bearer of universal culture, was able to “create” America. Cortés, who conquered Mexico for the Spanish Empire, was a notable Don Giovanni. Madariaga was a fervent Europeanist, and his Don Giovanni embodies the crimes and excesses that stain the history of European empires. According to Madariaga, redemption for past crimes lies with women, because they are less implicated in the crimes of colonialism. Madariaga preferred Zorrilla’s romantic version of the story.

Ahmad disagrees about the role of European women:

- The research I’m doing on a novel by Tayeb Salih supports the opposite view, especially regarding a postcolonial Don Giovanni, but I don’t want to go on about the complicity of Western women in the colonial project. I’ll talk about that at the next conference in Paris. Right now, now I’d rather have my say about the links between Don Giovanni and colonialism, which is more complex than mere conquest.

Ahmad introduces the theme of benevolent colonialism by talking about a mid-nineteenth-century utopian Désiré Laverdant, who mixed ideas inspired by the socialism of Charles Fourier—community life, communal education for children, and the abolition of slavery—with Catholicism. His drama *Don Juan Converti: Drame En Sept Actes* created a parallel between Christopher Columbus, who conquered territory, and Don Giovanni, who conquered women: they both shared the same attitudes and used the same vocabulary, although with different meanings:

- Laverdant also saw colonialism as a European mission in which, due to the superiority of the white race, Europe was

bringing unity and peace to the universe. According to him, for France, Madagascar could be not only a military and economic resource, but also the testing ground for a harmonious colonialism. But Etienne, who hasn't spoken yet, will surely have something to add to this idea.

The Belgian scholar parries this approach:

- I'm writing about the transition from colonial to postcolonial in the figure of Don Giovanni in interwar Belgium for the Paris conference. But I would just like to add a small quote concerning the Francophone Don Giovanni that brings together military and amorous conquests. Molière's *Dom Juan*, who takes his inspiration from Alexander the Great, explains who he is in these words: "Nothing can withstand the impetuosity of my desires: I feel my heart capable of loving all the earth; and, like Alexander, I wish that there were still more worlds in which to wage my amorous campaigns." And his servant Sganarelle, explaining to Donna Elvira why his master had abandoned her, says, "Madam, it was because of conquerors, and Alexander, and the need of more worlds, that we had to leave. There, Sir, that's all I could think of to say."

He then turns gracefully, almost tenderly, to Kornelia and says:

- It is true that the glorification of love makes a romantic solution possible, and I would be interested in going back to what you were saying, but I'd like to suggest a compromise: let's stop this obsessive conversation and pay attention to the food. We've let sardines in saor and moeche — or mazanete crabs as they are called — go by without comment, not to mention the wine, and I would not want the same fate to befall the liver with white polenta, rice with goby, and so on. Don Giovanni would also be annoyed by that. So, please visit me tomorrow evening after dinner at the apartment I

rent when I come to Venice. I would like to continue our discussion then.

Kornelia thanks Etienne, accepts the invitation enthusiastically, praises the dry white wine served with the antipasti, and suggests that for the rest of the dinner we don't pick another wine from the Vicenza area, but rather choose a trevigiano. As a good connoisseur, she has studied the list of local wines. Etienne looks at her admiringly and says that the gambellara is a historic wine that Don Giovanni might have drunk.

The writer and the actress decline dinner the following evening, but the rest of us accept the invitation gratefully, since we are now stuffed with Don Giovanni. Father Silveira mischievously suggests we invite Emilia for tomorrow, as the discussion might interest her.

Don Giovanni's Lover

Wednesday morning

Yesterday evening, returning to the San Lorenzo neighborhood where we are both staying, Lydia and I agreed to continue the conversation. Today we meet early for coffee in the Campo Santi Filippo e Giacomo, still empty and quiet. Soon we'll have to leave it to the crowds and head off toward San Lorenzo and San Giorgio degli Schiavoni in the direction of Fondamenta Nuova.

Lydia walks quickly and stylishly as if she were on set. Her movements maintain a solidity that resists the flurry of people and things. She has just received confirmation that she will be given the funds for a show about Don Giovanni, an assemblage of theatrical, literary, and philosophical works, in which she will work as both actress and co-director. She warmly invites me to come to the rehearsals, which will be held in Florence at the Fabbrica Europa Contemporary Arts Festival.

- I'd love to. Yesterday evening you mentioned performing in other Don Giovannis, didn't you?
- Yes, I played most of the female roles in Tirso's *Burlador* because we wanted to create a parallel female version of Don Giovanni's disguises. He is so versatile that he can plausibly substitute himself for a legitimate lover, transform-

ing himself and presenting every woman with the face she wants to see. He offers himself to them as a mirror reflecting the loved one as they want to see them. For this reason, when the king of Naples asks him who he is, he can answer, “Who am I? A man without a name,” and — about the meeting with the Duchess Isabela — “Who should we be? A man and a woman.” With this smoke and mirrors maneuver, he can persuade every woman they are The One.

- But it’s not a trick!
- Not really, it’s a mask that he puts on and believes in himself while wearing it. As Rilke says, Don Giovanni leads many women to “forsaken solitude.” He seems to push women into a process where, despite suffering, they recognize themselves as unique and therefore as full subjects. But this self-recognition is accompanied by disappointment because it is born from deception or violence. Don Juan’s comment in Tirso, “They’re all a joke to me right now,” mocks the illusion of creating a life of one’s own based on romantic love.
- Was that your interpretation of *Burlador*?
- Yes, in a way, but it wasn’t just negative. I played the duchess, the fisherwoman, and the countrywoman to show that women also act out the *mise-en-scène* of amorous seduction, adopting different roles, including that of the betrayed woman with her unhappy lover’s lament.
- So the women weren’t portrayed as victims. Or better, under this sentimental contract, they aren’t always depicted as inferior.
- Certainly not. Not all of Tirso’s women behave in the same way in this contract. The fisherwoman is the most tragic because she has constantly mocked men and now suffers the same fate that she has inflicted on her lovers. She is passionate and intense; her lament is a bitter reflection of the destiny she wanted. Doña Ana is astute and attentive and immediately sees through Don Giovanni’s disguise. She mourns the father he stole from her, not an unhappy love. And so it goes. Shifting between roles, I changed not just my costume but also my whole posture and demeanor.

- These characters never met one another, though?
- My duchess, who opens and closes the piece, tells the audience about her meeting with the two other women seduced by Don Giovanni, the fisherwoman, and the countrywoman. And, yes, we had to change two or three scenes from the original version to have them recounted by the duchess — that is, by me. It's an old technique from *Commedia dell'Arte* and other troupes that didn't have many actors available, and it worked well. It was a test of skill that shifted attention from the seducer to the women. I even reworked the scene wherein the Don deceives two women simultaneously, which appears in many Don Giovanni plays from Molière to Bertati, with the Don as a woman, too.
- You know the Don Giovanni repertoire really well.
- I had to! I've experimented with it offstage as Don Giovanni's lover!

She says it conspiratorially as if revealing a secret, adding emphasis by opening her eyes wide and covering her mouth with her hands. We both laugh, and I must admit that something similar happened to me. But my Don Giovanni claimed, despite his many well-known past conquests — and probably future ones too, given his reluctance to make commitments — that at that moment he had only one loving and sexual relationship: with me. He was married but had promised to maintain a friendly and affectionate sibling-style relationship with his wife.

- And you believed him?
- I did. He really seemed to have little time, and to spend it all with me. I would have liked to live with him, but it wasn't possible because he was in a love triangle with his wife and his mother, who had known each other forever. The mother was dead, so the love triangle was unbreakable. In the final analysis, that was the role assigned to me and the role I wanted, like many of the women seduced by Don Giovanni. It resonated with my psychoanalysis, where I was re-enact-

ing with my analyst the state both of the motherless orphan and a daughter separated from the father.

- For me, in contrast, nothing went well. But I had no real suspicions. John was English, and he was always moving for work. He was a classical violinist, but he played other genres and with all kinds of musicians. I was in London to learn English. There were many places I didn't know, and I didn't have any understanding of how long it took to get from one place to another. Once, I arrived early at the apartment where we usually met and I discovered his email inbox open on his computer, filled with messages from his lovers. So I made a list of names...
- You made a catalog! Like Leporello!
- Exactly. But I also added a trick of my own. I sent the list to his wife.
- What an idea! Worthy of a comic actress.
- Pity she didn't believe it. She was in the same social circles as many of the women on the list and knew many of them. Who knows what John told her. For my part, I didn't want to hear his excuses; we broke up then and there. He and his wife later separated. I don't know if it was because of me, but I was satisfied with my parting shot.
- I can imagine! It's a great joke that also makes me laugh, although I always take Don Giovanni too seriously.
- Why is that? Why are you so fascinated with Don Giovanni?
- Well... I collect stories and memories and record them with vocals or on video; I transcribe them and piece them together. Don Giovanni is an inexhaustible source of stories.
- That I understand. And you don't have personal reasons?
- Oh, I don't know — maybe it's about getting older. Don Giovanni transports me back to when I had *joie de vivre*. Now living is more often tiresome than pleasurable. Don Giovanni can never age in the same way Casanova did.
- There are old Don Giovannis in plays and life. Kierkegaard makes him "handsome, not altogether young" and suggests his age as "thirty-three, that being the age of a generation." Tirso allows him the alibi of reckless youth, but he doesn't

fix his age precisely. I've always thought it out of place that Byron's Don Juan was only eighteen because he can't be an adolescent. I think he should be between thirty and forty years old, even if, for Da Ponte, he is "a young, extremely licentious nobleman."

- From what I know, in most Don Giovanni stories, the seduced women are young, whereas he has to confront older enemies, like the father or the Commendatore. Don Giovanni acts as a mediator between the ages and generations, and for this reason, he can be neither old nor young because neither youth nor age would fit with his fate.
- The perfect example is Losey's Don Giovanni in his film of the same name. The character Ruggiero Raimondi plays is in his prime and can mock social conventions that ridicule both old age and youth. Losey deliberately introduces, at the beginning and end of the film, the young man who perhaps will be the next, enigmatic Don. Don Giovanni could not fully fulfill his destiny of being at the center if he were only youthful or old. However, the onset of old age has moved forward over the centuries, and people over thirty-eight considered themselves old, as Montaigne did.
- Whatever age Don Giovanni might be, I see him as sparkling and joyful, while I feel slow, damaged, and melancholic. His character's presence contributes to my obsession with old age. It reminds me of the contrast between his quickness — which was once mine — and my slowing down today. As a friend of mine from New York, who is almost my age, says, "I don't like being slow; I liked being fast." The prospect of slowing down scares me because it reminds me that the end is near. Don Giovanni is not afraid of dying and dies as explosively as he lived.

She looks at me absentmindedly:

- Perhaps it's better to arrive at death slowly and not explosively. Anyway, you haven't convinced me. I know that

getting old is awful, but you talk about it as if you were ten years older than you are.

I'd rather change the subject than run the risk of disagreeing on this sore point:

— Anyway, tell me how Kornelia reacted to your adventures with the English Don Giovanni and his wife...

She laughs full-throatedly:

— Oh, she felt very differently! She also wanted to be the only one. On the one hand, she would like to seduce Don Giovanni like Zorrilla's Ines, but on the other, you've seen how flattered she is by the adoration of the Belgian Don Ottavio! I see you want to change the subject. But one can always benefit from a little dramatic staging in life, as in theater. You must be able to live your old age as if it's a play, downplaying it a little, perhaps with the help of Don Giovanni.

— You'll have to tell me how to do that...

— You cannot take Don Giovanni too seriously; it goes against who he is. Come to Florence to see our rehearsals!

On that promise, we part, taking different streets.

Second Imaginary Dialogue

Wednesday at midday

From the Fondamenta San Severo, I take the long walk to Cannaregio to find a friend who lives near the church of La Madonna dell'Orto. I suddenly hear Don Giovanni's voice, which often happens when I'm free to fantasize.

- She's pretty, your new friend.
- Ah, there you are! Have you seduced her, too?
- Of course. Otherwise, she would not be so sure that she was the only one. In the end, Lydia and Kornelia, the redhead and the blonde, have the same illusion: that I pursue one single ideal of femininity, and each one of them, in their way, can embody it. Other things aside, Kornelia, too, is very attractive and in love with me, in a way, but she is more cautious in her choices. This is to be expected, given that one is an actress and the other a Jesuit's assistant, although the Jesuits are always better than the Franciscans.
- So it's true — the story that the Franciscans, who couldn't stand you challenging their monopoly on transcendence, got rid of you and then spread around the little story of the Commendatore?

He gestures dismissively:

- That's a version endorsed by Camus and Ellery Queen. It has the advantage of cleaning up superstitions about Hell and the talking statue. As Molière's Dom Juan says, it could result from a hallucination. But without the statue back from the dead, the story becomes trivial.
- Certainly yours is a theatrical drama and must remain so, even if it deals with interior drama.
- Let's remove "interior" and hang on to the theater. I'm not interested in your kind of divided subjectivity. Here's why I cannot repent. I am my own story, or, better, stories. I've already told you it's better to focus on the stories rather than the self, because that's only the means of telling them.
- What type of subjectivity would interest you?
- What lies beneath — the deep substratum upon which the self floats. You can't reduce subjectivity to the self.
- In any case, your personality is a part of me, of my subjectivity.
- Ah no, that's not enough, or I am not enough. There's something else. There is an Other inside you.
- You're talking like a Lacanian. I wasn't making you so knowledgable.
- And why not? There's even a rather interesting book — *The Philosophy of Don Giovanni!* Besides, "individual" and "unique" are not entirely the same thing. Because the individual includes collective and shared elements, whether ancient or new. The latter prevails in my persona. You should integrate that into the self.
- Now we are moving into the Jungian world. But how do you help women become complete individuals if you are not fully self-realized and are not an individual?
- Exactly in this way: I let their individuality emerge. And at that moment, each is the only one, at least in some way and for a little while. Uniqueness is temporary, not only as far as I'm concerned, but in general: individuality is a tiny part of the subject. In my case, the Romantics' insistence on the

One is out of place, as is the attempt to reduce my persona to a single Don Giovanni who returns in different epochs and places, a kind of eternal return that doesn't convince me. My dimension is multiplicity, both in women and in my character.

- You have now replaced Molière's Sganarelle in the philosophical debate: he talked about smoking tobacco, and you are creating smoke screens. As a historian, I agree, in principle, but it's more complicated than that. There are numerous women for each Don Giovanni, and there is his variousness towards each woman, but both things are different from the multiplicity of his personae through history.
- The last thing is very close to my heart. It isn't true that *plus ça change et plus c'est la même chose*, as if the changes were irrelevant and only theme is important. The context is fundamental, and Don Giovanni is varied. These days, for example, my irreverent and blasphemous side is in the shadows, because it's no longer scandalous.
- Still, there cannot be multiplicity without heartbreak, which you won't admit.

He rises, provoked to respond:

- Your stories of heartbreak! Do you want to die broken into pieces at your age? It's you who doesn't want to go back over it because your failures would be revealed: your love affairs with the wrong men. And you were unable to salvage the only one that made sense.
- You are merciless! Go ahead, twist the knife in the wound.
- I know I can be cruel. With good reason in this case. You can't reduce me to a kind and wise part of yourself.

He realizes I'm distressed and reacts in his usual manner:

- Oh come on! I was joking! Don't fret about it. We won't talk about it anymore. I'm fed up with being labeled ignorant and thoughtless while my servants and chroniclers are so

knowledgeable and thoughtful. And if that's not enough, they lecture me about morals while they drone on about philosophical or theological questions.

Douglas Fairbanks and Marlon Brando

Wednesday, late afternoon

We meet up again with Emilia, for whom I provide a detailed run-down of the evening before, inviting her to the follow-up discussion after dinner. For her part she tells me about two films she saw the evening before about the putative age of Don Giovanni. We're in a café in the big square by Santa Maria Formosa, and she has just come out of the Querini Stampalia Foundation, where she wanted to look at the eighteenth-century furnishings and pictures for her sets. While she finishes making notes on what she has found, I realize how much she has changed since we were together in Venice. She was very thin but is now harmoniously plump, although she still has a slender figure. She had a blond bob, but her hair is longer now, with dyed streaks, and her delicate features have become sharper with age thanks to subtle wrinkles and a smile that hovers between irony and wit. Her liveliness has overcome her former timidity as she throws herself into recreating the previous evening.

According to her, the central theme of Don Giovanni in the twentieth century is aging, which comes back repeatedly, and not just the aging of the character but also of his own myth in

our time. Emilia is convinced that Don Giovanni can't be dead as others maintain, even if he isn't alive in the same way as he was in the past, both full of joie de vivre and also sacrilegious. The whole myth has undergone a change of tone that swerves from tragicomic to parody or cruel farce.

Farce was the mood of the first film she saw yesterday, *The Private Life of Don Juan*, made in the 1930s. This Don Juan is the same age as the actor who plays him, Douglas Fairbanks, who was already fifty-two at the height of his popularity. To manage climbing a rope ladder up to a balcony where beautiful women await, the film's hero must follow a diet supervised by Leporello, submit to a masseur, and tear off his white hair. Moreover, he has a wife with whom he is consistently unfaithful, yet he always returns to her.

Emilia admits that *The Private Life* deserves the poor reception it had in Europe and in South America, but in terms of the performance she plans in Warsaw, she thinks the way the film offers a "double" protagonist is suggestive. In the film, directed by Alexander Korda, a young man impersonating Don Giovanni is killed in a duel by a jealous husband. The true seducer, Don Giovanni himself, therefore has the privilege of attending his funeral, at which dozens of grieving women come together. But none of them recognizes him when he presents himself in the flesh. The whole lot of them prefer to believe that he is dead, in homage to his mythic persona, which in collective memory is passed on nostalgically as more attractive and even more commanding than he ever was in reality. Emilia points out that the possibility of attending one's own funeral is part of Otto Rank's theme of the Double and is an example of self-awareness that is lacking in Don Giovanni.

The prevalence of memory and entertainment over "reality" interests Emilia in terms of her future performance. In fact, the film's plot includes the publication of a book called *The Private Life of Don Giovanni*, which sells thousands of copies and is turned into a play. When Don Giovanni forces his way onto the stage, protesting that the text contains many lies, he is mistaken for a madman. When the director asks the audience whether

they are interested in the real life of Don Giovanni, the spectators shout out that they are not because they much prefer the legend. Don Juan has no choice but to follow Leporello's advice and retire while the memory of who he was ten years ago is still vivid.

Emilia insists that she likes the disconnect between art and life at the latter's expense. But then, I say, there is Hoffmann's version, in which the story of Don Giovanni appears as an insert, framed by the journey of a composer who narrates his imaginary encounter with the Don Giovanni — and above all with the Donna Anna — of Mozart. No, replies Emilia, in Hoffmann you don't find the now crucial theme of aging.

— So, I ask, where are we today?

Emilia replies that we are at the absurd point of forced reconciliation between youth and age, as evidenced by last night's second film, *Don Juan DeMarco*, directed by Jeremy Leven.

— Oh, I saw that in London with a friend when it came out in 1995 or '96; she grumbled at me because I dragged her to go. If I remember correctly, it's the story of a young man who believes he is Don Giovanni.

— Yes, yes. The film is from 1995, but paradoxically it anticipates the themes of the 2000s. The young man, played by Johnny Depp, has adopted this identity to get away from himself and his relationship with his mother. He visits a psychiatrist — Marlon Brando — who listens to his invented stories of duels and sex scenes revealed in flashbacks. The old man is caught up in his young patient's tales, who infects everyone around him in the mental hospital with youthful energy. When he is "cured," he understands that he is not Don Giovanni, and the psychiatrist and his wife take him on a trip with them. Experience and fantasy are thus reconciled, and the story ends on an island where the young man reunites with his former love.

— It was a terrible film, from what I remember.

- Both the Korda and this one were awful, but their narrative structures interested me. Both shuffled the cards between reality and fantasy. In *The Private Life*, the invention of Don Giovanni's biography splits the story into the fantastic and the realistic, and the former prevails. In Leven's film, I'm drawn to the discovery that both the young man's account and the whole story of his life are a heap of lies told by everyone involved. So the implication of mental illness dissolves, but on the island, the game begins again, inserting fantasy into reality. Don Giovanni constantly vacillates between reality and imagination, and when you deal with him, you need to know how to put him back into his proper shape.
- That's a fascinating interpretation. But can I ask why the "real world" Don Giovanni interests you?
- Ah, that's an old story, and I don't think it's germane. While studying here in Italy, I had a relationship with someone older than me who openly described himself as a Don Giovanni, and I was fine with that. Indeed, it increased his attraction and my own self-esteem. But I knew it implicitly. He didn't flaunt it, and I didn't want to see it. We had identical cell phones, free thanks to a "family" contract — what an irony! — and once by mistake they got swapped. There was an archive of messages, sent and received, that he was keeping on his, and I felt compelled to read them. It was over for me after that.

Another intrusion of technology into a love story: an email for Lydia and a cell phone for Emilia. It reminds me of an American friend whose lover dumped her on Skype.

- You said he was older than you?
- Yes, a lot. But that's only a secondary reason for my interest in Don Giovanni's age; the main reason is dramatic logic. The theater can update the myth, substituting the threat of Hell with the reality of old age, which makes repentance inevitable, even if it takes the diminished form of regret.

- That’s a lovely interpretation, better than the films you described.
- And in fact, literary and dramatic versions are disappointing. Otto Rank, who is a goldmine of ideas and suggestions, lists many works about Don Giovanni’s old age, noting that almost all of them are no good. In Paris, I saw a revival of a play that was first performed at the Odéon at the beginning of the last century called *The Old Age of Don Giovanni*. The protagonist was a tragedian who had observed his own aging process for years while identifying with Don Giovanni and working out how to put him on stage. It was successful work then, but it now seems ridiculous and unreal, not just because it was written in florid rhymes. Don Giovanni is so old that he needs help walking, and instead of drinking wine, he drinks milk and honey! Moreover, he renounces a girl who falls in love with him, the daughter of the only woman who has ever rejected him, and kills himself while declaring that he loves her in return and praising humanity. It is relentlessly tedious.
- That confirms my constant refrain that Don Giovanni can’t grow old —
- But Casanova can. I know the refrain. It’s no coincidence that the finest interpretation of an ageing seducer, written by Schnitzler, is about Casanova. It’s a terrible portrait of an old man who buys a night with the beautiful and learned Marcolina from her lover, who looks like a young Casanova. She notices the switch at sunrise, gazing with horror at Casanova’s elderly nakedness. Casanova, in turn, kills the young lover in a duel, leaving him naked on the ground. He spends the remainder of his wretched life spying on “free thinkers” for the Venetian government.
- No, this isn’t how we want to imagine Don Giovanni.
- In fact, I’m exploring other approaches, including the legacy problem of who will inherit the seducer’s mantle, as in the films of Losey and Leven.

European Myths

Wednesday, after dinner

A lovely top-floor apartment on the Rio di San Lorenzo, topped off by a terrace with a pergola. Our Belgian friend, Etienne B., greets us in a friendly way and promptly offers us coffee, fragolino wine, and zaeti biscuits to refresh us after the climb up, of which the last flight was steep. I realize only now how tall he is. In fact, he hunches his shoulders as if he does not want to tower over us. He has iron-grey hair sticking up like a brush, a large nose close to a long, slender mouth reminiscent of a Pantaloon mask, and facial lines softened by a natural kindness.

Kornelia waits with anticipation for his comments on her version of Zorilla, while Emilia, to whom I have carefully reported Kornelia's version, is also waiting. Urged by the two young women, Monsieur B. explains that the play, defined by Zorilla as a "religious fantasy," was pretty much a fiasco in the mid-nineteenth century but has become successful over time. It was also staged more than a century later with sets and costumes designed by Salvador Dalí.

— Yesterday, he continues, Kornelia rightly chose to begin with Don Giovanni's salvation, which Doña Ines mediated. I'd like to add that Ines dies of a broken heart when Don

Giovanni kills her father and Don Luis, his own friend and criminal rival, with whom he had a wager as to which of them could carry out the worst crimes scot-free: himself in Italy, or Don Luis in France. Of course, the winner is Don Giovanni, who seduced the most women and killed the most men in duels. But when Don Giovanni kidnaps Doña Ines from the convent, he falls in love and wants to marry her. Faced with the derision of Don Gonzalo and Don Luis, he kills both of them.

Kornelia believes that the gory side of the story is necessary to bring out the remarkable nature of the conversion.

- It is true, admits Etienne, that this Don Giovanni is particularly savage, but up to this point the drama proceeds in the usual way and then changes track with the falling in love. The second part, which radically departs from tradition, is born from this and offers a new persona for Don Giovanni, from Satan to saint. I won't bore you with a detailed account because some passages are the same as many other versions: the scene at the cemetery, the infernal dinner, and the irruption of the underworld. I just want to place Kornelia's story about the intercession of Doña Ines, the conversion, and divine forgiveness in this narrative. It is not the only version of this kind. Others have a romantic inspiration, interpreting Don Giovanni's volatility as an incessant search for an ideal love object. Some interpreters, from Otto Rank to Camille Dumoulié, claim that the transition from many women to the One alludes to women's emancipation from male sexual power.
- So in the romantic interpretation, there might be a feminist version, Emilia says with skepticism.
- Exactly so. But I believe that nothing is more contrary to the spirit of the myth than to attribute Don Giovanni's search for pleasure to an ulterior motive. The principle that governs his life is the incessant movement from one conquest to another, falling out of love as quickly as falling

into it. Otherwise, the contrast with Don Ottavio would disappear. I can absolutely say so since in my own life I am a Don Ottavio! To suppose that the catalog of the hundreds of conquered and abandoned women is only a cover to chase a unique undiscoverable or elusive woman is to distort the figure of Don Giovanni. It is true that to him, every woman briefly seems irreplaceable and that she, and none other, must be conquered, but this state of grace ends straight after the conquest.

We all agree, except Kornelia, who frowns. Father Silveira smiles at the comparison between Etienne and Ottavio and shows his support for the Belgian's position by humming the end of the Catalog Aria from Mozart's opera:

It doesn't matter if she's rich,
Or ugly or gorgeous,
As long as she wears a skirt!

Silveira continues:

- In Mozart's opera, Don Giovanni fails to recognize Donna Elvira when she follows him after being abandoned by him, confirming that he can't establish a loyal and faithful relationship with any woman beyond declarations that help him get his way in the short term — because he forgets each woman as soon as he starts a new seduction. For this reason, the romantic interpretation of Don Giovanni's frenzy as a search for the ideal woman comes up against another insoluble dilemma, the conflict between the narrative tradition of the myth itself and the innovation introduced with the figure of the One.
- They aren't entirely incompatible, Kornelia protests.

Emilia says she is right, adding another piece to the puzzle:

- On the theatrical level, the love-induced conversion introduced by Zorrilla is a great idea, a *coup-de-théâtre* that was well received by contemporary audiences. Today perhaps not so much... But the writer who pushed Don Giovanni's conversion further was Oscar Milosz in the theatrical *Mystery* he wrote just before the Great War. He was a Polish diplomat in France and a relative of Nobel Prize winner Czesław Miłosz whose *Miguel Mañara*, inspired by a real person of the seventeenth century, is a ruthless seducer of women, from duchesses to the middle classes and even prostitutes. Don Miguel doesn't keep a catalog of his conquests but he boasts of his betrayals and blasphemies while admitting that he had always searched for love in vain. He falls in love and is loved by a pious young noblewoman, Girolama. Moreover, she cynically forgives his indiscretions with other women because she considers those women equally guilty of adultery.

Kornelia intervenes, pointing out that the author was in fact Lithuanian, and she reinforces the message:

- Milosz doesn't give enough prominence to the love that Don Giovanni finally reciprocates. In this extreme version, the role of the female figure is reduced to almost nothing, and Girolama is merely an apparition who sounds like an etiquette manual with no depth. Fortunately, Girolama dies, and Don Miguel becomes a monk. So total is the inversion of his life that he punishes himself severely until he dies, resulting in miracles. But his conversion would not make sense if it were not mediated by courtly love, the only catalyst capable of giving rise to such an inner revolution.

I am happy that Kornelia has taken up the theme of courtly love, which stands as the polar opposite of the myth of Don Giovanni. I turn to one of my old battle horses, Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World* arguing that Tristan and Don Giovanni represent the two European archetypes of love, two

sides of the same coin. Don Giovanni is the mirror image of Tristan; the latter advances slowly, while Don Giovanni runs all the time. Tristan had just one woman, whereas Don Giovanni had many. The former loved, whereas the latter was loved. Don Giovanni laughs and jokes all of the time, making fun of everything and everyone, while Tristan, as his name suggests, is devoted to melancholy and *tristesse*. But in the end, these two mythic figures resemble one another because they are both dark characters doomed to die. This is why they combine to form a double European myth. Among other things, Rougemont wrote in the 1930s that the Europeans' idea of love is closely connected with the martial notions of siege and conquest, as the warlike language of love since ancient times demonstrates.

Silveira responds:

— “European” myth? I wonder what Ahmad would say to that...

Etienne:

— He might not be in complete disagreement, but he would be critical. He would say that it's valid only in a negative sense; otherwise, you would fall into Eurocentrism.

I feel I ought to defend de Rougemont's positions and reject or minimize the charge of Eurocentrism, but Kornelia protests against the turn the discussion is taking:

— Enough postcolonial theory! In Lydia's absence, it's my turn to return the matter to the realm of performance — where Don Giovanni truly belongs. Yesterday I saw *The Adventures of Don Juan* (1948) at the film festival, with Erroll Flynn playing Don Giovanni. Flynn is a bit heavy-footed, even though he was only thirty-eight. He is scarcely more lively in the last scene, shot a year earlier. But he is also

heroic when he puts the conspirators against the Queen to flight thanks to his bravura swordsmanship.

Emilia points out that Flynn was a Don Giovanni in real life, so the film interests her for its entanglement of life and art. She and Kornelia take turns telling us the plot, which tries to put love and power together in a Hollywood manner. Flynn has to leave the English court because he has caused a scandal. He takes refuge in Spain, where he finds himself at the center of a power struggle and foils plots against the Queen. He admits having countless amorous adventures when he professes his love for her, but he argues he has not yet met the woman of his dreams. The Queen first rejects him, but she ends up falling in love with him. Don Giovanni gives her up for the good of the Spanish people and departs once more with Leporello, promising to dedicate the rest of his life to study. Very soon, an encounter with a young woman brings him back to his calling.

- An accurate pastiche for a romanticized Don Giovanni, observes our host equably, with Max Steiner music instead of Mozart. The director, who was close friends with Flynn, had many affairs with actresses like Bette Davis, John Crawford, and Rita Hayworth.
- But the film is significant, Kornelia insists, because during the years immediately following World War II, it was successful in Europe but not in the United States. It can be taken as a sign that the European public continued to have sympathy for a character that they, like me, considered typically European. In fact, in this version of the Don Giovanni myth, love remains impossible, and the plot cannot be resolved with a divorce that enables a happy union in the Hollywood manner. It's right to talk of a European tradition that revels in love, both unhappy and requited. At the same time, the film's hero revives the other side of the myth, that of the man who is an adventurer, despite his soldierly loyalty.

- One critic saw the film as a saga about an American spy and put it in the context of American foreign relations in the 1940s...

Etienne, however, diplomat that he is, doesn't want to contradict Kornelia and prefers to close the conversation about the "Europeanness" of the myth:

- On the theme of European myth, we should listen to Ahmad. It's a pity that he isn't free tonight and leaving tomorrow. However, he also considers Don Giovanni to be a symbol that is central to Europeanness, though in a different way. From there, he deconstructs the myth from the outside, looking from outside Europe to the world within its borders.
- And do you also work on something similar? I'd like to know.
- No, I'm trying to deconstruct European myths from the inside, as you did with the European idea of love. Next month Ahmad and I will attend a symposium that touches on this topic within a postmodern and postcolonial studies framework. If anyone wants to come and hear us, it will be at the Collège de Philosophie in Paris.

Kornelia is immediately drawn to this prospect, and I share her interest:

- I have a friend at the Collège whom I'd really like to see again, and I could stop off in Paris on my way to the United States. I'll try to come.

He inclines his head a little with his habitual courtesy:

- It would be an honor.

Third Imaginary Dialogue

Wednesday night

I return to the house and wait for my friends, who are putting me up. I sit on the balcony, protected by anti-mosquito fumes. It's the perfect moment for the reappearance of my imaginary interlocutor.

- I see you've made a few strides. Thanks to Emilia and Kornelia, your so-called catalog is less boring than usual.
- Ah, you're back. Okay, let's forget our last conversation, but I'm amazed that you're interested in the topic Kornelia introduced, which I thoroughly enjoyed.
- You like Kornelia because she takes the side of your other fixation, courtly love. But you should have understood that I fall in love constantly, even if courtly love is another thing. Over the centuries many people have tried to turn me into a playful Tristan, which is senseless. Returning to the girls, Emilia is my favorite.
- She's younger, even if not young enough for you.
- Oh, now you are siding with that American professor who understands Leporello's "little one" and "ingenue" to mean they were children!
- But his book about the innocence of Paolina is good...

- Well, the story of the old goat in Venice who sleeps with the little girl sold to him by her mother is well told, with meticulous attention to the original documents, but it has nothing to do with me. Perhaps it's about Casanova and not Don Giovanni, since the latter seduces women with lies and promises but does not purchase them.
- Agreed. Anyway... why do you prefer Emilia?
- Because I like her shameless approach to a theology of liberation that mixes up a complete remoteness from the divine with a true valuation of the human. As for Casanova, well, I owe him a lot, including thanks for his revision of Da Ponte's libretto, which improved the version that he copied from Giovanni Bertati, even though Da Ponte disapproved of him...
- But everyone was copying from everyone else. For example, Bertati from Molière. Why did Da Ponte despise him?
- Because he thought he didn't know Italian. In fact, Mozart revised the text himself, as he always did. In any case, Bertati's libretto for Gazzaniga's opera isn't bad. For example, it includes a fine toast to Venice and Venetian women given by Don Giovanni's servant: *con quei zendaletti / che solo a guardarle / vi muovon gli affetti* ("wearing those shawls that if you just look at them you feel emotional"). But... shouldn't your week-long conference also be on Casanova?
- It is, but I am not going to many of the sessions on Casanova. The juxtaposition between you two bothers me. I'm interested in Casanova, and I like him, but Don Giovanni thrills me, and I consider the two of you distant from one another.
- There isn't a vast difference. Casanova, too, is full of fantasy, like his memoirs. Anyway, the point is not old age, it's the afterlife, which doesn't feature in Casanova. What would the story of Don Giovanni and that of poor Leonzio be without Hell? If aging is a trick of your era for eliminating Hell, then it's just a gratuitous invention, a change for its own sake, rather than the invention of something new. This is the weak point in Emilia's interpretation.

- Very few people invent something completely new in this myth: Tirso, Molière, Mozart, Hoffmann. Hoffmann is my favorite.
- Why is that?
- He created a different approach, which is non-naturalistic. I am picturing the young composer who arrives by coach in a provincial town one rainy Friday evening and gets out by a pleasant small hotel. The porters carry his trunk to the rooms reserved for him on the top floor, where he has a bath in a tub filled by the servant. He dresses elegantly and goes down to dine at the hotel's communal table, where he has dinner with champagne, which he also offers the other diners. The next day is Saturday. It's sunny, if cold, and the composer strolls through the market before going to lunch with his friend, who is waiting for him. When he returns to the hotel for a siesta, he is suddenly awakened by the music of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Then he discovers a little secret door in the tapestry, from which a corridor leads onto the stage box in the theater next to the hotel. This is the most fascinating part, which gives the story a fairy tale quality.
- Ah, the "strangers' box" is the right place to host Donn'Anna, who comes up from the stage to the box to speak to the protagonist. She alone represents the presence of the supernatural as she is dead when she appears at the front of the stage.
- She steals the show.
- Completely. She becomes its center. It's a real innovation, tremendously dramatic. There should really be a performance of the Hoffmann since he so brilliantly demonstrates the entanglement of real life with the theater and the differences between them. You should talk to Emilia about it.
- I already have, but she wants to stick with the issue of aging at all costs.
- Ah, that's the fixation of your era, which is obsessed with staying young. You'll see that Emilia will change her mind; she is too intelligent not to. In any case, she will make it a great show.

- But she's leaving tomorrow. And I am going too, after these very intense days.
- You see that you did well to follow my advice. It is more entertaining to occupy your mind with things you feel strongly about, rather than with yourself, at least at this stage.
- I need to reflect on the criticism I received here: you accused me of egocentrism in writing, and my friends accused me of Eurocentrism in understanding your persona.
- These critiques are connected: we are both Eurocentric!

TURIN

Seduction and Clinical Cases

mid-October

After returning to Turin, a friend from Berlin comes to stay. He reads and writes at night but gets up early. He spends the morning in one of the cafés in the Piazza Vittorio, watching passers-by and chatting with waiters and customers to refresh his Italian and get a feel for Italy. He speaks the language very well, with an accent that varies in strength depending on his involvement in the discussion. He likes metaphors in Italian and uses them as often as he can. He is a financial consultant and wants a holiday free of professional commitments so that he can write his stories and essays. He has a late lunch in a café on the river, comes home for a long siesta, and meets me for dinner in the evening.

Günter has always been tall and heavy; over the years, he has become huge due to eating and drinking with enthusiasm. He is bald, which makes him look even more like a giant egg, and he walks solemnly. But most of the time he uses the yellow bicycles he happily rents in the town car parks, “to save my poor feet,” and hurtles like a rocket along the few cycle paths in Turin. He is always friendly to everyone and is interested in every detail of Italian culture and language and the daily lives of the people he meets.

We share many memories, because I've stayed with him in Berlin and he has stayed with me in Turin and New York. He always asks me how Don Giovanni is going. The theme interests him because of his own life history and his skill and passion for music. But when I ask him for details of his direct experience, he changes tack and talks about *Sex and the City*, in which women speak freely about their romantic experiences, or rather he palms me off with the TV series, which according to him is essential for understanding Don Giovanni's current transformation. But we agree that sex is not the main thing for Don Giovanni, at least not from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. I am still dubious about whether it has become so today, whereas he is convinced.

- But sex has lost some importance, I object.
- Ah, at the narrative level, it's different.
- How? I remember that we were both critical, if not scandalized, by the orgiastic Don Giovanni we saw at the Komische Oper — when was it?

He immediately searches the Internet on his smartphone:

- 2003. It was directed by Peter Konwitschny — a good director!
- Yes, but he reduced Mozart's opera to a sexual frenzy, with additional violence and abuse. Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, and Don Ottavia all undressed, while Don Giovanni appeared in his vest, with others in various states of undress. On the Internet, it was described by a member of the audience as soft porn, and a review compared it to a *coitus interruptus* that culminated in group sex presided over by Don Giovanni.
- Okay, that kind of collective orgasm is entirely beside the point compared to the singularity and solitude of the protagonist. But Don Giovanni likes to organize social gatherings, even if the three nobles break up the party. No, the wretched thing for me was that Konwitschny added

a scene at the beginning in which the child Mozart was struck across his fingers with a baton by his father Leopold. Even worse, a letter about death from Mozart to his father interrupted Don Ottavio's aria *Il mio tesoro intanto andate a consolar* in the second act (Günter hums it in his refined accent). In addition to the unbearable annoyance of the interruption...

- I remember you shouting and whistling!
- A psychological interpretation emerged, as if at the root of the sexual rebellion depicted there was an oedipal complex that was Mozart's own. As if the traumas of the young Mozart rebounded directly onto his Don Giovanni, which happened to have been written a few months after the death of Leopold, blah, blah, blah...
- Is that why you were so annoyed?
- Yes, because the protagonist's irreverence, his lack of belief, libertinage, and playful side were all turned into something oedipal. These things bore me to tears.
- Do you recall the couple from Chicago we met during the interval who were dismayed because they were bringing their fifteen-year-old daughter to see an opera in Berlin? Moreover, the audience's annoyance was revealed in a kind of rumbling. All in all, the performance was tortured.
- However, the interpretation of Don Giovanni as a more or less violent playboy has become fashionable. The Peter Brook version I saw at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan in 1998 staged him as a sexy, rapacious man-child. In this case the imposing figure of the singer was the cheese on the macaroni. And the staging was marvelous, so minimal and elegant...
- How do you remember that it was in 1998?
- Because I'd taken an advanced Italian course at Perugia and was going back in stages, first Milan, then Munich, and then Berlin.

Knowing his omnivorous cultural appetite and his interest in psychoanalysis, I try to interview him about it:

- Have you read Julia Kristeva? I mean her work on the false equivalence of seducer and playboy?
- You are dreaming if you think I read any French writers; they understand nothing about music. French music doesn't exist; there is only Italian and German music. So, what does she say?
- It is a psychoanalytic interpretation. According to Kristeva, we must distinguish Don Giovanni, the seducer, from his imitators, who swap phallic power for athletic performance, when it's really about impotence.
- As far as that's concerned, I flipped through *The Game*, which was a worldwide success, translated into many languages. The author is an American who passes himself off as a seduction consultant and wrote a do-it-yourself book about it. *The Game* consists of a series of techniques implemented by men who live to seduce as many women as possible. Starting out full of frustration, the failed seducer ultimately accomplishes the status of playboy and tells others how to imitate him. It's very boring and proves we no longer know what seduction is.
- Well, you're in agreement with Kristeva about that. She also talks about Don Giovanni's mother...
- But there's nothing about the mother anywhere!
- No, there is, in Byron, who presents her as unbearable. She may be there paradoxically or in the background in a few other texts, but there is no need for her to be there literally. According to Kristeva, Don Giovanni pursues the lost memory of an original, inaccessible, and unspeakable mother.

He repeats:

- "Inaccessible and unspeakable"... you, too, are chasing after the postmodern, the postcolonial, and all the other "posts!" Kristeva might have invented a mother based on the experiences of her patients, but Don Giovanni is another thing. These psychological interpretations are all hot air!

In his anxiety, his German “r” has returned. But I don’t give up:

- The inaccessible mother was already there in Otto Rank. You should know this from your study of Freud, and that Rank had to break with his “patron-father” Freud, who refused to accept his idea of a pre-Oedipal stage in which attachment to the mother prevails. And it is Rank who studied art and the artist, connecting them with ancient or primitive mythical traits.
- It’s always Rank who reduces the myth of Don Giovanni to a version of Oedipus! And he makes Don Giovanni die of guilt. Can’t you see that the idea of compensating for the lack of the mother with the conquest of multiple women falls within the search for the One? Among other things, Rank has a linear schema in which he puts versions of the myth, and the later the version, the fewer the number of seduced women, according to a process of decadence of the story of Don Giovanni. No, Rank is great for other works, but not for this one. The article on the *doppelgänger* in literature and myth is finer than the one on Don Juan, both published in the master’s magazine. Mightn’t you propose some more stimulating traces on the philosophical-historical side?
- Well, I read an essay by an English scholar on libertinism as a pathological perversion. He quotes Foucault on Don Giovanni: behind the libertine is the perverse. For Foucault, the story of Don Giovanni is an example of the transposition of sex into discourse, the condensation of a story about the undoing of the dissolute behind which looms the whole population of perverts and marginal sexualities.
- It is precisely this that I can’t agree with any more than you: that Don Giovanni is reduced to being the forerunner of this crowd, carried along by the frenzy of “unnatural sex.” In this way, the importance of the character is lost, as Adorno saw. Or, to put it better, this is a discursive version — French-style — of its anti-bourgeois significance.

- But not only the French, Günter. There is the interpretation of Juliet Mitchell, also a feminist psychoanalyst — but English, not French — who has written on Lacan. For her, Don Giovanni is a pathological case, a typical male hysteric. According to Mitchell, hysteria is neither limited to women nor reducible to the father-son relationship or the Oedipus complex because it can only be explained by the presence of brothers and sisters. So, there is a radical and profound jealousy of his mother at the heart of Don Giovanni. Don Giovanni identifies with the women he seduces; he reflects their desires and conspires with them against the father figure. This reasoning is based on Mitchell's clinical cases and Mozart's Don Giovanni. She also sees an identification of Freud with Don Giovanni: love stories with many women, sublimated in many books.
- This last aspect and the theme of male hysteria seem convincing. All fine for clinical cases, but in the vast majority of Don Giovanni stories there are neither brothers nor sisters. Only Nikolaus Lenau's *Don Juan* — which, among other things, is unfinished and is also an oddity in which Don Giovanni has lots of children — opens with one brother who is jealous because the other is his father's favorite, and who functions as the messenger from his father to induce him to repent. But this jealousy does not affect Don Giovanni, who pretends to be someone who frees women from a restrictive sexual morality and who, based on the Catalog, bequeaths a generous legacy to each of his lovers and to the children he has had with them. This version mocks the old myth. In any case, atheism and irreverence cannot be reduced to brotherly jealousy. How can you apply this diagnosis not just to patients but also to a mythic character who survives for centuries? Bollocks to that!
- Otto Rank anticipated that a proper diagnosis for an individual cannot be applied to a long-standing literary trope with regard to Don Giovanni's father. Not so much the real father, like the one who appears in the dramas of Tirso de Molina and Molière — though they make him a weak and

inadequate figure — as much as a symbolic one. It is against the Statue or the Commendatore that Don Giovanni commits parricide.

- The challenge of Don Giovanni doesn't need any psycho-anthropological muck to make it work; on the contrary, that stuff is harmful both to the myth and to its political dimension.
- Why do you take it to heart? Why are you so stung by the psychological aspects of Don Giovanni?
- Partly because I've dealt with an awful real-life Don Giovanni. But above all, I find that the best interpretations are the philosophical ones. When I get back to Berlin, I'll look up my notes and call you.

With that promise, we interrupt our debate and spend the weekend in a country house in a valley near Turin. There are two excellent trattorias in the neighborhood. Günter sets up a contest between them, alternating each evening to sample and re-sample tairin pasta with mushrooms, agnolotti with sugo d'arrosto, and traditionally prepared fried offal. As a result of chatting with the owners, he learns some Piedmontese terms connected with definitions of special ingredients, like particular wild herbs. He learns some recipes handed down from the past by word of mouth, as well as special pairings of food and wine. Various wines are produced from local Freisa grapes, and he tastes them fastidiously. He prefers non-sparkling Freisa and rejects the Cari, a sweet sparkling wine. When I suggest we drink half-bottles to allow him to try more varieties, he looks at me with pity. The trattoria contest has no winner because Günter re-launches it every visit. At lunchtime he floods the kitchen with the smell of Bavarian potato fritters and Bra sausages from the market in Chieri. He has also had fourteen chunks of Parmesan cheese vacuum-packed for his trip back to Germany.

Byron at the Colle della Maddalena

a Friday afternoon

I wish to discuss Don Giovanni with my friend and colleague Grace, a specialist in comparative literature. I rarely see her because she travels a lot, but today she is free and we seize the chance of a sunny afternoon to go for a walk in the hills around Turin, up to the Victory Beacon at the summit of Maddalena Hill. I tell her what I have recently read and heard about Don Giovanni and she listens attentively, pausing before replying. She looks at the plaques with the names of the fallen on the paths of the Park of Remembrance and comments on the losses in the First World War compared to the Second. She points out that names are preceded by rank: Private, Officer Candidate, Corporal, and so on. She is very tall, with shiny brown hair in a bob, and large, sultry lips. She is not exactly beautiful, but she is “quite something,” as people used to say.

Grace follows her own train of thought, one swerve after another. All of a sudden, she comes out with an unexpected remark:

— And just think, only thirty years after Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, Byron writes *Don Juan*!

- I didn't know that it was pronounced with the emphasis on the "u." So, 1787 to...?
- 1819, but only two cantos. The rest was unfinished and published posthumously.
- Why do you say "only" thirty years?
- Because women are not the priority in all the stories up to and including Mozart. Before Byron, they have no real autonomy and are often dull.
- I object! In Mozart, the music gives a great deal of prominence to the female characters...
- There, too, they don't have any real choice, not even Zerlina.
- But Zerlina has chosen to accept Don Giovanni's advances when she sings, *Presto non son più forte... Andiam!* at the end of the duet with him. She pulls back only when Donna Elvira arrives to unmask him and the music changes from the andante to the secco recitative.
- You see that the result is the same. The most important thing for Mozart is still the rebellion against the supernatural, just as it was in Tirso and Molière. But in Byron, women are central.
- But he often takes it out on them. He says terrible things about educated and intellectual women, including Don Juan's mother, who is presented as insipid and fanatical about mathematics.
- It's all a self-ironic commentary on his own mother and wife, even if he denies it. But in the poem, it's always the women who initiate seduction. Don Juan simply lets himself be seduced.
- Don't you think he's too young, this Don Juan? He is only eighteen, practically an adolescent.
- His age is appropriate, I think, given Byron's argument about the revolt of youth against the restrictive morals of adults and old romantic poets. However, in the early nineteenth century, one wasn't considered a teenager at eighteen.
- There is no religious or supernatural aspect to the poem, if I remember correctly.

- No, but there are politics: a hatred of every despotism, which represents another kind of authority, or if you like, paternity.
- There is no rebellion against transcendence.
- Oh no, for sure. But there is still rebellion, even if it doesn't include the divine. As a man, allowing yourself to be seduced is a form of rebellion against the conventions that govern the relationship between masculine and feminine. Beyond the prominence given to women, another way Byron is innovative is in making fun of the supposed superiority of Western morality and the “emancipation” of women in Northern Europe. His Don Juan never loses the chance to deplore England's decadence and continually travels between Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Russia, exactly like his creator. But Byron, unlike Don Juan, did not return to England. There is also all the fantasy about Turkey, an advanced society in which polygamy was legal; the seraglio filled the imagination of libertines.

We go up the last path, which has wide stone and earth steps, and arrive at the piazzale of the Faro della Vittoria, a lantern held high by a great woman with outstretched arms. At the bottom, an inscription written by Gabriele D'Annunzio praises the founder of Fiat, an acronym interpreted by the inscription as *fiat lux* instead of *Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino* — the Italian Automobile Factory of Turin — as it really is. All around, you can see the Alps, the peaks silhouetted against the sky, clearly delineated, while the city down below suffers under a cloud of smog. As always, we stop to study the brass plaque with compass points that shows the winds, the names of the mountains, and the cities of Italian colonialism: Tunis, Tripoli, Benghazi, and Adua. Then we go down to the other side, toward the cafés.

— But you are a bit of a Don Giovanni yourself, aren't you?

She isn't upset but sighs quietly.

- That's what they say. But it's easy for me because I travel a lot, shuttling back and forth the whole year between Chicago for my mother and to do a few short courses, Turin for work, and England for my research.
- In each place, you have a different life and different people.
- That's the way it goes. Different lives, people, and houses. But not so many people. Some are fixtures, others only if it happens that way. I don't pursue anyone, but I have lots of opportunities, especially in my public political work.
- And the fixtures know this?
- The woman in Turin does: she has already broken up with me twice. The first time she kept it to the point of not wanting to see me for a few months, but the second time she gave me a taste of my own medicine by restarting a serious love affair with someone she had previously wanted to live with. I went mad; I couldn't stand it. Jealousy between women makes people suffer even more than in heterosexual relationships; I am sure of it because I've also had affairs with men in the past.
- But yours would be the jealousy of a Don Giovanni, which is a contradiction. Do you really want to be the only one or just the favorite?
- I am sometimes jealous, and even though I don't have it wrestled to the ground, I keep it in a corner, and I try to keep it there. However, I have become more careful, more aware. I can also give something up. Don Giovanni never changes and never gives up anything.
- Does politics also come into all of this?
- That's understood... my kind of politics. I have a group in Chicago and another between Genoa and Turin, both more or less concerned with the same things: public feelings and queer thinking. We discuss, write and organize events, inviting people from different countries.
- It's a good life.
- I like my life. It only palls when it's my turn to play the butch role.

- But you are not butch at all! You don't seem like it, and I know you aren't.
- Sometimes I do seem like it because I deal with problems in a brusque manner. The role somewhat belongs a bit to me because I come and go while my partners tend to stay in one place. Not all of them. My Chicago partner is a songwriter who travels a lot. Maybe that's why there are fewer conflicts with her. But I typically relent... The real problem would be if someone wanted children. I wouldn't want them unless I could be the birth mother.
- I would never have thought that you would. Is it possible?
- I think so, but I'd have to change my life completely. One needs a lot of money to do it comfortably, although my mother could help me.
- I can see you are capable of stopping and changing just as you are currently hurtling about. You have always been like this, from the moment we met...
- Since my time in Chicago. I was finishing my PhD at Northwestern and successfully applied to Utrecht for the post-doc. I attended your lecture and then some of us went for a drink. After that, we met again in Toronto, Utrecht, and maybe in Paris with Xenia? Speaking of Xenia, I saw her in July: she's getting together a conference on the colonial and postcolonial. Finally I came to teach in Turin...
- I also read your articles on public feelings. But what strikes me about you is that you are always in shape, as if you are comfortable in your own skin. You are always in a good mood. Okay, once in a while you, too, might have a toothache or a headache, but you seem to be so well — how do you do it?
- It's because I do what I want.
- So, being a Don Giovanni has nothing to do with it?
- Only in part. Perhaps women express the role of Don Giovanni differently.
- You have to explain that to me.
- Women — many women — are natural Don Juans. They can have children by different men and simultaneous affairs

while maintaining fidelity to each of their lovers without really “betraying” them. It’s almost biological, that is to say, it’s cultural, obviously, but ancient.

- Why should it be easier for women? Biologically, it’s quite the opposite.
- It’s the opposite only if contraception is not available... and also IVF.
- And this could make sense regarding relationships between women?
- Much more. Women in general, but above all women who love women, are in the best position to construct a free-flowing kind of freedom, including in the sphere of reproduction.
- Possibly surrogacy, too?
- Why not?

We are back in the car and are getting ready to go back to the city. I look to see if I can discover any trace of irony in her, and she begins to laugh, taking me affectionately by the arm. She is so confident, soaring, and ready to laugh — you never know if she is serious. All of this she combines with a core of fragility that makes her irresistible.

Fourth Imaginary Dialogue

- At last, you've begun to talk about jealousy.
- But Don Giovanni isn't jealous.
- You're mistaken. Some Don Giovannis are jealous of happy young lovers and seek to destroy their happiness. For example, in Molière, when Dom Juan talks about his jealousy of a couple in love, he finds it so unbearable to see them happy together that he imagines the joy of destroying their bond. He plans to kidnap the woman during a jaunt at sea, but an unexpected storm scatters his scheme to the winds. It's one of the sadistic aspects of the character, and I understand it well: envy of the couple who are bound together and faithful to one another for a long time, something I don't want, either open or monogamous.
- So feminist theorists are partly right to think you are suffering from a syndrome of acute loss.
- Maybe, but not in the sense that I am jealous of a particular woman or man. That's not the way I am. Grace is right that we need to put jealousy to one side. The fun of breaking up a couple is something else.
- Yep, it's one of your cruel jokes. But how do you protect yourself from jealousy? Hinting to each woman that she is your favorite is one of your skills.

- That's easy: because the world is narcissistic, and every person is primed to believe they are special.
- Don Giovanni's favorite is always the current one near her sell-by date.
- In fact, the system of the favorite is not a good solution because it necessarily involves a precarious role that doesn't satisfy the woman and leaves jealousy a hook. As soon as they realize the position is unstable, they will be jealous again. I become mercurial and flighty when faced with jealousy. I am a serial lover because I run away from every attachment, and although erotic and sentimental freedom puts attachment aside, it doesn't cancel it. Most women are only interested in lasting bonds that are infused with sentiment.
- With you, one might set up an alliance, a warring friendship.
- Maybe I'm not capable of friendship. You, in particular, have an attitude of complicity towards me, which suits me; one can also be complicit in an ongoing confrontation. Ours is now a relationship based on solidarity. It is sometimes still seductive but no longer produces a pattern of sexual behavior or identification in the strict sense. The solidarity lies above all in this: I don't say much about myself, and I leave the task of writing the Catalog to Leporello or to whoever is standing in for him, in this case, to you. In the context in which we find ourselves, it falls to you to tell my story and, in some cases, to question me. Which also is your professional work.
- Okay... what did you mean when you said last time that we are both Eurocentric?
- In our way of describing ourselves and explaining things. The space we live in is now the world, but where you start still matters. As far as I'm concerned, the theater is my proper sphere and my performances follow Western or European canons, as do yours.

- Then you're referring to my dreams about Europe. I am embittered, but I haven't abandoned them altogether. There is a need for fantasies because Europe is in its current state.
- Do you mean you still hope for new European citizens and a different kind of Europe?
- Not a hope, a dream... a reaching for something that isn't there.
- Fine words, but do you believe they also apply to Don Giovanni?
- Well, there is the unceasing pursuit, the refusal of repentance, the willingness to start again, the change that is relentlessly critical of what you get and what you cannot deny being... all this I see in you, too.
- Very good! But I have no ideals, and once again, you risk taking me too seriously. So, to return to theater and storytelling, the repertoire is always the same, both for you and me; the erosion of our established legacy from within...
- It's because of this that I will go to the conference in Paris on the colonial and postcolonial, where I hope we'll listen to what is being said outside the European mindscape.
- But what are you thinking? Almost all postcolonial writers have also adopted Western forms of both non-fiction and imagined narrative!

Confidences on the Train

a Tuesday morning at the end of October

We leave for Florence. Günter, who hasn't been there for many years, is pleased that the train now only takes three hours. I check my email while he reads the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, his reaction swinging between disappointment and laughter. Etienne and Ahmad, who have met in Brussels while working, write a playful email "from the capital of Eurocentrism" to the entire Venice group, cheerfully recalling our Don Giovanni conversations. I also received a long message from Lydia, bringing me up to speed on her recent meeting with John in Florence. His new lover left for Rome, annoyed that Lydia was there. John will be in Florence for several weeks after finding an apartment where he can practice the violin without anyone complaining. "The important thing," Lydia's message concludes, "is for things to play out equally, and this time it really is like that."

After the train leaves Milan, we go to the bar for coffee and perch on the bench that looks out onto the countryside while we chat. Günter overflows from the stool with his bulk but still has an imposing appearance that commands respect. He asks about my husband, with whom he hasn't been in contact for almost a month despite chatting regularly on FaceTime when he first left.

- After spending some time in Karlsruhe, he attended Montclair State University in New Jersey for the autumn term, where he could study and teach history of science and science education. I'll join him there in December, leaving Paris straight after the conference on postmodernism.
- It seems there is always something “post this” and “post that” keeping you in Europe.
- But the us is full of that stuff! Anyway, I won't be there long; we'll be back right after the New Year.
- And Don Giovanni?
- He is used to separations; he knows I won't forget him.

Günter is curious about my relationship with my husband, about the fact that we got married in our sixties, and he wants to know how I reconcile my marriage with my fixation with Don Giovanni.

- It took me years to realize I could have never confronted Don Giovanni without meeting and marrying a man like Vincent.
- I thought so! But in what sense?
- A little while after I met Vincent more than twenty years ago, we went to see Don Giovanni together — perhaps at the cinema, perhaps on tv — and he said to me, “I am Don Ottavio!” I thought he was joking, but he was serious. He meant that for him, fidelity and reciprocal loyalty were non-negotiable. In this sense, he had always gone against the prevailing current, even when we all thought sexual freedom and open relationships were obligatory. For example, he told me that he had ended a significant relationship immediately following his partner's infidelity. That seemed to me an excessive decision, especially in those years, but he said he couldn't have it any other way.
- And were you okay with that sort of deal?
- I thought not in the beginning, but then I saw that I was my natural self with him. I had found a husband and began to understand what that could be. Before then I was always

falling in love, but I stopped a little while after meeting Vincent.

- But Don Giovanni still lives inside you!
- Don Ottavio and Don Giovanni co-exist inside me even though it seems one negates the other. As I learned to appreciate Don Ottavio and got some distance from Don Giovanni — without leaving him — I saw his character more clearly. I placed boundaries around my obsession with him. But I must say that I always liked Mozart’s Don Ottavio, with those wonderful arias, like *Dalla sua pace la mia dipende*. Even the way he is considered inadequate. For example, immediately after the death of Donna Anna’s father, he asks someone to help her. This can be seen as an example of his awareness of his limitations. And when Don Ottavio calls Donna Anna his “wife, friend,” and says to her, “you have a husband and a father in me,” he shows that he has understood much about love relationships.
- But isn’t he too much of a conformist regarding rules? Don Ottavio, I mean, because Vincent isn’t conformist at all.
- In the case of Don Ottavio’s conformism, it is a question of loyalty to people and above all to the shared rules of life. He is dignified and profound and generously endures the unyielding Donna Anna. She always remains her father’s daughter, who, even after Don Giovanni’s descent into the flames of Hell, asks Don Ottavio to wait another year. Don Ottavio fascinates me because he has been far from me for a long time. Or, to put it better, I’ve been far from him. The 1968 generation tended to emulate Don Giovanni, but not always. You, for example, are neither of them...

The train’s snug atmosphere and our delightful chatter have resulted in a level of mutual openness that allows him to pick up our earlier conversation and respond to my curiosity in a personal way:

- I mentioned I was dealing with Don Giovanni in the flesh. You know Frederika, and you know that we have been get-

ting along well in recent years even though we don't live together, or indeed because of that. But for a long time, it was difficult. She was very clear from the beginning: she had another relationship and wanted to keep it. I understood, but he was a Don Giovanni himself. He came and went, both with her and other women. Frederika was always available to him, and she would go crazy or disappear when he visited.

- How did you respond? I remember a little book from the 1970s called *Beyond Jealousy: Love*, which encouraged “free love.” But even before that, during the heyday of the 1960s, jealousy was banned.
- I wasn't really jealous. It was something inherited from the past, which I had to endure. Like mosquitoes, jealousies cannot be eliminated. But they are not always there and precautions can be taken to cut down the trouble they cause.
- And how did it end?
- It ended with him getting married. Frederika could put up with a Don Giovanni but not a faithless husband. In any case, I feel that I am neither a Don Giovanni, nor a Don Ottavio. I used to think I was a bit of one or a bit of the other, at different times, but I've now moved past it. Or maybe I stayed on one side?

We've come to the Bologna-Florence section of the journey, and I'm always struck by the beauty of the landscape, enhanced by the tunnels, which only allow us to glimpse the hills at intervals. Günter is also spellbound and doesn't want to continue talking.

As always, there are too few taxis at the Santa Maria Novella station, so we go to the station bar and bookshop to have a coffee and view the large landscape tempera paintings by Ottone Rosai. Günter tells me once again how much he likes this rationalist building. Then we say goodbye with a plan to meet up later at Fabbrica Europa.

FLORENCE

Bitter Laughter

Tuesday, late afternoon

We go to see Lydia's company rehearsing and sit on folding chairs. The ample space is almost dark and the actors are speaking on a temporary stage. Lydia welcomes us enthusiastically:

— Today's order isn't definitive because we are trying out some sections that will be assembled with other pieces — you can also see those in two or three days if you want. Ludovic and I are taking turns; he directs when I act, and vice versa. He is Catalan and has experience of avant-garde theater in Barcelona. The themes that have guided us in our choice of pieces are malice and humor, which together give bitter laughter. We're rehearsing the malice sections today.

The first piece is based on a storyline from the *Commedia dell'Arte*, *The Atheist Struck Down*, believed to be mid-seventeenth century, though the oral version is even older. Peasants denounce Count Aurelio before the King of Sardinia for having stolen both their goods and their honor by seducing their women. The actor who impersonates the count is a big man but animated as he shows the intertwining of jocular and insouciant ruthlessness that characterizes him. In contrast, the count's

servant Bertolino is small and thin, both a jester and heir to the moralistic tradition of this kind of performance, which was put on in churches. He urges Aurelius to repent, reminding him that either Heaven or Hell await us after death.

When the king banishes him, Aurelio just laughs out loud. He swears eternal love, which is reciprocated, to Leonora, the noblewoman he has kidnapped, but he also insists on also keeping Angela, a woman he has kidnapped from other outlaws. The two women take turns on the stage, both played with great virtuosity by Lydia. The first is elegant, exquisite, and lost in the forest where the outlaws live; the second is brazen and is a willing partner in Aurelio's outrageous arrogance. It is amazing to see how Lydia transforms herself from one into the other. Angela arms herself, disguises herself as a brigand, and participates in the dinner, tucking in happily. But she only acts as a foil to the count, while Leonora is the real opponent of Aurelio and is tragically unlucky. Lydia, acting her part, complains bitterly to Aurelio, but his only response is to give her a kick that throws her to the ground. She is rescued by a hermit whom Aurelio wickedly and sarcastically ridiculed. On a platform at the bottom of the stage, you can see the hermit holding out his hand as the count first laughs, then says something we can't hear, and finally tosses the man a coin. Everything happens in silence as Leonora's tragedy takes place on stage left in front of her parents' funeral monument.

Lydia's interpretation sweeps away the female stereotype that responds unthinkingly to love and chastisement, as ready to love as to repent and die of sorrow. Lydia/Leonora is a strong character who subjects herself to a difficult atonement and finally allows herself to die in front of her lover in an extreme act that declares his guilt. Aurelio continues to feast in front of the monument to her parents, who then appear from their tomb holding swords. He challenges the supernatural by offering his own hand, but a burst of lightning pushes him down to Hell. Clashing music accompanies the gradual illumination of the stage while the actors freeze like living sculptures.

The rapid and intense performance and the unhinged violence of Aurelio, which we watch with bated breath, come to a halt. The co-director begins to talk to the actors about their movements while Lydia comes over to talk to us. She tells us that some years after the first performance, one of Aurelio's speeches, in which he probably tried to get the hermit to swear in exchange for a coin and, in the end, tossed it over to him even though he had refused, had been cut out of the original manuscript. This hypothesis is based on a very similar scene in Molière's *Festin de Pierre*.

Günter is squirming dangerously on the folding chair and protests that Aurelio is a caricature of Don Giovanni's atheism, so exaggerated in his treachery that he is unconvincing. But Lydia disagrees:

- It is an inversion of the good feelings that infuse the universe of the comic actor; the world turned upside down, head over heels. We are in the mythical world of popular humor.

Günter:

- But this Aurelio is a one-trick pony who ends up being either ridiculous or perverse and certainly joyless. The character of Don Giovanni may be bad or even cruel, but not so meanly perverse — despite what Foucault says about it!

He launches his tirade:

- Aurelio seems to be a grotesque version of the revolution in ordinary behavior and refusal of decent manners that we acted out in the '60s, such as the obsessive repetition of obscene expressions or the demand for complete openness in personal relationships, not to mention flaunting burping and farting.

Lydia:

- Those were statements that were meant to be transgressive and political. In the mythical universe, nothing is serious and everything is allowed, from the obscene reversals of Carnival to the exaggerations of Gargantua and Pantagruel or the ridicule of the Trickster, which indulges in all kinds of extravagance. And the music underlines the grotesque tone; do you know where it's from?

We admit that we don't know.

- It's taken from *Phantom of the Opera*, a musical turned into a film, into which a musical piece about Don Giovanni is inserted, a kind of farcical adaptation of Mozart's opera. The discordant music of the insert, called *Don Giovanni Triumphant*, contrasts with that of the musical and underlines its histrionic character.

Ludovic, the co-director, impatiently calls us to return because he wants to move on to Molière. He's on the stage and Lydia takes over as director. The servant Sganarelle is the most prominent character, the actor under the bright lights at stage left, while Dom Juan remains hidden in the shadows at the back. Sganarelle wears the Brighella costume, inspired by the one of watered silk with green stripes described in the inventory of Molière's goods at his death. Ludovic, moving behind us, acts as a narrative voice. Sganarelle starts the play with a eulogy in praise of tobacco and presents Dom Juan as one who "is the greatest scoundrel who ever walked the earth, a mad dog, a demon, a Turk, a heretic who doesn't believe in Heaven, or Hell, or werewolves even," addressing him directly:

- But one has to believe in something; what do you believe?
- What do I believe?
- Yes.

- I believe that two plus two equals four, Sganarelle, and that four plus four equals eight.
- What a fine creed that is! So far as I can see, your religion consists of arithmetic.

Ludovic's voice comes from right behind us, saying that in comedy the exercise of arithmetic stands for the high point of reason, and Dom Juan is convinced that reason is a good enough guide to life.

At this point, a spotlight shines on Dom Juan, and a poor man appears next to him. We watch the same scene previously presented to us in silence, now spoken in the words of Molière. The poor man, who lives in a wood and dedicates his life to prayer, asks Dom Juan for money. After ironically observing that he will lack nothing if he prays to God every day, Dom Juan offers to give him a golden Louis if he will curse religion. When the poor man refuses, preferring to starve, Dom Juan still gives him the coin, saying it is "for love of humanity."

Ludovic, now standing to our left, explains that this scene in Molière's *Festin de Pierre*, which Voltaire was very struck by, was cut by the censor on the evening immediately following the première. It proved additionally scandalous because it referred to a true incident: a famous libertine, the Chevalier de Roquelaure, had been arrested in 1646 and charged with offering money to a poor person if he agreed to curse religion. Molière's play of 1665 was regarded as a kind of manifesto for libertinism and was stopped by the censor after only twelve performances. The target of the censorship was the presence of a character who was a poor man and the scene in which he appeared. This was especially scandalous in a Catholic country like France because it suggested that blasphemy was a condition of financial advantage. The work was staged again almost ten years after Molière's death in 1682 with the title *Dom Juan*, but it was a mutilated version in which the offer of money and the demand to curse, along with other censored parts, had been removed. However, the scene with the poor man was included in the Dutch edition printed in the same period. It is considered the closest to

Molière's text and was defined as "European" as it circulated outside France. What emerges from the whole affair is that the French censor regarded the seduction of women as a less serious offense than the sin of free thought, which questioned social and religious institutions.

At this point, Lydia interrupts him, climbing up on the stage:

- The narrator's speech is too didactic!
- Of course, it's didactic, replies Ludovic, annoyed. It has to explain the historical background to the audience; otherwise, it remains ignored. And it was you who proposed it.
- It is not the performance, which is fine; it is the intervention of an external narrator, which does not convince me. Couldn't we make Sganarelle say these things, giving him a double role like the one I had in Tirso last year?
- Which is to say?
- Sganarelle is a practical sort and suggests that Dom Juan repent, at least as a matter of prudence, to avoid the risk of punishment. And he is very versatile. He disguises himself as a doctor, makes pompous philosophical remarks, and engages in ridiculous conversation with the statue. Above all, he mediates between Dom Juan and the world of the peasants. It is no coincidence that his part was played by Molière himself. It could become an "aside" on the part of the historical character...
- That way it would overload the character. He already provides the opening for Dom Juan to joke that one mustn't think of what evil might happen in the future, but only of the pleasure that it could bring. It is Sganarelle who stands up to Dom Juan several times, only to quickly retreat for fear of retaliation and to transform his provocation into mockery of libertinism, which he dismisses as an intellectual fashion. As acute as he is, he is already far too clever; for example, as when Dom Juan reacts to the phenomenon of the speaking statue attributing this "trivial incident" to natural causes: "most likely we were deceived by the dim light, or by some momentary dizziness which blurred our

vision.” Sganarelle ponderously comments that freethinkers, who don’t believe in anything, end up running away from confronting this sort of problem.

- But the comedy finishes with him demanding his wages, which shows that for Sganarelle, moral compensations are not enough. Ultimately, he stands for a sort of cynicism that is quite close to free thought.
- Exactly, but the audience don’t know that, just as they don’t know about Sganarelle’s final remarks on his pay, which were cut by the censors. And, besides, how do we make him speak if we also give him the narrative voice? The same way that he speaks as a servant? When you played the narrator in Tirso, you used a different language from the one for the Duchess and different again for the fisherwoman. Although the difference is not highlighted in Tirso, in Molière they really are different languages!

Lydia is caught on the back foot. Outmaneuvered, she explains that in the Molière play, Dom Juan and Sganarelle speak regular French. In contrast, the peasants talk in a dialect rendered in the Italian translation by Dario Fo and Delia Gambelli as a mash-up with elements of Neapolitan. Ludovic’s narrator uses yet another language, a modernization of French. If the servant also acted this part, would he have to alternate between the different languages? Ludovic sees Lydia’s confusion and puts a hand on her shoulder:

- Listen, I’m not convinced either. Let’s talk about it all together at dinner this evening. Now let’s rehearse the last bit.

The actors agree and get ready to tackle the ending, a silent scene based on the Baudelaire poem depicting Don Giovanni pulled down to Hell by a man of stone. At the back of the stage, an actress reads the poem in French, almost invisible in a darkness just lifted by occasional flashes of light, accentuating the rise and fall of the verses. On the stage floor, a fan makes waves out of

a curtain laid on the ground — a nice trick I've also seen used by Ariane Mnouchkine — as the backdrop for a boat in which the actors lean rhythmically back and forth. Taking the oars is the poor man standing like the avenger. To one side, shadows move as if they are on the bank of an underground river. Lydia is amongst them, ghost-like and dressed in mourning clothes. She acts as a sort of female chorus lamenting the journey of the hell-bound boat while Sganarelle loudly demands his wages. But Don Giovanni remains impassive, leaning on his sword, closed in his solitude, with his gaze fixed behind him.

Impressed with this short but powerful ending, we applaud loudly. With his huge hands, Günter makes a thunderous sound, and the actors bow and smile. We praise Lydia's versatility and Ludovic for the whole undertaking. He invites us to return in three days when they will be rehearsing the comic sections.

Lydia accompanies us to the door, pleased by our warm approbation. Günter — to whom I've told their story — firmly rejects her proposal to meet up with John the next evening. He doesn't want to meet a Don Giovanni in the flesh; imaginary ones are enough for him. I accept immediately out of curiosity — I can't wait to encounter him.

G.

Wednesday evening

John and Lydia wait for me at a little restaurant in Le Cure, where she is staying. The restaurant is right on the Mugnone River, which at this time of the year is still home to ducks and seagulls, though already swollen with water.

John is middle height with gray-blond hair, light, impenetrable eyes, a high forehead, and a charming grin. He is very polite to me, playful almost. When Lydia goes off to make a phone call, he tells me why.

— She's told you the whole story, right?

I say yes, and he laughs aloud. Lydia comes back and immediately understands what's going on, as her facial expression reveals. But she ignores it and tries to turn the conversation towards her staging of *Don Giovanni*. John, who didn't even want to see the rehearsal, lets the discussion drop straightaway. He says that the only Don Giovanni who interests him is John Berger's G. John likes G. for his vagrant and rebellious character, but also because he comes to political consciousness through his love affairs — pan-European, he adds for my benefit. G. is the son of an English mother and an Italian father, half-and-half

by birth, as John himself is by cultural choice. And there's more: Berger gave half of the prize money he got for the book to the English branch of the Black Panthers. Faced with John's enthusiasm, I almost have to apologize:

- It's the one book of Berger's that I didn't like...
- But why? As a cultural historian, the mixture of historical fiction and erotic exploration should move you! The description of the first flight across the Alps by G's friend, the denunciation of the massacres of the First World War, the end-of-the-century riots in Milan — all happening as he pursues his love affairs... I don't really like it all, but I see it as a reworking of Byron's *Don Juan*, who is very dear to me: young, innocent, and almost a willing victim of his seductions.
- Compared to Byron, G. seems dazed and confused, as if wandering about without self-awareness. His death is not a challenge; he lets himself be led like a lamb to the slaughter, ignorant and docile. And compared to Don Giovanni, he is not convincing: yes, we are there with obsessiveness, but there is too much passion, too much feeling, which the irony in Berger's writing does not always manage to redeem.
- Isn't dying at twenty-five in a popular uprising enough of a challenge? He dies because he joins — even if he doesn't know it, but in these things, the facts count — with the proletariat and underclass of Trieste fighting against the Italian leanings of the elites.
- There you go, I reply playfully and acerbically. You like G. because not only does he put your heart at rest politically (among other things, Berger mentions "Women's Liberation" in the dedication!), but above all because he absolves you of responsibility and fans the flames of your youth-worship, given that the protagonist does not have time to grow old.

Lydia rolls her eyes at my respectable tirade, but John and I enjoy the skirmish. I grant that Berger makes a good call with

his interpretation of the anti-Italian uprisings in Trieste in May 1915, triggered by Italy's declaration of war on Austria. I also admire the book's ending, which is based on a fiery class analysis of the opposition between pro-Italian irredentists and pro-Austrians, which chimes with historical interpretations that put the national dimension in parentheses to insist on the social and economic nature of the revolt against middle class professionals and the intelligentsia. And I give Berger the credit for seeing G. through the eyes of seduced women. Nonetheless, I express my annoyance with the overall construction of the book and the protagonist, and how I can't bear the written style I liked so much in the 1960s.

Before the disagreement degenerates, Lydia shifts the conversation to John's musical experiments. He has recently been trying out the electric violin. He has taken it up because he wants to collaborate with the Orchestra of the Piazza Vittorio:

- I met them by chance when I was going through a subway station in Rome, and they were electrifying: an electric string trio playing the music for Leporello's aria "Notte e giorno faticar," which was sung by an excellent Cuban singer. People were stopping to listen, applaud, and record them on their phones. I then went to see their show, which was brilliant. Mozart's opera is reborn as a global phenomenon that brings together singers from Tunisia, Italy, and Brazil and reworks Mozart with jazz, samba, reggae, and Sufi songs, mixing Italian, French, and Arabic... Donn'Anna sings in Portuguese, though she is actually Neapolitan.
- We are always in the world of political correctness, I say.

John smiles slyly and reassures me: it's not because it's multi-ethnic and iconoclastic that he likes the Orchestra of the Piazza Vittorio; it's because he has always sought this sort of musical mix, especially in Italy. Too bad that they have already done *Don Giovanni*, but he has an idea of suggesting a collaboration, taking musical sketches from the work, starting from the Catalog Aria, and intertwining them with others from the *Nozze di*

Figaro and *Così fan tutte*. A friend of his in London has written an inspiring book about the musical and philosophical connections between these three works.

At the end of the dinner, I decide to go back on foot since I'm staying quite close and the evening is clear. John also wants to stroll a bit before getting the bus into town. After leaving Lydia at her door, we walk on together. Hands in his pockets and shoulders wiggling, John goes along whistling without a care in the world. After the first moments of silence, we can't help returning to our discussion of the trick Lydia played on him, which was cut off earlier. I want to know if that joke had changed his dongiovanniesque habits.

- But our musical side aside, I'm nothing like Don Giovanni, who takes what he wants and leaves. Although I go on expanding my list of conquests, I often set up a return, reigniting old loves that, in time, come back. I maintain relationships for years, carried on contemporaneously, maybe even more than two at a time.
- Well hidden from each other.
- Not necessarily. It depends on how the relationship is set up: if it's predominantly sexual, for instance. Some women don't ask many questions; others also have multiple affairs. It is not always necessary to lie to seduce. It is true, though, that often you need to maneuver adroitly. You have to move very fast and read situations quickly. Most of the time, faced with suspicions or accusations, it's enough to laugh and say that someone who spreads such lies is envious or a bit crazy.
- That's the same technique as Don Giovanni in Da Ponte's libretto, when he lies about Donna Elvira, the wife he has abandoned, saying: "Poor girl, she's quite demented, / I sorely do lament it! / The fit may be prevented / If she's by me besought."

He interrupts impatiently:

- Well, yes, it's the same technique, except that Don Giovanni fails — at least this time.
- He can't do anything on that last day because his sins are catching up with him; he says so himself. The day of reckoning is approaching.
- At first, it seemed that it would be the same for me, too, but then things settled down. It is true that I separated from my wife, but there were already problems before this particular incident, and if I wanted to get back together with her, I am sure I could. It was a little more challenging with Lydia, but it's now going well again, as you have seen. I've interrupted the relationship with the woman who came to Florence with me, but that doesn't mean it's over: there's always a way to get it started again.
- Ah, but then you take Don Giovanni too seriously as well, at least Tirso's Don and his refrain: "Tan largo me lo fiáis!" What a long term you are giving me!
- I heard that Lydia advised you to take Don Giovanni more lightheartedly and to use him to come terms with your anxieties about old age...
- Goodness, what a whirlwind of gossip! There's no hiding anything with you two!
- What should I say? Besides, Lydia's idea, going back to her suggestion, seems particularly fruitful when it connects Don Giovanni with old age — something that also haunts me. What you call "dongiovannismo," or at least my version of this stance, is an acting role, which fits several of my obsessions. It is not simply a charade; it's also part of who I am. For this reason, being "discovered" is not so bad; it can even be pleasurable.
- This is all fine, but how do you live out the idea of old age concerning Don Giovanni? I have a young friend trying to do this — to portray on stage a convincing representation of Don Giovanni's old age — and she is having a lot of difficulty. The supposed aging of Don Giovanni is anachronistic, an add-on from our own time that ends up out of place or from a time other than the myth.

- And why can't we have an anachronistic approach?
- Good question. But there's the right kind of anachronism and the wrong kind that passes judgment on people in the past who were politically incorrect or who were not sufficiently anti-imperialist or feminist and so on and so forth. As you have reminded me, I am a historian. And on a personal level, I don't want to pile my obsessions on top of one another. I'd rather keep a private, imaginary Don Giovanni, young or old, and deal with old age on another plane. As I always say, Casanova can carry that: he died at seventy-three years old, a bit younger than I am now.
- Er... Schnitzler's Casanova is fifty-three, my age now. He rebels against the laws of nature and refuses to get old, but he does it disgustingly, paying or tricking women to stay the night with him. No, I try to create a performance that openly accepts old age, to use Lydia's words. Also, alternating intervals of solitude and being in the company of other older people. It's necessary to see your peers to have a mirror and a confirmation from them of your own old age. If we are constantly with younger people — like Lydia or my ex-wife — you risk falling into the illusion of being young, too.
- It's not like that for me. My husband and I are the same age, so we also have the same old age. But also, I am not trying to seem younger than I am.
- I know, but if you put regret into the picture using your morbid attachment to Don Giovanni, you could act out the renunciation process.
- Meaning?
- Let's take another performance as a model. Forget Schnitzler's grotesqueries. Think of Mastroianni's Casanova in Scola's film *Il mondo nuovo*. His Casanova is sixty-six years old and ailing. His face is covered with wrinkles highlighted by face powder, and he uses a cane. But he is famous and always fascinating. Certain beautiful women still offer themselves to him, but he refuses gallantly, expressing regret, perhaps only out of courtesy. He could accept the

offer of one of them, and be a guest in her beautiful country house, but he chooses to retire to become a librarian in Bohemia. This way, he maintains both his dignity and his good name. I would like to go that way. To start, I'm getting used to being slow, having various ailments, and forgetting things —

- Way to go! You're at least ten years younger than me. And then you are a musician who is used to being on show. Or perhaps it's easier for a man to get old than a woman, even though you identify with Don Giovanni?
- Even now? I wouldn't know. Anyway, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* really is about masculinity and, indeed, has at least two models of masculinity, starting with Don Giovanni and Don Ottavio, who contrast with and illuminate one another. According to my London friend, who taught music at the University of West London and studied both Bob Dylan and Mozart, the contrast between Giovanni and Ottavio (he doesn't want to use the "don") is the most crucial hinge of the opera. Despite his old-fashioned arias, and even though his music is sometimes overshadowed by Anna's, Ottavio — a lyrical tenor — represents a new male sensibility: the sentimental lover, the faithful husband, the marital union in a nascent bourgeois society. All of this is set against Giovanni, one of the baritones who in Mozart's work embodies the harmful materialism of the Enlightenment. On a musical level, says my friend, Giovanni's excited and arrogant Champagne aria *Fin ch'han dal vino* contrasts with Ottavio's sentimental aria *Dalla sua pace* ("From her peace"), separated only by the secco recitative between Don Giovanni and Leporello. I prefer Leporello, both for his bright and varied arias and because he represents the future of social redemption against the power of the aristocracy, for example when he sings "no more I'll stay" at the beginning of the opera. There's also the peasant, Masetto, an example of yet another kind of masculinity...
- That's very interesting; I really should read your friend's book!

- In your eyes, he would be guilty of a forced actualization, in the sense that he accuses the Enlightenment of being fiercely hostile to women and having the same attitude towards rape that was prevalent in the English courts of the 2000s, according to which the woman always bears part of the responsibility. For my friend, Giovanni is a rapist like all other libertines of the eighteenth century and the women of the opera are only victims, not real subjects, just as they were for Sade. According to him, there is a typical Enlightenment contrast, which Mozart shares, between the women's static and subdominant music and the dynamic and dominant music of the men.
- An example of "bad" anachronism. How does he support it?
- Well, he says that the environment of the middle classes in Mozart's Vienna was caught in the tension between the Anglo-Scottish-French Enlightenment focused on morality and the German Enlightenment that was interested in subjective experience. Music — especially with what he calls the chaotic harmony or harmonic instability of *Don Giovanni* — was the one thing capable of reconciling the contradiction between reason and emotion, that is, between the materialistic reason of the baritones with the sentimental reason of the lyrical tenors.
- Yes, yes, I understand, more or less. It is very suggestive, but it's all a bit forced, a little rigid.
- Sure. But what the author says about relationships between men is important, for example the psychological-melodic correlation between the Commendatore and Giovanni, two examples of the stoicism that both Kant and Sade share. Don't let's go on about it — I have already quarreled with him about this simplification. We often quarrel because his opera quotations are not always correct...
- Why are you so fixated on correctness, the political and the grammatical?

He looks at me sideways, grimacing resignedly, and begins to laugh:

- That's the contradiction in my character, which alternates between punctiliousness and frivolity. You cannot operate in several areas if you are not precise. But enough: you've made me lose the point, and the point is that you anticipate too much.
- Generally, yes, but what is there to anticipate this time? Old age has long come for me.

He hesitates a moment and then goes on:

- It's not old age that you are anticipating... It's not old age that Don Giovanni represents, either for you or for others...

I understand why he is hesitating:

- You want to say that I am anticipating death. But it really is closer for some people than for others.
- Yes, for example, for that kid who passed us at breakneck speed on his motorbike.
- No, I mean as a perception, as a warning.
- You can heed the warning, but don't indulge the thought. But now I don't know why I'm telling you all this. Anyway, the important thing is that Don Giovanni does not take either himself or death too seriously, which is the only sensible attitude.

We have reached my friends' house. John kisses me on the forehead and disappears into the night.

Puppets and Comedians

Friday afternoon

We are at Fabbrica Europa, getting ready to watch the rehearsal of the second sequence. Ludovic and Lydia explain that it is based on a comic tradition. For centuries, Don Giovanni was an important presence in the repertoire of itinerant comedians, especially in puppet theater. Many plays that existed almost exclusively as oral texts have been lost. In the remaining ones, often performed as sketches, there is a strong relationship with Tirso de Molina's *Burlador*, which this presentation will deliberately highlight.

Lydia says:

- To counterbalance the unknown texts we are bringing to the fore, we are introducing a series of tropes made famous by the servant Catalinón from *Burlador*. They are found in the popular culture tradition shared by all of Don Giovanni's servants in various theatrical versions, and especially in the Commedia dell'Arte. A good example is Catalinón's description of the dinner offered by the stone guest, with the black table set with black plates, the food served by pages dressed in mourning clothes, and dishes of scorpions and vipers accompanied by a sauce of vinegar, fingernails,

and gall instead of wine. To avoid such a dinner, Catalinón first expresses the fear that the food has cooled down, then he tells the dead that he has already had a snack, asks if the table is ever washed, and finally observes that the fingernails must be those of tailors, well known for their rapacity. His character colors the aristocratic milieu of his master with his own popular and earthly world, overturning the social order — and perhaps his name alludes to excrement, to *cacca*.

Ludovic interrupts:

- We have revived an old play from the repertoire of the Girolamo Theater in Milan, *Don Giovanni il disoluto, or the unthinkable punishment, with Famiola unlucky in love*. Famiola is a version of Gianduja — or Gerolamo, with whom he is interchangeable — the masked character who lampoons the stereotypical Piedmontese peasant, a man who is both cunning, credulous, and unreliable, greedy like the Arlecchino character, but less quick-minded.

The performance has started. It is another display of virtuosity. The actors, dressed in variegated costumes inspired by Commedia dell'Arte, act as if they were puppets with rigid and jerky movements. Don Giovanni goes from one adventure to another, making false promises, taking on different guises, and fighting countless duels. But the central character is his servant Famiola, in the same costume that Sganarelle wore, reminding us of Brighella and taking us back to Molière. He speaks a northern dialect inspired by Piedmontese, a comic contrast with the polished speech of Don and the courtly language of the statue. Famiola's world is the peasant one, where the statue is called *Birbon d'in moliné* (the "rascal miller"), because it is as white as a miller covered in flour.

We are also in the world of *cucina povera*, peasant cuisine, contrasted with the infernal banquet offered by the Commendatore statue. The serpent on the black table (which at a certain

point rises and undulates to chase a terrified Famiola) is *a merlus faus... or calé an pes ciappà anti bosch d'Africa* (“an unreal codfish... or a fish caught in the woods of Africa”), to which Famiòla says he prefers *ciccolata tajà col fil* — chocolate cut with a wire slicer, which is to say, polenta. But the comedic core of Famiòla’s speech is obscenity, the continuous reference to the corporeal and the sexual. His initial tirade, which sets the tone for the comedy, mocks the master who goes around at night looking for women: *Se tute le fumele de cust mond ’a fussa na fumela sola... oh che fumlan... che fumlanas! A proporzione per soddisfé cust fumlan assaria gnanca abbastanza la torr de Babilonia* (“if all the women in the world were a single woman... oh what a huge woman... what a slut... to match and to satisfy such a woman even the Tower of Babel would not be enough”).

The actors who play the parts of Famiòla and his friends make twirls and somersaults; they exchange slaps and insults, laugh aloud, and then freeze in silence when the statue appears, white and disturbing. A Colombina who pirouetted with exceptional skill stops in the middle of a movement and remains almost suspended above the stage. Lydia follows my admiring gaze: “She is Rozalia, only just arrived from Moldova; she is very good indeed.” The immobility lasts a moment — then everyone starts to move frantically, running this way and that.

The scuffling and screams fade away in a moment of complete darkness. When the lights come on again, the statue is dragging Don Giovanni away, and the devil has already snatched his cloak. But Don Giovanni protests that he still has many things to do and many names to add to the list. He makes a pact with the devil to get another ten years of life, while the statue disappears with threatening gestures and signs of annoyance.

Lydia whispers:

— We have moved on to the drama of Edmond Rostand, *La dernière nuit de Don Juan* (*The Last Night of Don Juan*), written at the time of the First World War and left unfinished. This is also a draft rather than a revised text.

There's another dark interlude. Then we have a dialogue set in Venice between Sganarelle and Don Giovanni, who is terrified because his time has run out, according to the deal he made with the devil. The devil appears with a sinister laugh and calls up the thousands of women seduced by Don Giovanni, represented by white shadows projected onto the backdrop, whom Don Giovanni tries to recognize in vain. The shadow chorus, wearing white Venetian masks and white shoes, tells him that he never really possessed them because he didn't love them. The devil repeats their accusation: "You've seen nothing! You've known nothing! You've had nothing!" But Don Giovanni pushes back, bringing up the example of other conquests, those of Spanish colonialism:

- My ancestors were no less the conquerors of the Indies because the Indians themselves remained a mystery.
- The devil: — So, possession?...
- Possession is domination. My prodigious energy has satisfied that spirit which theology calls the spirit of... of...
- I think you've been reading too much of what they write about you!

At this point, the actors still behave like puppets, though with more fluid movements and in a less exaggerated way. A big White Shadow comes forward, majestically acted by Lydia, and tries to save Don Giovanni with the force of her love. But he declares that he only loved the act of conquest and himself: "For me, woman was just a pretext." It is clear that in the struggle between the White Shadow and the devil, the latter will win, and the tone of the piece turns to the tragicomic. The devil condemns Don Giovanni to return to his destiny, the popular folk theater, and become a puppet. The actors, who had toned down their imitation of marionettes, brought it back with full force in the last scene. The piece of Rostand ended with Don Giovanni perfectly imitating a marionette, slumped and dangling from its strings.

There's a pause. The two sections were done with great rapidity, but now there is a moment of hesitation.

— Are we doing the Saramago or the Frisch? asks an actor.

Ludovic and Lydia consult each other with their eyes, then respond almost in unison:

— The Samarago: it's more dramatic.

They tell us that this is the reworking of a few scenes from the libretto of *Il dissoluto assolto* (*The Dissolute Acquitted*) the result of a collaboration between Saramago and the composer Azio Corghi, which was based on an original text written by Saramago. In March 2006, Ludovic saw the première of the opera in Lisbon — it was staged at La Scala in September — and he explains that the scenes are based on the opera rather than the original piece, and put four figures on the stage: the Comendatore statue (in bronze), the Donna Elvira Mannequin, an actor who represents Leporello, and an actress who plays both Donna Elvira and Zerlina. The other actors function backstage as a chorus, punctuating the acting with a whispered couplet: "... is the dissolute acquitted? No, he is punished! / ... the dissolute is acquitted! Isn't he punished?" The statue, which looks like a suit of armor, speaks in a very deep, dark voice. The text is declaimed, whispered, murmured, screamed — never spoken in a normal voice.

Lydia explains that the men and the Mannequin sing in the original opera, whereas the women recite:

— You could say that our version brings out the "feminine" side of the opera: that is, the part closest to daily life and its miseries and paradoxes. Not being able to have the parts sung, we accentuated the differences between the various tones, underpinned by the musical passages taken from a recording of the opera itself. This is a real hypertext, linking many pieces together, including bits of Mozart like the

Catalog Aria, folksongs from Emilia-Romagna, quotations from Rossini, and madrigals. We like the doubling of Elvira as a character and a Mannequin, which fits in with our idea of mixing the marionettes and the Commedia.

The staging captures the farcical and caricatured nature of the work well. In Don Giovanni's house, Donna Elvira's Mannequin and Leporello replay the catalog scene in a style that parodies the Da Ponte-Mozart opera. The Commendatore declares that he was transported to Don Giovanni's house by the "spirit of service," but his curses have no effect. Hell's flames quickly rise and fade when he invokes them three times. Leporello, played by Ludovic, comes home with the shopping and complains that they have left smoke stains on the tiles. Donna Elvira appears and says that the curse is whipped-up nonsense. Lydia brings the character to life by skilfully mixing bitter tones with comments that are now exalted, now sardonic, for example, when she says that the Commendatore seems to be "part of the furniture." Donna Elvira has brought a copy of the catalog of Don Giovanni's conquests to replace the real one, which she throws into the fire.

The acting is interspersed with extracts from Corghi's music, which unfolds in a wide spectrum of sounds, from harps to timpani and bells, with a wide spectrum of vocal sounds as well. Lydia and Ludovic insert brief updates about the other characters. One after another they reveal that they are not really what they pretend to be: the Commendatore is a hypocrite who acts as a man of honor even though he knows that Donna Anna has not been assaulted; Elvira and Anna lie. Don Ottavio is just a shadow of Donna Anna and ends up killed by Don Giovanni in a duel, who himself has lost his self-assurance after the destruction of the catalog. Masetto is an inconsistent figure, obsessed with revenge but unable to understand what's happening.

The person who transforms the situation is Zerlina, who is finally able to declare her love for Don Giovanni, "who has suddenly become a poor man whose life has been stolen from him." She turns him "into simply... Giovanni." Leporello throws

himself into philosophical reflections and the statue clatters to pieces in a heap of scrap metal. “The reprobate is acquitted!” announces the offstage chorus, and both the threat of divine punishment and the disapproval of the *bien-pensant* people and betrayed women are shown to be petty and perfidious. The possibility of transcendence has disappeared. The voice of the Donna Elvira Mannequin issues from the flames in the fireplace: “Acquitted... but for how long?”

Günter and I comment that this last fragment is intriguing and suggestive. I also like the sequence constructed out of two other pieces through clever editing; and I especially appreciate the connection between the conquest of love and colonial conquest. To discuss the show, we accept the cast and crew’s invitation to dine at an old trattoria in San Niccolò that Lydia and Ludovico go to when they are in Florence. Wine and chicken liver crostini are brought while we are waiting. Günter wants to know why they preferred Saramago to Max Frisch, whom he knows well from the original edition, *Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie* (*Don Juan, or the Love of Geometry*). This starts a new argument. Günter says:

— Perhaps it’s an inferior piece of theater, but it’s crucial for the ending.

I ask for details, and Lydia summarizes Frisch’s ending for me:

— After years of neglecting geometry for women, Don Giovanni makes a pact with the Church to pretend he is dead so that he can live peacefully with his geometry in a monastery. He stages a farce about himself in agreement with an old ruffian disguised as the statue and invites his former lovers to attend. The result is a theatrical show, *El Burlador*, which will be performed in Seville and attributed to Tirso de Molina. The hoax succeeds, and all of Seville believes it, even though the attribution to Tirso is disputed. In this way the comedy wraps around itself with beautiful reflexive irony.

Günter recalls that Albert Camus liked Frisch's finale. Camus saw it as the logical conclusion of a life shot through by the absurd and marked by a kind of courage that was not physical, an intelligence without illusions of a stable relationship with the transcendent.

— Yes, but as you said too, Ludovic directly contradicts Günter, Frisch is very over-determined, and the relationship he establishes between laughter and rationality doesn't make you laugh at all!

The *potato tortelli al ragù* arrives and the intense conversation starts again only after we finish this first course, while we are waiting for the *peposo coi fagioli*, Tuscan peppery beef stew with beans. The large dinner restores Günter to good humor. The actors discuss the production; one would prefer to bring the carnivalesque comedy out more, especially in the third segment. It is Kamil, the young man from Prague who trained with Laterna Magika and who uses puppets to bring the words to life:

— One could take the hint from Don Giovanni's mention of colonialism and insert a reference to oral traditions such as that of Native Americans, re-launching the theme of the Trickster, which exists in many cultures. Moral standards don't apply to the immortal rascal; he performs his stunts with a twinkle so that laughter predominates. The Trickster can behave outrageously, because he is over and above ordinary mortals, and stands for a principle beyond their norms. Don Giovanni is also a bit like that.

Lydia agrees but says they must find a way to put the scoundrel into the theater. Kamil tells the Navajo story about the Trickster-like Coyote, which would work well in animation with puppets of various sizes. The name "Trickster" comes from "trick," but the story also comes from the circuses of wandering comedians. The Trickster is a character that Europeans would describe as Rabelaisian, with immense appetite and scatological humor,

who transforms himself in a thousand ways and dresses as a woman. He is ridiculous, obscene, and beyond all laws of the physical world. No ordinary rule applies to him; for example, he can send his penis across the river to make love to the chief's daughter on the other bank. Kamil says there are African and Asian versions of the Trickster. He adds that the advantage of putting such stories in would be an extension of the theme beyond Europe, generating a postcolonial look at the European horizon.

- Very interesting, says Günter sarcastically, but what does it have to do with Don Giovanni? Do you think that the Trickster might be the Don Giovanni of the Navajo or the Sioux?
- No, no, Kamil shakes his head, Don Giovanni is not a Trickster. What I'm talking about is an ancient substratum from which the imagery of the myth of Don Giovanni stands out —

Günter interrupts him as if something else had suddenly occurred to him:

- And Goldoni? Isn't Goldoni in your comic rundown?
- For goodness's sake! Lydia says. He wrote something terrible, just thrown together. It seems it was to take revenge on an actress who had betrayed him with someone he represents as Don Giovanni in the play, a vulgar sort of country gentleman. The worst thing is the author's spiteful address to the reader railing against Tirso's comedy, which Goldoni attributes to Calderón de la Barca. He attacks it by saying that since it is packed with vulgarity and cheap thrills, it only succeeded thanks to a pact with the devil and an audience of low and ignorant people. He ends up taking it out on Molière, whom he says staged a deliberately scandalous and sacrilegious *Don Giovanni*, with scenes so shameful that they made you sick. I think he did that because he had read the anonymous libel against the first edition of *Dom Juan*.

- How do you explain that? And his own play *La Locandiera*...?
- *La Locandiera* is much later — but I'm not an expert on Goldoni and have no wish to be. However, his Don Giovanni hasn't just lost his rebellious and blasphemous character; he is also devoid of everything that Goldoni calls buffoonery because the burlesque component of the *Commedia dell'Arte* is suppressed. How do you explain that?! It was because he was fated to be Masetto and not Don Giovanni in his own life!

Don Giovanni the Feminist

Saturday after lunch

After a lunch of *bistecca fiorentina* at the Mastro Geppetto trattoria in San Gervasio, I leave Günter immersed in a conversation about Tuscan meat with the owner and go to interview a Florentine psychoanalyst who has written some fine books about Don Giovanni. She lives in the same neighborhood and welcomes me into her small *art nouveau* style house, where she has her consulting room. We know each other by name and greet each other with the familiar *tu* because we have been feminist activists simultaneously, though in different cities and in groups with different orientations. We still identify ourselves the same way even if we are no longer active. I begin the interview with a question that may seem naive, asking if it seems right that two lifelong feminists like us are obsessed with Don Giovanni. She answers that today, Don Giovanni must be understood in the historical and theoretical context of women's understanding of themselves:

- We can see him as a catalyst for female subjectivity in that, for example, Mozart's Donna Anna becomes a woman subject thanks to him, not Don Ottavio. And it is in the course of the relationship with Don Giovanni that Donna Elvira

turns from victim and object of seduction or derision into a fully realized subject, capable of standing as the judge of her seducer and even trying to save him — which reminds me, you should see Louis Jovet's film *Elvira*. Without this role Don Giovanni risks being just a clinical case, who endlessly repeats the same script and is forced to demand the same scene.

Her theory justifies and enlarges Lydia's interpretation and sends us back to the connections between the two settings of theater and psychoanalysis. What I take from it is that the price of not having these connections would be the loss of the character's theatrical and mythical dimension:

- That is, beyond your hypothesis Don Giovanni risks being regarded as just pathological? If he is only interested in conquest and abandons women immediately after seducing them, then he is reduced to an abnormality, and perhaps he does not even really enjoy having sex.

My fellow feminist shakes her head and replies that there is always something pathological in this story. Don Giovanni does disport himself, not just for the conquests but also for his pleasure. I voice my doubt:

- The pleasure is all his; he doesn't consider the woman's pleasure.
- Ah, that is slander by envious people to discredit him. If it really were like that, he wouldn't have the success he has. All that's missing now — she says sarcastically — is to project the feminist controversy about clitoral or vaginal orgasm onto him! On the other hand, there are important points of contact: our generation's main transgression was in the sexual arena; more generally, it was personal relationships as part of a revolution in daily life.

I agree that in the early sixties, the attack on bourgeois society was intertwined with a sort of freedom that was seen to be expressed in having multiple partners, living out a rejection of jealousy and heteronormativity, and experimenting in sexual and loving relationships. Our feminism, too, was defined by the wish to live more fully, to savor everything. I ask my interlocutor to confirm this:

- The Italian radical feminism that we shared was not moralistic. We refused just to attack men and argue for equality. Accusing Don Giovanni of vulgar machismo is part of a relatively recent ideological trend. But I would like to discuss the crucial point of pathology: do you find symptoms of Don Giovanni in your patients, as Kristeva and Mitchell do?
- Well, I am very eclectic. I bring different approaches together in my practice and writing, always looking to hold firm the line between myth and my clinical work. The myth can be applied to the patient, not vice versa. As far as clinical practice goes, I find that my clients often feel guilty: they fear being victims of what is now called sexual compulsion. But Don Giovanni is very far from this state of mind, whatever colleagues and famous people in the past say about it.
- I, too, think that Don Giovanni can be cruel and enjoy himself without feeling guilty.
- Certainly, because the truth of desire is ambivalent, it moves between opposite poles: from Dionysian intoxication, from the play and freedom of eroticism, to lies, violence, and rape. According to Jungian theory, the figure of Don Giovanni contains both these psychic opposites, which include the shadow side.
- And does it make sense for you to talk about Don Giovanni when there are so many of them?
- Many, and each is different one from another, just like the times they live in, but most of them have something in common. Don Giovanni is always the seducer in the original sense of the word — *se-ducere* — that is, pulling the other

away from themselves and towards him. Seduction is always a diversion, a move to somewhere else. He does this by disguising himself, embodying his lovers, and identifying with their desires.

- My friend Lydia says the same thing. But does he ever genuinely fall in love?
- You wish! He doesn't love, but he certainly falls in love. However, we must stress that Don Giovanni is a man with male chauvinist values. And for women, maleness has always been the perfect embodiment of otherness, especially in extreme ways. It begins with the father. Phallogocentric discourse attributes to the individual woman the role of the other or the object as if the subject was always and only male. In the Don Giovanni stories, Don Giovanni can be a woman while the man occupies the object position.
- As you want, or I want. In my obsession with Don Giovanni, I'm disturbed to recognize that he was a role model for me despite being a man.
- Of course! Our generation only had male teachers and role models. There were no female teachers when we were between fifteen and thirty years old. Later, we came to value the mother, though often only ideologically, as the father's daughters.
- Absolutely right. I had a woman friend — a *maestra* for me — very late in the day, long after my formative years. I was nearly forty, and she was thirty years older than me. I did not understand immediately, mainly because she often said I was her oral history teacher. It was a not entirely serious joke with a hint of flirting. No, it was her charming way of combining seriousness and lightness. She taught me to be in the world, insofar as I have succeeded. But it's true that for me, as a teenager and young woman, freedom was masculine — without the shadow of getting pregnant, without the terrible experience of back-street abortion.
- And that seems insignificant? Anyway, it was also because you made sexual choices based on heteronormative criteria.
- No, I was erratically bisexual in the second half of the 1960s.

- Mmmm, so it didn't change much. But look: Don Giovanni is unusual compared to many males. I use the plural because, like you, I dislike and am annoyed by the essentialism of those who say: "all men are like this," or "all women are like this." Don Giovanni is not the head of a family — at least "our" Don Giovanni isn't — he doesn't want to be a mentor and has no heirs or followers. Perhaps in this way, he is, in fact, a "model" for those of us who didn't wish to have children.
- Then there won't be a legacy for a feminist foundation to our passion for an anti-romantic, voracious, and libertine Don Giovanni? Someone able to reveal the falsity of putting women on a pedestal. Our feminist theorists attacked romantic love, setting up a trap for women.
- Oh, I remember! Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*: I read it in 1971. Now, she is criticized for not interrogating heterosexuality. Actually, romantic love can also be charged with liberation. Anyway, for me, defending Don Giovanni means taking my distance from 1960s and '70s feminism without reneging on it. And along with that I am refusing a prescribed role and the demand that I give up on any claim that there is a relationship between experiencing something and understanding it. We have got to retrace our journey, remember it without betraying it, and not put it into any straitjacket of today.
- Maybe that's what I'm trying to do with Don Giovanni: repent without betraying.

That makes me smile:

- Yeah, it has seemed to me that you were after a mythobiography.
- In the sense of Bernhard?
- Yes, exactly — in the sense that for him, writing mythobiography means going back to a myth in search of connections to one's life story...

Mozart's Freedom

In the last week of my stay in Florence, with Günter having already left for a tour of Tuscany before returning to Berlin, I go to see Benedict. He has just moved into his new home and is finishing restoring it with a lover and friend, who is an architect. It is charming, set in a little valley above Fiesole. It's like a fairy house, tapered from the ground to the roof and painted pink. The ground floor has two big rooms, one of which is the kitchen; upstairs there are four small rooms. This house signals a great change. Benedict has traveled all his life; his mother was Ethiopian, his father a Dutch-Indonesian diplomat moving constantly on his postings, and the family often accompanied him. Benedict went on moving from place to place as a UN economic consultant for "emerging" nations. Then, just before he turned sixty-five, he decided to retire. He spent almost all his pension lump sum on this small house, isolated but within earshot, as he says, from the nearest farm. It's difficult to get there, and I had to get a lift from a friend who lives in Borgunto, down below.

Benedict is very tall, with tight curls, dark amber skin, and a slow way of moving. He greets me with a big hug and asks why I didn't come to see him earlier.

— I was on Don Giovanni's trail...

- Ah, the old madness! Well, I did it, too; I still do it, at least the music.
- That's just what I'm missing. I've come not just to visit you but also to interview you about Don Giovanni.
- About my life? he asks, laughing.
- Why not? But mainly about Mozart and Da Ponte.
- What a fixation! Today, that opera is lionized and set in stone. However, from the time of its first performance and for a long time afterward, there were many variations for reasons ranging from the whims of the singers to the taste of the public: three or four arias were added between the Prague premiere in October 1787 and the version in Vienna the following May — and in that one the playful ending was cut. The current version is largely arbitrary.
- A similar thing happened with Molière's *Dom Juan*. The text that is thought to be closest to the original is the result of critical analysis, comparison, and dispute. As for the Mozart, it has been formed inside me in a kind of crystallization process, resulting from mixing together all the versions I've heard or seen over the years. When new versions appear, I feel cheated, but I'll try to make space for a change in what I hear...
- For example, by listening to completely different musical interpretations. There's so much other Don Giovanni music! There are the operas of Calegari and Gazzaniga written in the eighteenth century, Strauss's symphonic poem in the nineteenth, and the Stravinsky/Auden opera in the twentieth.
- And you've managed to hear them all?
- Many of them, in various places where I happened to be or where I was sent on postings — in Berlin, Milan, Sydney, New York... But I could go on and on. Let's go for the Mozart — let's get something to drink and sit by the piano, which might come in handy.

Before we begin, he shows me the outside area where there used to be a vegetable garden and space for domestic animals. The

neighbors have a donkey, whose braying comes faintly through the distance.

- Will you have a garden too, or maybe a dog or a cat?
- Dream on! The vegetables we grow are awful and pets need constant looking after. Then you get fond of them, and going away on the spur of the moment is impossible.
- But is Bertrand thinking of living with you?
- I don't think so; he'll never leave his apartment in Porto. And then, you know, we have agreed not to interfere in one another's Don Giovanni-style adventures...

I never know when he is teasing me. He smiles charmingly and inscrutably:

- Come on, let's move on to Mozart.
- All right. In preparation, I re-read the book by Mila...

He listens to me with an air of ironic kindness as I continue:

- Let's abandon Mila's notion that the various Don Giovannis are a continuous historical process.

He waves his hand as if he is chasing away something annoying. But I continue:

- Two or three things in particular struck me in the book. One is the insistence on the theme that the Overture could represent a portrait of Don Giovanni. The second is the enthusiastic commentary by Luigi Dallapiccola on the final scene, suggesting that the Commendatore statue might be the true protagonist of the work, the positive center of the whole thing. In my research about Europe and love, I found that for Rougemont and Blanchot, the statue represents the night, or rather the other night, otherness *par excellence*. Thirdly, the role of women in the work: my friend, the English literature expert, maintains that women are the objects

and not the subjects of seduction, while Mila takes up the belief of an American philosopher of love that the women are hate-filled and wild. Mila talks about women who are angry and damaged and voice so much rage that, listening to them, we find ourselves thrown into indifference rather than taking their side.

Benedict gets up and takes a dog-eared score of Don Giovanni from the bookcase.

— This is an old transcription for piano, but it'll do for us. Mila talks a lot about the allegro passage in the overture... so here it is.

He plays the passage on the piano and repeats it several times:

- It's true; syncopation gives it a feeling of anxiety — can you hear it? Something that could be seen as unconventional —
- Dissonant in a way? I also feel something that drags one away, a kind of inevitability.
- Aside from the Champagne Aria, which is thrilling, Don Giovanni does not have great arias. Above all, he doesn't have soliloquy-type arias in which he sings about himself. But when he sings *Là ci darem la mano*, or when another character talks about him in the Catalog Aria, for instance, a dance-like rhythm appears. Dance carries you, moves you, takes you somewhere else — and, in fact, it is as if he is acting out a predetermined destiny. The dance pushes him on as if he is fated. You feel as if you are in a whirlwind, a whirlpool, a vortex...
- Max Frisch said that Don Giovanni could have become a ballerina because he is in constant motion.
- In fact, there are many ballets named after Don Giovanni. Gluck's ballet music is based on a fine libretto by Calzabigi, inspired by Molière, less than thirty years before Mozart. It's a ballet that is narrative, dramatic, tragic, and comic at the same time: a revolution in the history of dance.

He rifles through the score until nearly the end:

— This is the final scene with the statue.

He begins to play from the arrival of the Commendatore: *Don Giovanni, a cenar teco m'invitasti e son venuto* ("Don Giovanni, Thou didst thyself invite me, / For that I must requite thee").

— Here, Mozart goes beyond the limits of the musical grammar of his time; it's almost an anticipation of atonality. The statue comes from beyond the grave. His sound is spectral, unhuman. Mozart does it on purpose so that we don't understand which key we are in.

Benedict remains absorbed for a moment before continuing:

— As far as the women are concerned, people spout nonsense. Take Elvira, who is rightly resentful and offended: her music is never savage. For example, she has an air with a solo cello that carries a feeling of sensuality... it's beautiful. Mozart would never have used the cello to express rage. The whole opera breathes freedom. The home key is D, moving from the Minor to the Major, but Mozart often moves away from that — this is his form of freedom. But there is also the characters' freedom: Don Ottavio is almost expressionist. He has noble arias, like a form of nostalgia for the aristocratic gesture, but also a wide, varied range of expression. And the same for everyone else. Only Don Giovanni is constrained and has a predestined erotic drive, which is why he is very modern, in fact of our own day.

— Well, sex was already an obligation for us in the 1960s and '70s.

— But there weren't many of us. Now it's all young people.

— Do you notice that in your nephew? How is he, by the way? I'd like to see him again.

— Yes, he asked after you. I notice it in him and his friends, who are in their early twenties, but especially in the schools

where, now that I have time, I'm doing jazz and chamber music presentations, not for money, but because I am interested. All the boys and girls feel obliged to have sex. It is no longer a male prerogative; it's both male and female and is even more flaunted by the girls. It is Don Giovanni democratized. If you name Casanova, they don't know who he is, but if you say "Don Giovanni," they understand. Even the young Essex kids. Today, anyone can be Don Giovanni without a problem; it's a badge of merit.

- A woman can be Don Giovanni?
- If an old queen like me can be one, then why not!
- But it wasn't that simple in the past. Okay, there's the Marquise de Merteuil in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and many others, but even so, they are a minority.
- There was the Contessa di Castiglione, who, is it said, had twelve lovers simultaneously, all unknown to one another. But I admit that it's risky to put forward a female version of Don Giovanni, and it can produce grotesque results. I read a bad American novel, *Don Juan in the Village*, about a female sadomasochist who seduces many women in different parts of the world, starting with New York. The heroine (or, anti-heroine) had too much self-pity to embody a real female Don Giovanni. Are you familiar with the *Don Giovanni* put on by the Piazza Vittorio Orchestra?
- A violinist friend told me something about it, especially its multi-ethnic character...
- Oh yes, but there's much more. Anyway, the orchestra's story: nearly twenty years ago, a musician who lived in the Esquilino neighborhood decided to put together a sort of Babel orchestra made up of musicians and instruments from all over the world found in the area. Many had neither *permesso di soggiorno*, a legal right to remain, nor any proper work, and they didn't know much Italian. I met them when I was still based in Rome because of my work with the UN and UNESCO. The orchestra succeeded, nomadic and religiously varied as it was, and ventured into ambitious works like *The Magic Flute* and *Carmen*, up to their

recent *Don Giovanni*, a Franco-Italian co-production. This *Don Giovanni* does not stop at going beyond geographical and genre borders — mixing Western classical music, Sufi songs, blues, and reggae — but also mixes up sexual types. The Don is androgynous and played by a woman claiming no specific sexual identity, displaying the freedom to resist a monogamous world. The sets also contribute to a fascinating spectacle: lights, reflective panels, projected images, and drawings. The music comprises Mozart arrangements, including a Don Giovanni who sings other characters' arias since Mozart has given him so few of his own. You need to have seen it! They also make a case for Don Giovanni as a person in torment, suffering remorse for his killing of the Commendatore.

- This doesn't fit with Don G.
- It fits with an interpretation that draws us to his persona and is in harmony with his hatred of confinement, his non-conformism, and his continual wanderings. Perhaps remorse is the voice of the transcendent, and this brings him closer to our own worries about finding a form of transcendence that can be reconciled with the present.
- What about desecration as a form of blasphemy?
- It is difficult to understand how Don Giovanni's blasphemy can be translated into today's world. The same is true for me in that I've had black lovers and have come out of the closet: big deal!
- Of course, you curb your self-destructiveness and have a good relationship with your nephew, even if you haven't talked to your sister for ages — and that's not just because of your sexual choices, it's also due to your defiant attitude and rejection of close ties.
- Let's see how all this goes now that I'm in one place.
- Have you truly settled down? And why in Florence?
- Well, I'll continue to go on wandering, just as my family did, even though I stay at home in a way I never had before. Florence because my nephew lives in Rome with his mother, but I don't want to live in Rome anymore. This is

close enough, but not too close. And there's a good musical season.

I'd like to know more about these family ties, but I see that Benedict seems tired and a bit distant. I have been intrusive, and it occurs to me that he has had more of his chronic migraines. But he is very perceptive and he collects himself and gives me a little smile:

- I didn't retire for health reasons but because for too long I no longer believed in my work, managing international development loans and similar initiatives. I like solitude which is not isolation. Bertrand is always there; we are in constant contact and see each other often. And then, as long as I'm interested, there are lovers both old and new. I just have to make some calls or go down into town, or I can go somewhere else further away. I'm still attractive, at least up to a point.
- I can see that very well, and not up to a certain point. But being Don Giovanni comes with a cost...

He laughs indulgently:

- It's less of a cost than other ways of life.

Fifth Imaginary Dialogue

Benedict has accompanied me to the main square in Fiesole, where I've taken the number 7 bus, as I used to do every day years ago. On the bus, which has a long wait time before setting off, I am thinking about the afternoon's meeting when Don Giovanni begins to speak:

- It was high time that, in this inventory, the opera was considered directly and not just when other things came up. I mean the opera of operas: Mozart and Da Ponte's.
- Yep, understood. You turn up at the right time. But in our inventory, it's mentioned a lot!
- So far, only indirectly. And, on another subject, Benedict is a nice dongiovanniesque type. I'm pleased that he is in our catalog, or inventory, as you want to call it. How did you find him? Not today, I mean in your life.
- I got to know Bernard first; he is partly Cape Verdean and worked with the revolutionary Amilcar Cabral during the struggle for independence in Guinea-Bissau. He's my age, ten years older than Benedict, and we met in the late 1960s when I was collecting material from liberation movements and writing with them and for them. After Cabral's assassination and Guinea-Bissau's independence from Portugal, Bertrand moved to Europe. Benedict arrived later.

- So you met him through Bertrand?
- Well, let's think: how did it happen? About halfway through the '70s I was in Paris because of my feminist contacts, with groups like Psych-et-Po and "the two Bs" (as I call Bertrand and Benedict) had a shared base where they often met together. Bertrand had a temporary post at the University of Porto, and Benedict wasn't yet working at the UN. He was taking courses on comparative musicology. He was very young, highly critical of everything, always happy and wild. We met in the spaces occupied by veterans of 1968 and groups like the GAUCHE PROLÉTARIENNE; they combined a Maoist faith in the role of the party with a belief in the revolution initiated spontaneously by the working class. I vaguely remember a meeting at the headquarters of the *Ligue*, which had moved on from the old Trotskyist LIGUE and had links to the French Labor Confederation, the CFTD. I was then very active in the school and university branches of the Italian Labor Federation, the CGIL.
- Bertrand and Benedict were already together then?
- Yes, but they also had affairs with other people; they were a Don Giovanni-style couple. For me, it was the last years of my revolutionary activity, both in daily life and in the political sphere, which all ended in 1978 with the assassination of Aldo Moro. By that time Benedict had already started traveling for work. Bertrand had settled in Porto as a political science researcher, and their relationship was becoming normalized, until it became the central element in both their lives. Their other sexual relationships, which sometimes went on intermittently for years, were never secretive; perhaps some were shared. They seemed to me like a model couple, but at the time I said ridiculous things about sexual freedom and behaved in absurd ways. Now Bertrand has become more contemplative, and — how shall I put it — he makes himself desired and precious... at least with others, not with Benedict.
- Agh, more politics... you'll have to explain it better.

- Well, Benedict has also been very active in student movements and the queer movement, bringing together his international contacts. Then, on the wave of defeat at the end of the 1970s, all three of us convinced ourselves that political activity could be translated into cultural and professional action. Said differently, there was no alternative. It was oral history for me, UN work for Benedict, and colonial and postcolonial history for Bertrand. We were all attempting to transfer hopes for radical change into cultural action.
- This transition from the political to the cultural unites you.
- Not just that. We were already very close friends with deep affinities. But a common background in our political past makes us understand our subsequent ways of living, even if we rarely talk about it. I think it's the trust that daily life has a political value. Now, in old age, we can renew our friendship, meet more often, and spend time together.
- It's a fantasy to seek beauty in old age. Could this collection of material about me also be an attempt to take something from defeat?
- No, no. I am beyond defeat now; it has no such claims. Our inventory is a diversion that creates backdrop between one research project and another — a way to spend the summers gathering scattered sheets. But I don't know if there will even be another project after this.
- So, if it is just a diversion, I should warn you that this catalog is running the risk of getting boring. Some of the old stories have had their moment. You should spice up the repertoire by talking to someone younger with a different experience to update our gallery of characters...
- I "will do what I can," as you say in the opera. But what do you think of the discussions of various kinds of masculinity?
- To me you are reinventing the wheel, typical of your time.
- And what do you say about an androgynous version of yourself?

He disappears with one of his epic grins.

RETURN TO TURIN

Between Two Rivers

early November

Now home, I telephone my young friend Isabella. To call her young is just a manner of speaking, but I've known her for a long time, first as a pupil and, more recently, as a friend in a relationship of closeness and complicity. She listens to me for a few minutes and interrupts to remind me that the crooner Fred Buscaglione was from Turin: perhaps he wasn't a Don Giovanni in the strict sense, but he was still a 1950s-style seducer. I was vaguely aware of this. We arrange to meet in the afternoon in Via Eusebio Bava 26B.

I arrive early. There's nothing special at this residential address: houses from the '50s, a rather shabby street without shops, and no commemorative sign. We are in Vanchiglia, or the *burg del fum*, "smoketown" as it's called in the local dialect, a neighborhood shaped like a perfect triangle in which the long side is the Dora River and the short one the Po, and where the top of the triangle borders the Royal Gardens. It was once an industrial zone, with many little workshops or *boite*. Now it's rapidly gentrifying.

Isabella finally arrives with her flaming hair, naturally red but accentuated with henna. She is dressed, as always, in a way that is both outlandish and elegant: a flared skirt with bright stripes of

green and purple, purple blouse, green shoes with high chunky heels, and large earrings and bracelets, even an umbrella with multicolored polka dots. She looks great, and her image brightens the November day, gray and cold after an unusually hot October. We hug each other joyfully, but now I'm impatient...

She points to the usual sad glass doors with metal surrounds.

- This is where Fred lived, on the seventh floor. You get a good view of the Mole Antonelliana, where the cinema museum is housed, from his house.
- And there's not even a plaque?

She shakes her head sadly:

- The singer-songwriter Leo Chiosso lived nearby in Via Napione. They were great friends and wrote songs together. They talked to one another from their balconies. Leo's son is named Fred. Santa Giulia church is nearby, where Buscaglione's funeral was held in the 1960s, attracting thousands of people from all walks of life. His tomb is not far from here, in the Cimitero Monumentale.

I'm struck by this, but in the second half of the 1950s I was being a young intellectual, oscillating between existentialism and despair. I was snobbish about Buscaglione's kind of music and didn't appreciate his irony.

- I remember only a few songs, like *Che Bambola*, *What a Doll*, and *Porfirio Rubirosa* — no, sorry, *Villarosa*. Of course, Buscaglione was a Don Giovanni; just these two songs would be enough — but perhaps there's more...
- Of course there is. Are you intrigued?
- Very.
- Ok, let's walk a bit. We'll go to my house and I'll tell you.

It's begun to drizzle, and we walk under Isabella's big umbrella. How fast and safe she is in her green shoes. We cross the broad

piazza Vittorio; it's shining in the rain, with its arches and illuminated shop windows. At the intersection of Via Plana and Via Maria Vittoria, Isabella points out the corner restaurant named after Porfirio Rubirosa. She tells me there are others with the same name in Parma and Florence. This one is pleasant — you eat well and it's a decent pizzeria. We pass through Piazzetta Maria Teresa, perfectly square, with rounded paving stones that Isabella negotiates with skill. We turn towards the River Po and head up to her house. From the windows, you can see the Monte dei Cappuccini and the Basilica of Superga between the mist and the rain.

Isabella makes a white tea, and I settle into the sofa, waiting for her to tell her story. I know the habitual rhythm of her stories, written and narrated, and I look forward to getting into it.

Isabella's Tales: Fred

— He came from a family of workers near Biella. His father was a painter — *pitùr*, meaning house painter, as it was called in the local dialect. His mother was a concierge but also a piano teacher. He had to leave the conservatory to be a delivery boy and then a dental assistant. He sang and played jazz in cafés on all sorts of instruments: trumpet, double bass, violin, piano. Leo Chiosso, a law student, noticed him at the Caffè Ligure, near the Porta Nuova station, and they began collaborating on lyrics and music, an intense, profound, even emotional pairing.

Fred creates a character: gangster style, with a Clark Gable mustache and tough attitude, as in the detective stories Chiosso constantly reads. *Che bambola* is their first success. The girl is “a beautiful mammal” Fred tries to be too clever with: “She filled out a beautiful lamé dress, she is stacked like no one else in the world.” She pins him to a lamp post, but then she’s upset that he is so defenseless. He pretends to pass out, she goes to help him, and ends up kissing him. Fred starts with the irony of machismo, which he then undercuts. Above all, there is the rhythm, the hammering of the rhymes, the rasping tone of voice, and the play between the soloist and the chorus.

- I remember: posing as a tough guy, cigarette dangling out of his mouth at an angle, his level gaze, and his Borsalino hat low on his forehead.
- Because in life and song, he is channeling the atmosphere of American films and characters like Humphrey Bogart. He is not afraid, just as later, Paolo Conte will not be afraid of being a bully and a playboy. Fred's a lady killer. There is even talk of an affair with Anita Ekberg.

The song *Porfirio Villarosa*, also with Chiosso's lyrics, transforms the famous Dominican playboy Porfirio Villarosa into a textile worker, "more handsome than Valentino." The text addresses him directly, in a refrain with a festive rhythm: "Porfirio, Porfirio, what do you do to women?" He is called "the lover of Zazà" — Zsa Zsa Gabor Italianized. Villarosa leaves the factory because he has been set up and is now flush with cash, *pieno di grana*, in the jargon of the Turin mob — an Italian-style portrait of the real Dominican playboy, whose fate Fred would share.

- In the sense that he, like Rubirosa, died in a car crash?
- In his lilac Ford Thunderbird. Fred had married a North African acrobat, but hadn't left women and alcohol behind. They had separated, and he was living at the Hotel Rivoli in Rome. One night, after a show at a nightclub in Via Margutta, he collided head-on with a truck at an intersection in Parioli. It was February 3, 1960 and Fred was thirty-eight. He lived frenetically: cinema, music, radio, tv, adventures. For him, life and art mirrored one another. His myth will continue, and he will have many followers.

I'm taken with Isabella's urgent and rapid delivery and tell her I always like her way of telling a story, punctuated with short, insistent phrases.

She shrugs her shoulders:

- But there's an essential prequel about the real Rubirosa if you want to hear it. It's not really true that Buscaglione is a

- proper Don Giovanni, even though he always maintains a hint of irreverence, but his model is much more of a Don.
- Of course I want to hear it. I'd also like to know why this kind of personality attracts you — that's the idea I have, but I'd like confirmation of it.
 - So tell me your idea!
 - Well, I think you like these men who are not ashamed to embody the character of the womanizer in the old-fashioned way and with modern Americanized characteristics but also with heavy irony that is local, Piedmontese in the case of Buscaglione and Conte. I think you also like to play the part of the feminine figure they evoke, a provocative *femme fatale*, always mocking themselves and others. You also enjoy the male and female role reversal that then operates. In the end, women are stronger than men.
 - All right, but you don't consider my passion for music, which is crucial. Their music expresses the charm you describe; it conjures up an enchanted atmosphere while setting up a distance. They play with the past — jazz, film noir — but they make it new in a radical way. They do the same with their image.
 - You're very clear-sighted.
 - In this game, that's indispensable.
 - Do you mean when meeting these men in your life?

She laughs:

- I like to play with this kind of Don Juan, but it requires continuous clarity of mind. You must never entirely believe either what you say yourself or what they say. You can't even not believe it; otherwise, no one has fun. And you must keep in mind that there is always some danger. However, you know that I've had a fiancé for some time, and we are going steady.
- "Fiancé?"
- He's happy if I call him that. Now I'll add some hot water to the tea and tell you something about the real Porfirio. I did

some research on him so I could understand the figure of Fred better and why he intrigued me.

Prequel: Porfirio

- Porfirio was a playboy, the last one, according to the newspapers. The magazines of the 1950s are full of news about him and his other playboy friends like the Egyptian King Farouk, or Aly Khan, the heir of the sultan Aga Khan. They were very rich. He wasn't: his money came from his wives. Two of his five marriages were to American millionaires, Doris Duke and Barbara Hutton, who handed over houses, cars, racing horses, planes, and cash after their divorces. A playboy needs lots of money. Rubi was reckoned to be the most elegant man in the world. He had an enormous wardrobe — linen and silk for the summer, fine wool for the winter — innumerable pairs of shoes, mostly Italian. It's a very expensive lifestyle; someone like that must be able to afford all kinds of luxury, give presents like jewels, gigantic bouquets of flowers, exaggerated tips. Porfirio often found himself short of money and even ended up dying in financial difficulties after having squandered huge sums.
- But where did he come from?
- He was the son of a diplomat from the Dominican Republic and married the daughter of Trujillo, who was dictator there, and who appointed him ambassador in places like Berlin during the Third Reich, Vichy France, Rome, Cuba under Batista, Argentina.

- So he was tied up with dictatorial regimes...
- Yes, and one of his wives was Danielle Darrieux, one of the few actresses who went on working during the Nazi occupation of Paris, probably as a result of blackmail. But it's also said that he had contacts with the French Resistance and helped a certain number of Jews to escape from the Third Reich and take refuge in the Dominican Republic, which allowed Trujillo to ingratiate himself with the United States. But maybe Rubirosa was just selling Dominican visas to wealthy Jews. The stories about him veer off into the realm of fairy tales, like the one about him searching for sunken treasure in the Caribbean, in which he lost a huge sum, infuriating Trujillo.
- Sagas, telenovelas...
- That's the character he inhabits: caught up in Mafia-style hits in the US, investigated by the FBI. He hung out with Frank Sinatra and JFK, but his specialty was romantic love. Among his conquests were Soraya, Empress of Persia; Christina Onassis; Ava Gardner; Rita Hayworth; Zsa Zsa Gabor — the list probably goes on. Aristocrats, but also waitresses and for sure prostitutes in a luxury brothel near the Champs-Élysées. He didn't discriminate between the beautiful and the ugly; he tried it on with everyone and did not hold it against those who refused him. According to him, women are attracted above all to indifference, so the thing is never to pursue them. He sits in a café and responds to those who notice him with a knowing look and a smile. Because of his reputation as a seducer, many women think: "I want to try him out as well." He prides himself on maintaining absolute discretion about his affairs.

He was regarded as a great authority on women; twice he was a judge on Miss Universe. But the great thing was that when he dedicated himself to a woman, even for a short time, he gave her his total attention and put her at the center of everything.
- And how was he so attractive?

- Well, he wasn't particularly handsome: middle height, a friendly face and lovely smile, a seductive air, a bit sly. The Latin lover par excellence, along the lines of Rudolf Valentino. He was creole with dark skin and took care not to get too much sun in case he seemed black. According to the Harlem poet Langston Hughes, Rubi added color to a racist world because he was mixed race and seduced many women.
- He was certainly famous. In the course of my research, I found that magazines like *Oggi*, *Gente*, and *Songs and Smiles* were full of news stories about him. They hinted, without saying it too openly, at his extraordinary sexual prowess.
- Sex! Sex! But what really counts for these men is the process of seduction, which is reciprocal and a ritual. Sex offers him only an affirmation, a fulfillment.
- No, that's not true. Sex is central, and not just for Don Giovanni.

She looks at me in amazement.

- Perhaps for you, for your generation. But let's talk about sex another time...

The Footballer

Isabella arrives at my house in the rain. Under an oversized shiny raincoat, she is dressed in black, with a tight-fitting jacket and ski pants highlighting her slender figure, a golden lamé blouse, ankle boots, and a crocodile handbag. She is perfect and happy that I note it with my usual mixture of admiration and amazement for her clothes. She mentions that you can see La Mole from here too, but the opposite side of the one that Fred saw. To finish telling me Rubirosa's story, she starts from an experience of her own:

- The real danger in affairs with Don Juans is the power disparity. I tried it out with a handsome, sympathetic man a bit older than me. We liked one another and made a fine couple. We ate good food, laughed a lot, and had fun.

In response to my enquiring look she admits he was married, but that wasn't the problem.

- The problem was that at that time, I didn't have a fixed job, whereas he had a good one, long term collaborations of various sorts. We collaborated on an advertising project on the history of sport which was rewarding and well-paid. But the gap between our sexual-sentimental relationship

and our working one was short-circuited, which meant a total dependence on him. With great effort, I cut myself off completely. It gave me the impetus to start my own business, my cultural services agency.

- With Don Giovanni it's best to have only one level of relationship...
- Absolutely. For that, Porfirio was perfect. He often said that he had no time to work: his work was being a playboy. He referred to himself as “a man of pleasure,” a term typically applied to women with questionable morality. For him it meant pleasure in the broadest sense, not just sex.
- You promised to tell me about that.
- OK then. They used to say of Porfirio that he indulged in long sex sessions thanks to an elixir extracted from a root grown only in the Dominican Republic. But he was also capable of quick bathroom sessions or fumbles in store-rooms. Truman Capote claimed he had a coffee-colored penis 30 centimeters long, which excited the envy of jet-setting white men. But if you really want to understand his character, this is distracting and irrelevant nonsense. Other details of his behavior matter more. Rubi held his drink well. He could drink all night: cocktails, champagne, liqueurs. He was a good conversationalist who always dressed perfectly for the time and place. He played the piano, the guitar, and the ukulele and spoke five languages. He was a great dancer, especially of the Charleston and the Argentinian tango. From boxing to polo and football to yoga, he was an accomplished sportsman.

Isabella looks at the clock:

- Do you need to leave?
- No, I just have to send a text. I want to tell you the last story I found while researching the history of football. It's about a bastardized Don Giovanni, a footballer, who has several characteristics of the type of person who interests you: speed — moving like lightning from one place

to another — not just on the pitch, but also from one city to another, and from one woman to another. Like Don Giovanni, he likes Spanish women and that's mutual. He also has Don Giovanni's greed for cars, food, and women. He counts seven hundred women in eleven years, from when he was thirteen to twenty-four. Unlike Don Giovanni, who does not make rankings, he clearly separates out a few girlfriends, four in all, from the hundreds of lovers. Even among the seven hundred, the player establishes hierarchies: only twenty from the world of show business, are cataloged as beautiful.

For the classic Don Giovanni, all women had equal value, and in the variety of pleasures conquest was the main one, which gave meaning to all the others. The footballer, however, does not put women first. The mother figure sits at the center of his imagination. His girlfriend, destined to become his wife and mother of his children (and his mother's grandchildren), also counts, but the book's last page is dedicated to the word "Mum" in Barese. Right after that comes football.

- Where did you find out all this?
- In a kind of autobiography that somebody wrote for him. You could use it to make a comparison with Don Giovanni. In a world dominated by advertising, conquest is easier because a rich and famous footballer doesn't need to dress things up or promise anything. We don't know anything about the sexual prowess of Don Giovanni, but this guy boasted of never failing, just being a bit quick and "selfish," but mostly "fantastic."
- How would you place the story of the footballer into the narrative tradition of Don Giovanni?
- There are points of contact between the original myth and what can be called "a degraded incarnation" of Don Giovanni: the ready laugh, the complicity with men that suddenly turns into violent hatred, the playfulness.
- Of course, but I'm not convinced by the idea of degradation or bastardization because it suggests an uninterrupted continuity of the myth, with a single figure following a linear

path, first of ascent, then of culmination — for example, with Mozart — and finally of decline.

- Yes, I've noticed that too. In fact, it's not a single persona who falls away, as other figures pretend to be him and try to fill the place left by his absence, as in Korda's film about Don Giovanni's private life. But he's absent only because of our inability to hold on to him and understand his essence. This happened in consumer culture in the 1950s, with the phenomenon of celebrity promoted by magazines. The play-boy is a product of all this. He is not a rebellious figure, he is thoroughly profane, and he is not subject to social stigma or denigration. It allows for a cooked-up scandal without social disturbance.
- But do you think it's true then that Don Giovanni is dead, as Macchia maintains?

Isabella looks at me thoughtfully.

- Oh no! Not at all. It's just that he is now misunderstood or misrepresented. We must bring him up to date or he will die. Look, I went to Rome to see OperaCamion's adaptation of Mozart's opera, ironically described as "undisciplined" and "rock-n-roll." They drive their portable theater around suburban Rome, performing for free. Arriving at a town square, they open a container to reveal a two-floor set with a slide that performers use to move quickly from the upper to the lower stage. It's a sparkling and colorful show, with animated videos in which Don Giovanni turns into a bat and flies away. So perhaps he doesn't die. Indeed, the director, whom I met because I wanted to find out about his set designs for one of my articles, wonders and asks himself and us: "But actually, is Don Giovanni dead, or are we?"
- In the sense that we are dead because we no longer take enough notice of that sense of vitality?
- Exactly. There is another thing to say about the "death" of the character: that we are in a time when women behave

- differently than those in the saga of Don Giovanni. We have come to the toyboy, who is now a socially accepted figure.
- What is he?
 - The young lover-companion of an established, more mature woman who promotes him, like Demi Moore.
 - Goodness! The young protégé or favorite has always existed for powerful women. But to go back to my earlier point, is there or is there not a continuity between the original myth and the popularized or mass-market version?
 - I see a break between Don Giovanni and the playboy because they exhibit different types of seduction.
 - Unless the playboy is the only kind of Don Giovanni our era can allow? I checked the Oxford Thesaurus, which gives “Don Juan” as one of the synonyms for playboy, in fourth place after *charmer* and *libertine*. For more than half a century, the term was adopted by *Playboy* magazine, founded in the 1950s, which, not surprisingly, has reduced the number of pages dedicated to female nudes.
 - I don’t know. Don Giovanni is unique, for better or for worse. But Fred and Rubi, too, in their own way, were his heirs...

The Seducer's Legacy

I am doubtful:

- But can there really be a legacy of the seducer?
- Why not, Isabella says. Just look at the Joseph Losey film and concentrate on the figure of the valet, always in black. I did a little research in preparation for our conversation. The critics wrote a lot of nonsense about the valet: that he represents Da Ponte's unconscious, or that he is the figure of death, or a scapegoat, or a satire on the theatrical establishment — reviewers have written all kinds of stuff.
- Perhaps that's because the valet is very mysterious, and his presence changes the whole story. I recently watched it again; it's a perfect mix of film and staged performance, even in the details. For example, Losey has toned down the operatic clichés, the exaggerated and hyper-dramatic gestures.
- But the valet figure is only possible in film, not in staged productions. Eric Adjani, who plays the valet very well with his beautiful enigmatic face, opens and closes the film by opening the first door of the villa and closing the last one — the sign of his crucial role in the story. Of course, Rudolph Nureyev, Losey's first choice for the role, would have been stronger with his dramatic, chiseled features...

- I think Eric Adjani is really meaningful and persuasive, more uncertain and more enigmatic than Nureyev.

Isabella replies:

- Losey's valet is a kind of *deus ex machina* who solves problems of representation in an exquisitely theatrical way, but he is much more than a theatrical convenience. Losey also asserts that the valet is Don Giovanni's illegitimate son, but I think this is senseless and excessive compared to the film's architecture. Moreover, if he were the son, there would be no tension between him and Leporello, to which the director himself alludes, tension that only makes sense as competition between servants.
- Well, the valet is no ordinary servant; he is a sort of page, a young nobleman who serves a gentleman, waiting to become one himself. He adds a hint of homoeroticism to the film, potentially creating an element of competition. Some productions add a homosexual relationship between Don Giovanni and Leporello; more useless nonsense because their relationship in the opera is homoerotically complicit, and this is what counts, whether it is made explicit or not. If you look online, you will find plenty of shows of this type that sacrifice Don Giovanni and the whole work to a cause. Directors pile everything onto it, from attacks on corporate globalization to critiques of Euro Disney. So, do you think the valet is the heir?
- He might be, in a subtle, elegant, and mysterious way. The film's construction makes use of the valet in black as a link between its sections, although stays true to Mozart's score. I listened to the Columbia Records soundtrack, completed almost a year before so as not to reveal the faces distorted by the singing in the background. It also allows us to understand how the film's structure creates bridges between sound and vision. The opening sequence begins with the sound of water pouring and a quote from Gramsci written on the wall of an empty cell: "The old is dying and the new

cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear,” revealing that Losey views the work as a drama about social class, “a piece of rebellion”...

- Yes, Losey said revolution was in the air, but you don't see explicit signs of it in the opera. The peasants are not an effective political force.

Isabella nods:

- The opening credits run across the continuing sound of the pouring water. The overture doesn't commence until “Musical direction by Lorin Maazel” appears, and immediately after “Directed by Joseph Losey,” the servants turn on the lights of the Vicenza Teatro Olimpico, initiating the filmic scene. Dressed elegantly in courtly white, Don Giovanni appears from a corridor, emerging into his role fully composed. The other characters appear until images of a leaden sea beneath heavy clouds and ominous wooden poles in a lagoon fill the screen. But all this is still part of the opening. The narrative begins when the valet opens the gate of the Murano glass factory and welcomes the procession of nobles as they disembark from a boat.
- So, the scene changes from the Teatro Olimpico to a glass furnace divided into two floors, where the nobles stand on the mezzanine to watch the master glassmakers give a demonstration of blowing, inflating, and shaping the incandescent bubbles at the ends of long poles. But the valet stays with the glassmakers below, close to the flames that will engulf Don Giovanni.
- Exactly. Aside from the preamble, in the film proper the valet appears for the first time when he opens the great door of the Villa La Rotonda to let the servants pass carrying the mammoth catalog *delle belle, che amò il padron mio* (“of the beauties that my master loved”) — as Leporello sings while it unrolls down the steps of the villa. The footman accompanies the unfolding a few steps behind Elvira.

- Losey also says that the valet is the “guardian” of Don Giovanni’s soul. Guardian angels observe, watch over, and make announcements, as the valet in black does. He announces and accompanies movements and transitions. Perhaps the most evocative scene in the first act is the arrival of three masked nobles in a boat, a prelude to the revelation of Don Giovanni’s cruelties. The camera shows the valet passing by Leporello and going down the long staircase from the villa to welcome them at the landing stage, and then leading them back up the stairs and into the villa.
- The valet remains unruffled, even during the ball scene when Don Giovanni, more and more manic and audacious, kidnaps Zerlina and is discovered inside a cottage, upstairs. But his gaze gets more and more eloquent. When Don Giovanni tries to blame a stunned Leporello for the attempted assault (“Ah, cosa fate? Ah! What are you doing?”), Leporello stares at him with a penetrating gaze that demands answers, so much so that the Don glances over at him instead of ignoring him as he does in other scenes. And Leporello remains upstairs on the cottage porch, a witness to the crime, even when Don Giovanni drags him down the stairs. All alone, he later follows everyone at a distance when all the villagers and nobles rush after the fleeing pair. Thus ends the legendary wedding night, *droit du seigneur*.
- I remember the scene well. The valet appears in white and black in the darkness, with only his long cuffs and large white cravat visible, colors that refer back to Don Giovanni’s monochrome suits. He is in last place in the procession and doesn’t share the general uproar. But in the final scene, before Don Giovanni descends into the flames, the camera is just on Leporello. We last see the valet when Don Giovanni declares to him and the statue: *Non ho timor, verrò* (“I have no fear: I’ll come!”) After that, we only see Don Giovanni retreating toward the flames and Leporello’s anguish.

Isabella disagrees:

- Well, not quite! After the concluding playful sextet and just before the waters engulf everything, the valet, like an angel of death, finally closes the villa's door. Don Giovanni is now a damned soul, so the valet is also a bit diabolical in an Olympian sybiline way.
- Mmm... okay, let's try to untangle this a bit. In the end, what will the seducer's legacy be, if there is one?
- It is ambiguous and ambivalent. We don't know what the young man, the valet, will want and can do with the old world he is heir to. We can never predict how history will go. Look at 1968. See how, for Hannah Arendt, every new-born person changes public life when they appear with new ways of thinking. Who knows what young people will do in the future — with us following on behind? We hope.
- The valet is sober and self-restrained, like some of these young people, who, perhaps, like him, are waiting. In the meantime, they look at the excesses and shortcomings of those who came before them and the mess they left behind. The young people I know — perhaps we more or less consciously chose one another — are either extreme or self-restrained, sometimes both at once. They have a real grudge against your generation that sits between them and my generation, the 1968ers, to whom they are much less hostile. Some just seem to be waiting; others are getting ready. As Horkheimer said in a different context, it may become clear at some point that they have seen and understood everything.

Now it's Isabella's turn to be skeptical.

- And will they be Don Giovanni's heir? That seems like an old stager's fantasy, which is a bit ridiculous. Young women, too? Can the valet be a woman?

- Absolutely yes, as they say now. Especially since the valet is a figure replete with a sexuality which is distinctly androgynous.
- Quite a different sexuality than that represented by Don Giovanni. The presence of the valet creates a feeling of a break with the narrative tradition of the myth of the seducer and throws everything up in the air, even Leporello's mechanistic, inexorable accounting in the Catalog of his master's conquests...

Don Ottavio Restored

mid-November

Benedict and Bertrand meet up in Turin for the Slow Food Fair. Bertrand has sometimes worked as a chef and still writes about sustainable food. He is in contact with the Fair's organizers and the international Terra Madre foundation, dubbed the "United Nations" of food, and he is fascinated by the produce and how it is consumed. We dine at a restaurant he selected because it offers refined versions of Piedmontese cuisine and always sources the best ingredients.

The order calls for a long negotiation, during which Bertrand deploys his expertise, with some translation difficulties when the restaurateur's English is not good enough. Benedict and I observe that the menu is almost exclusively meat, but Bertrand gives us a dissertation on the environmentally acceptable ways to eat meat. In the end, we order old-fashioned dishes, like braised beef and *ravioli con finanziaria*, with a ragù made from Piedmontese fasson beef. Bertrand demands that we suspend our snobby doubts, as we are aiming to recover a lost culinary art:

- Don't you know how difficult it is to make *finanziere*? And find fresh cockscombs, sweetbreads, and brains? It's a million years since I've eaten it!
- That's because you never come to see me, I complain.
- You're the one who never comes to Porto. I added a separate small guest suite to my apartment. And I found a Portuguese version of Don Giovanni, written by António Patrício, who was born in Porto, not far from where I live. I stumbled on him after noticing a plaque on his house.
- Amazing! What is it?
- It's a verse play written in 1924, a "tragic tale," according to the subtitle. This Dom João must be a specifically Portuguese version of Don Giovanni because he is consumed with *saudade*, a form of longing which is a kind of national marker, a feeling that sits between nostalgic memory, desire, and the connection between sensuality and death. Death appears as one of the characters from the very beginning and reveals to Dom João that she is concealed within the characters of every woman he seduces. The drama ends with *Soror Morte*, Sister Death, coming to get him in the name of Love and God, and João's last words are: *Non sum dignus* ("I am not worthy"), pronounced humbly and religiously.
- Blimey! And the *saudade*?
- I don't know if it is a far-fetched idea, but I like the analysis that claims it is connected to Portuguese colonialism. It would have come from a feeling of being a long way from home, and the colonizers' solitude, which disguises violence and expropriation. It could have reflected the ethos of poverty-stricken settler-colonizers who had many reasons to feel lost and melancholy in the colonies, even as they perpetrated oppression.
- So you mean "colonial melancholia," like Paul Gilroy's book *Postcolonial Melancholia*, but actually amongst colonizers?

Benedict is a bit annoyed and suggests that we stop showing off our cultural knowledge and put off this conversation so that we can talk about meeting up in Porto. I'm keen to do that, too:

— I have only been to Porto once, and I'd love to return. I've been to Lisbon several times, though, and one of those times was a kind of honeymoon several years ago. We rode a tram up the very steep streets to the hotel. Our room opened onto a spacious terrace with breathtaking views.

Benedict asks playfully:

— Did your Don Giovanni period come to end with that visit?
 — Well, I guess so, at least as far as actual behavior is concerned. There are always more fantastical love affairs.
 — You mean sublimated?
 — It's another kind of pleasure. What about you, Bertrand?
 — I sublimate everything now. It's Benedict who prances about — with great success, too.

Benedict makes a face. The arrival of the *antipasti* saves him, but in between the first and the second courses we tease him about his continuing adventures, making a catalog that almost stretches across the world. Bertrand is the instigator:

— Everywhere except Europe. He just needs someone to keep count and write the list.

In the end, Benedict reacts:

— Anyway, my affairs never last long and, even better, when they're done, they're done. It's Bertrand who never really ends anything! How can you say you sublimate everything?
 — Okay, so sublimation is out of fashion. According to Jouvett, even Elvira's love is not a sublimation but a transformation. What I meant is that I don't start anything new anymore.
 — But if an old love reappears, you are still available!
 — Only if you leave the past completely aside.
 — And that means the seduction, which is the best bit.
 — No, that's always there. For seduction, repetition is essential, but only if you know how to handle it. It's all about invent-

ing something new. You remember that it's the same moves, but they seem as new as the first time, provided they involve challenge and transgression. Opening up possibilities, promising something else without specifying it, glimpsing together a space that is still empty...

- Can Don Ottavio be a seducer? Benedict asks.
- Yes, quietly, and it takes a long time to realize it. Don Ottavio can give a woman something that Don Giovanni will never be able to offer, so there is no real competition between them. Unwavering fidelity can be a subtle form of seduction if you know how to do it.
- Bertrand is the absolute master of that...

I don't hide my admiration; he protects himself, though we can see he is flattered.

I listen to them with interest. I agree with Benedict: don't ever go back to an old love unless you can blot out the past, which seems possible with sex but less so with feelings. I ask about Jouvett's Elvira, and they tell me you can't describe it, you must see it. I have another question:

- Had Da Ponte's Elvira not recognized Don Giovanni, forcing him to acknowledge her in turn, would he have continued to seduce her?

Benedict says it's impossible not to recognize each other. Bertrand argues otherwise:

- If the person has really changed and you have also changed, you might be unrecognizable to one another.
- I've changed a lot, I say.

They look at me inquiringly.

- I have re-evaluated Don Ottavio inside myself and in Mozart's opera.

- That already came out in the conversation at my house, Benedict observes.
- In fact, I looked again at Mila's book after that meeting because it struck me that you had spoken well about the music Don Ottavio is given, which is often looked down upon.
- And what did you get out of the book? asks Bertrand with a half-smile.
- Some interpret Don Ottavio's arias and the introductory music in Mozart's opera as static, dull, and conventional. Although the composer Luigi Dallapiccola says that Don Ottavio's arias are full of original harmonies, even if they don't — and shouldn't — have the dynamic energy of Don Giovanni's.

Benedict snorts a bit:

- I also suggested something similar, but the fact remains that Don Ottavio's music expresses perplexity or uncertainty and maintains a stately tone.

I react:

- But it also has energetic passages, such as the musical phrase that Mila defines as casual and quotidian: *Io da qui non vado via, se non so com'è l'affar*, when Don Giovanni claims Donna Elvira is mad to avert suspicions raised from her accusations in front of Ottavio and Anna. Or, during the minuet at the ball, when Don Giovanni tries to seduce Zerlina, Ottavio says to the fainting Donna Anna, "Pretend!" He is very convincing. An English musicologist argues that Don Ottavio represents the future — compared to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century — and Don Giovanni represents the past...

Benedict teases me:

- Take care not to make Don Ottavio bigger than he is, forgetting Don Giovanni!

Bertrand, who knows me better, interjects:

- No chance of that — you won't ever free yourself from Don Giovanni, *se tu non vuoi*, if you don't want to, as Leporello says when he is in Don Giovanni's cloak and afraid of being recognized by Donna Elvira.
- And I don't want to, really... though...
- But it's convenient for you to slip away discreetly, à la Leporello, as Klee writes in his *Diaries* when he plans to avoid military service duties.
- Klee?
- Ah, don't you know Klee's *Don Giovanni*?

Sixth Imaginary Dialogue

It occurs to me that, one autumn, a friend sent me a postcard of Don Giovanni from the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern. Following the cue of the two B's, I do a bit of research and discover a whole world of Don Giovanni in Paul Klee's mind and work. I read Klee's diaries, consult an expert, and write to the Zentrum Paul Klee. As luck would have it, at the same time I get the chance to go to a seminar on European cultural values at the University of Bern. I could go there at the start of my journey to Paris and then go on to the United States as planned. But I'm unsure. Will this journey have anything to do with Don Giovanni? Won't it be another step away from this field? That well-known voice starts up again:

- That seems like an excellent idea — going to Bern and then going back to Paris, I mean. New York, not so much; you've already been there so many times.
- Yes, I wanted to talk to you about my New York trip. I'm hoping you will come with me.
- In your dreams! I'm too European to follow you now. Poor Da Ponte already ended his life there!
- But he was very successful! He taught at Columbia University, organized the American première of *Don Giovanni*, got American citizenship...

- That was another time. Right now there are many things to say about your latest conversations and interviews. For example, who is the one you called your *maestra*?
- Giorgina. Despite being very active with teaching, politics, and writing, with many commitments, editing several newspapers one after the other, she was very comfortable with herself. She always paid attention to politics in a critical but unbiased way, equable in her judgments on the Israeli state — she had had to leave Italy because of the racial laws but never made a fetish of her Jewish identity. She looked after herself well and remained elegant into old age, so she was an example in this way, too. When I visited her in the Jewish retirement home, she would say to me: “I’m tired because I’m too old.” Now I’m beginning to understand what she meant.
- I know who she was and what she was like until the end. But she lived to a hundred and one, much older than you — as usual, you are exaggerating and dramatizing.

He is quiet for a moment before asking another question:

- And what is this *mitobiografia*, this “mythobiography,” that the psychoanalyst talked about?
- It’s Ernst Bernhard’s old idea that at the bottom of each individual’s biography lies a myth that connects us to the collective consciousness. If you are unaware of your myth, you mindlessly pursue it and find yourself playing the victim or perpetrator role as an inescapable destiny. The Nazis would have done this by following the myth of Hagen in a distorted and fanatical way: Hagen is the figure in the saga of the Nibelungs who makes Kriemhild reveal the only vulnerable point in Siegfried’s body and then treacherously kills him. Bernhard writes that when the racial laws forced him to live in hiding in Rome, he heard a speech by Hitler on the radio which directly harked back to the *Song of the Nibelungs* and the world of German mythic narrative. Bernhard suggests that the path of any life, individual or collec-

tive, can be changed with an awareness of the myth. When he was in an internment camp in Calabria in 1940–41, he himself managed to transform his mythic reference point from victim to the savior of the camp guards.

- But how does feminism come into all this?
- Well, my idea for what I'm putting together here was to understand why a feminist might put the figure of Don Giovanni as the basis of her mythobiography — that is, a mythologem that includes running against time, not growing old, loving without obligation, not repenting, and not betraying oneself... I wanted to escape from the myth of Don Giovanni as the hidden but dominant force of my life and, at the same time, free him from the reductive interpretations according to which he is simply an example of male violence. And actually, I think that now I really can defend you — I don't mean not criticize you — because I am a woman. This is especially so if you go through the history of Don Giovanni from an individual point of view, that of a subject who does not occupy the position of the "woman," but moves between female and male, or rather mixes them up and makes them more indistinct. A trans point of view, in the sense that it transits from one position of the subject to another.
- You really are appropriating everything.
- But it is by no means a move towards equality.
- Well, it has always been true that seduction — in the double sense of seducing and being seduced — can have both a man and a woman as subject and object. I am seen as a seducer, but I am also always seduced.
- Speaking of which, what do you have to say about the seducers who emulated you in the 1950s?
- I enjoyed Isabella's stories. Really fun and spot on. Those imitators, if you want to call them that, move me — Fred and Porfirio, above all. Like me, I'm sure they also said, "I'll do what I can" (*Farò quel che potrò*).

- I expected it: you like them because they can't compete with you, despite their best endeavors. So, are you convinced that you really do have heirs?
- With necessary differences, as John told you. On himself, he is right: he is not a Don Juan in the strict sense.
- Why is that?
- Because he returns and takes up again with old loves that played out at a particular time. Not me. It is the opposite for me: the variation and the accumulation are really important. I may repeat some seduction scenarios but with a different woman each time. Every individual counts, even if they are lost in the total. But John is right on another crucial point: the problem is not aging but death.
- I know. Because of death, not old age, the ego must get used to disappearing. We must understand that the ego is only superficial because of that disappearance.
- Oo la la!
- Okay, let's change the tone. Let's forget imitators and talk about possible heirs.
- Losey's film offers an indication.
- Ah, do you recognize the heir — your heir — in the valet?
- It's not for me to say who my heir might be. As with transmitting knowledge, the pupil chooses the master, not vice versa. But I see signs of it in the valet in black: the inheritance is his sight and foresight. Throughout the film, his gaze and the look in his eyes are the key to the story.
- Yes, the valet is all eyes; he doesn't speak and is almost motionless. He is unchanging even in the face of the afterlife and the specter of life beyond the grave. His gaze is impenetrable but never empty or absent.
- It's not true that he never moves; he has mobility in his eyes. The movements of the valet follow the direction of his gaze and show us the way to go.

I nod in agreement, and we take turns reviewing the relevant passages. In the scene where Don Giovanni serenades Donna Elvira's maid, the valet is present as an accomplice, playing the

mandolin. During the recitative between master and servant that begins with the exchange, *Oh, Leporello mio, va tutto bene! / Don Giovannino mio, va tutto male!* (“Oh, my Leporello, it’s all going well / My little Don Giovanni, it’s all going to Hell”), the valet not only opens the shutters to reveal the scene but also helps Don Giovanni dress, pushing away the jewels Leporello offers him. He assists in the double sense of the helper and the watcher. It is he who hands out the masks for the exchange of clothes between servant and master, although it is Don Giovanni who imperiously swaps them, appropriating the servant’s mask to seduce Donna Elvira’s maid. But most tellingly, Don Giovanni finds the valet sitting in his place at the fatal supper: when his master gives him an impatient look, he gets up with a bow, pulls back the chair for him, and stays there with his hand on the backrest, a guardian angel who cannot save his master, but who doesn’t lose sight of him to the very end. He brings Don Giovanni his plumed hat when the statue knocks at the door, and Don Giovanni goes to open it. When Don Giovanni steps back in front of the statue, he puts his hand on the young man’s shoulder.

I remember Losey describing the valet as an observer whose presence had always to be felt. My interlocutor agrees:

- Seeing is understanding, and the valet translates Losey’s many ways of seeing. In the trailer, the shot of his eyes, which look off to the side, alternates with the gaze of Don Giovanni, which is directed straight at the viewer. At the start of the film, we see the same shot of the libertine’s forehead and eyes as he runs away from Donna Elvira. He glances at a young woman with naked breasts washing herself at a fountain’s edge just as Leporello sings, *è la giovin principiante* (“it’s the young beginner”) in the Catalog Aria. With a wet face and steady sidelong glance, the girl returns Don Giovanni’s look as he passes, but she lowers the arm above her head.

I reply:

- Don Giovanni also moves between many ways of seeing: grim, gloomy, furious, cruel, ecstatic when he seduces Zerlina, and exhilarated when he enjoys the fun of causing Leporello's dismay in the face of the talking statue. And his eyes literally pierce Elvira when she arrives at his meeting with Donna Anna and Don Ottavio.

I try to broaden the argument:

- Part of this triumph of vision is Losey setting the film in a landscape that is created by a series of montages: the villa transported from the mainland to the lagoon so that barges and boats can reach it directly, and the Palladian environments that breathe balance and symmetry and act as a counterweight to emotional and libertine excesses of the protagonists. At the same time, the singers are framed in idyllic landscapes or against the backdrop of elegant architectural settings, grandiloquent mythological frescoes, and antique mirrors with crazed moldings.

It also seems relevant that the stress on the valet's vision might correspond to the main occupation of the actor, Eric Adjani, who was a professional photographer and cameraman and only acted in three films. And it is no coincidence that the valet figure was suggested to Losey by his co-writer since, in this film, the script takes the form of instructions for the staging and the visual fabric, as the actual script was already there in the form of Da Ponte's libretto.

Don G. doesn't pick up on these remarks and turns back to his argument:

- Losey is right in saying that the valet is illegitimate, but not in the sense of an actual child. He is a bastard in that he neither wishes for nor can represent a direct line of continuity; on the contrary, he brings discontinuity and interruption

even when he represents a transition. Don Giovanni has to contravene the principle of inheritance transmitted directly from father to son; he can't have legitimate heirs that are recognized in the eyes of the world.

- The eyes again, those of the world now.
- Of the spectators and everyone else. But along with vision, there is the idea of being visionary. The valet sees something in the air that the others still don't see. He is a figure of the interregnum, between one 1968 and another, between one mole-like eruption and the next...
- We are headed into utopian fantasy. However, the obsession with seeing can find lighthearted versions, such as the "Don Giovanni innocent" one.
- What are you talking about?
- There is a little illustrated story by the nineteenth-century writer Edmondo De Amicis about the aristocratic architect Giannino Giannarelli, who collected images of women in everyday life and the imagination. Gianarelli had "a hundred eyes to see the female form" on the streets of Turin, and not a single attractive woman or girl escaped his gaze.
- And what is this curious aristocrat doing besides looking?
- He's a man who is *happy enough*, a supporter of all social reforms that benefited women: he would like to give women the vote, open all careers to them, give them equal rights. He lives in a lovely neighborhood, surrounded by women who take care of him: the housekeeper, the laundry woman, the woman who does the ironing, the milkmaid, the seamstress, and the vegetable seller, and the walls of his studio are covered with portraits of women. He grows old and dies in total chastity.

TRAVELING

The Four Hundred and Sixty-First Adventure

end of November

Gusts of wind and rain are battering the grand arches of the Zentrum Paul Klee and the ground underneath them, where herb bushes and shrubs grow freely. I take a break from my work in the archive. One cannot even see the mountains that must have inspired the architect Renzo Piano, covered with fresh snow and visible only yesterday. What a change from Turin's peaceful autumn.

- You've come to find me even here, says Don Giovanni, almost stunned.
- And it is worth the trouble. They've shown me several original drawings that Klee made of you. It's been an emotional experience.
- Tell me all about it.
- The first drawing, called *Don Juan* (fig. 1), jumped out of its casing when the curator cautiously freed it from layers of protective tissue paper and put it in the center of the table. It made a real impression on me, even though I'd seen many reproductions of it, real and digital. The original is touch-



Fig. 1. Paul Klee, *Don Juan*, 1913, 48. Pen on paper on cardboard, 10 × 23.4/24.4 cm. Courtesy of Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

ing in its fragility: the pen marks in Indian ink, so vivid and intense, stand out from the yellowed mount, which shows its age — the drawing is from 1913 — and also has a little tear on its right-hand side.

- There is a lot of playfulness in that drawing. Not only that, but the drawing is kinetic and full of sexual tension.
- Klee was thirty-four when he drew it and at the beginning of his “ascent,” as he called it in his diaries. As far as we know, it is his first drawing of Don Giovanni, but the idea had been with him for a while. He knew the score of Mozart’s opera by heart, and in 1926, the Dresden Opera asked him to design the sets for a production of it, though they eventually hired someone else. As early as 1899–1900, I’ve seen that Klee referred to a little Leporello catalog of all the sweethearts whom he didn’t possess.
- I like this drawing: good images of me are scarce.
- It’s true, though who knows why that is.
- Because I’m very difficult to represent. I’m too mercurial.
- No, it’s because there is too much disparity between how people imagine you and your historical forms.
- Maybe... but what about Klee?
- For him, figurative work is born out of movement; it is movement itself. “A dot that moves becomes a line,” he writes in *Creative Confessions*. He drew this in Munich

between his trips to Paris and Tunisia. He was already experimenting with watercolors, but the “blessed line” he often spoke of is still dominant. Here is a teeming and intriguing line that produces grids. It wraps the figures in a kind of net and connects them, emphasizing the erotic areas or symbolically sexual features — Don Giovanni’s spurs, for instance, are a symbol of masculinity. Those who interpret these drawings talk about an enraged graphic style...

- It is a mysterious drawing, but it also has a witty side, with me between two women, one who seems to be dancing a sort of seductive flamenco; the other is on the ground, but it’s as if she has pulled me down too.
- It is no coincidence that one Klee scholar has interpreted the figure on the right as the seducer descending to hell.
- Oh no. Look, it’s obviously a woman!
- In fact, almost everyone interprets the picture as Don Giovanni between two women who pursue him in different ways, both emotionally and in terms of the staging
- I think it’s perfect that the theme of infatuation is treated ironically: I seem to be dazed, making ecstatic jerky movements. That makes people laugh, just as a puppet does.
- Or one of Klee’s puppets from his imaginary circus. Klee’s greatness is especially evident in small things like his hand puppets. By the way, I should suggest to Lydia and Ludovic that they use them, or at least pictures of them, in their performance with the actors imitating the puppets. Returning to Klee, his irony peaks in the next Don Giovanni, the 1919 watercolor *Bavarian Don Giovanni* (fig. 2).
- You didn’t see that today, though —
- No, it’s in the Guggenheim archive in New York. In that one, you are an acrobat dressed in Bavarian costume but in the diamond pattern of the Harlequin and, therefore, openly carnivalesque. He is shown climbing a ladder at night to get to his lovely ladies through the window. This Don Giovanni can be seen as a symbol of inversion or upending of the established order, turning the world upside down. But he is also a puppet controlled by destiny.

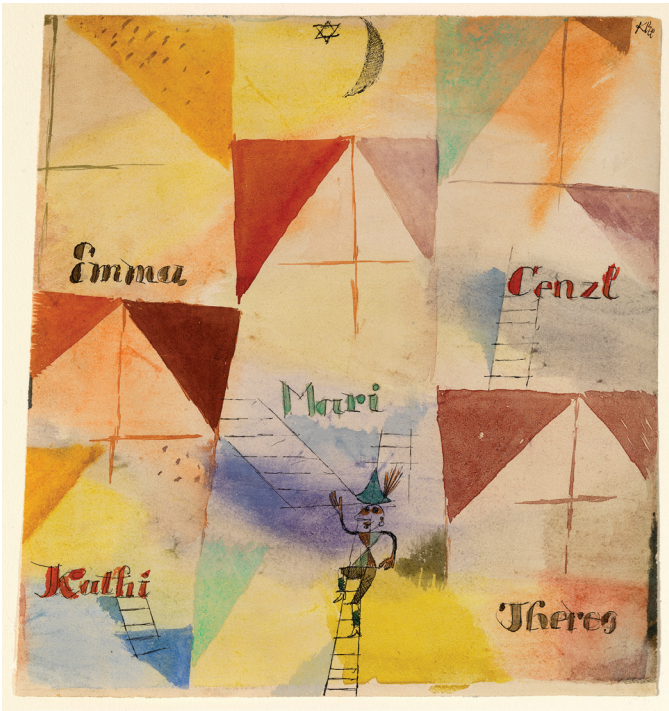


Fig. 2. Paul Klee, *The Bavarian Don Giovanni* (*Der bayrische Don Giovanni*), 1919. Watercolor and ink on paper, 22.5 × 21.3 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Estate of Karl Nierendorf, By purchase.

- Or an automaton, like those in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*? Or an archetypal image of masculinity?
- Well, yes, the Bavarian Don Giovanni recalls the world of the *Commedia dell'arte*, which acts on deep and ancient archetypes buried in the individual psyche. And this may have something to do with Klee's history of Don Juanism. Despite his many erotic drawings, which seem to reflect a male gaze, some people see in them a kind of pansexuality or androgyny.

- But these ideas don't lead anywhere. And perhaps his Don Juanism is imaginary only up to a certain point.
- In his *Diaries*, he records the night he spent with Cenzi — a relationship that continues for some time — and notes that he has got to give her “a bit of money” to free both of them from the “uncomfortable pressure” of her “clumsy conception.” In this story, I see a reflection of your attitude: a fondness for joking, cruel laughter, and an ambivalence towards women. Klee is relieved because Cenzi has found a job elsewhere, and he gets a loan to give her some more money. He is ruthless in his own way: “Even the thought of Cenzi, who lies in bed and talks nonsense, does not excite me at all.” It is a trait you share with him.
- Maybe. Anyway, if Klee's catalog — even in this painting — has an element of fantasy in his life, it becomes real in his art.
- The names of his lovers are real: those of the sopranos Emma Carelli and Thérèse Rothauser and his models Cenzi, Kathi, and Mari. The best thing is that Klee draws them with letters and colored shapes. It's a Mozartian watercolor.
- Yes, chasing Klee, you chase Don Giovanni through Mozart.
- Before anything else, I'm looking for you. Klee bewitched me with his witty interpretations of your character. Mozart, on the other hand, is unreachable. For Klee, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* was the perfect opera: compact, rounded, and all of a piece, even if it is problematic. He was convinced that the comic and light register should come out on top. There is a 1926 letter from him to the conductor Ernst Latzko, who ended the opera at the first finale with Don Giovanni sinking into the flames, as was the custom in the nineteenth century. That meant that the tragic gloom drowned out the playfulness and the lightness, and Klee disagreed. For him, the sextet of the second ending had to be there to restore the balance between the two “divergent diagonals” represented by death and atonement in the first ending, which breaks the equilibrium of the work and unbalances it by plunging Don Giovanni into Hell. Klee agreed with the composer

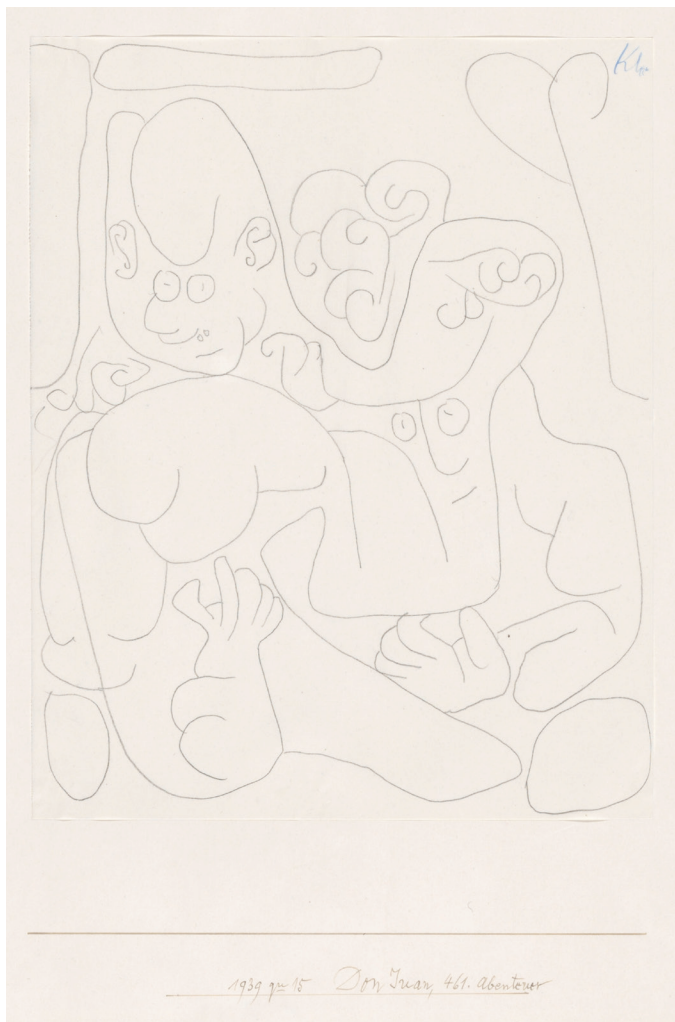


Fig. 3. Paul Klee, *Don Juan, 461. Abenteuer*, 1939, 195. Pencil on paper on cardboard, 27 × 21.5 cm. Courtesy of Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Livia Klee Donation.

Richard Strauss, who saw Mozart's operas as reconciliations of opposites, and so maintained the second ending to counterbalance the first. There was an extensive debate on this, in which Adorno also weighed in about the relationship between the tragic and the playful registers.

- Ugh, this juxtaposition again! You have to talk to Günter about it. I'm more interested in Strauss's tone poem.
- I listened to it again because Klee says he heard it conducted by Strauss himself in Zurich in 1903. He also read Nikolaus Lenau's unfinished verse play, published in 1851, which was Strauss's inspiration. Günter told me about Lenau's scene with the jealous brother, which is only a prelude. In the rest of the play, a frantic search for seduction takes over, the race of an over-excited Don Giovanni looking for true love, the perfect woman. Eventually, he realizes his search is in vain and lets himself be killed in a duel. Strauss has given this romantic hero a beautiful sonic guise, with the pressing strings and winds and the ending that stops, starts again, and seems never to want to finish. Klee will have grasped the deepest connections between the music of this Don Juan and the identification between Strauss and Lenau on the one hand and Don Giovanni on the other.
- Biographical trash!
- Well, I agree that explaining an attraction to the figure of Don Giovanni by biographical references is flimsy, and that my own infatuation or obsession is not because of a desire to be like him. Rather, it comes from seeing him as emblematic of a certain way of life without wanting to make him a universal symbol.
- More platitudes. Better go back to Klee. Have you seen any other drawings?
- A very late one, from 1939, just a year before his death (fig. 3). It's bigger than the ink drawing of 1913. In the reproduction, the individual line is almost invisible, but the original is very distinct and outlined with great precision. It's a

pencil drawing. The line has freed itself from “scribbles,” as he called them, and reached a kind of “spirituality.” The two figures emerge from the same line that creates their puffed-up hair with sinuous contours and soft volumes like clouds or curls. Several hands stick out. Don Giovanni’s hand is ready to grab and squeeze, and he seems withdrawn and greedy simultaneously, wholly absorbed in his adventure.

- That’s what always happens; the adventure is completely absorbing while it is going on. The beauty of the drawing is that it depicts a seduction scene that also seduces me.
- It is beautiful for its delicate and exquisite line, which creates an enchanted atmosphere. The title adds the final touch: *Adventure number 461*. Is that a number chosen at random, and concealed as part of the mystery? In any case, it’s a comic number, like 1003 in the Catalog Aria in Da Ponte’s libretto, which launches the buffoonish tone of the work and demystifies the seriousness of the seducer. Also, the woman in the drawing has a slightly mocking smile. Someone who has studied the importance of numbers and letters for Klee suggests that he uses them to shift communication to an unusual register.
- And have you got any clues from these explorations?
- No, not for the moment. There could be other Klee Don Giovannis, but they are hidden and mysterious to me. However, his 1934 painting *Don Chi*. (fig. 4) does speak to me, or rather questions me: it’s a sort of mask on rough canvas, which expresses sadness and lightness at the same time. Here, the enigmatic seducer is alone, with his gaze fixed on his obsession, but he doesn’t make a tragedy of it.



Fig. 4. Paul Klee, *Don Chi.*, 1934, 163. Watercolour, colored paste and oil on muslin on cardboard, 25,5/26 × 20 cm. Private collection, Switzerland, on extended loan to the Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern. Image credits: Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Image archive.

Serious and Playful

When I get back to the hotel, I answer a call from Günter in Berlin. I tell him where I am and why, and as usual, he starts to laugh:

- In your peregrinations, you always need two reasons, one which is work and the other which is your Don Giovanni stuff, one serious and the other playful, like “opera seria” and “opera buffa.” But I’ve called you because I have something that connects them.
- Is it the philosophical interpretation you were talking about?
- Yes, Adorno’s. I revisited some of his writing and found a helpful book of essays, including one written by Nikolaus Bacht, a philosopher who works on music. But the relationship between Adorno and Don Giovanni was very complicated, so you’ll have to calm down and listen to me.
- I can’t think of anything better. Tell me before I head off to dinner in a restaurant that serves cuisine from the canton of Ticino.
- Goodness! The Ticino canton has its own cuisine? Adorno’s first phase began after he attended Otto Klemperer’s production of Mozart’s opera in Berlin in 1928. Adorno wrote a review criticizing the reintroduction of the second finale.

Klemperer had been one of the first to do that, breaking the tradition of leaving it out. Adorno agreed with the director, who offered a serious interpretation of the work, in which the comic aspects were overshadowed even in the Catalog scene. The first ending had to prevail for Adorno, so the opera would finish with Don Giovanni's being engulfed and carried away by infernal fire. In one of the sections of *Aesthetic Theory* he restates this position, writing that the second ending — in which the survivors sing a cheerful moralistic condemnation of the seducer — lowers the tone of the work and makes the first ending seem silly. It's another review, not of a live performance but of Klemperer's recording on an EMI record.

- I, however, am persuaded by Klee's argument that it's right to finish with the opera buffa, which highlights the drama of the hellish ending. First, for the economy of representation, but also on a historical level, to put the work into a precise time frame.
- That's the problem! But, surprisingly, Adorno can help us. According to him, Don Giovanni experienced the humiliation of being a hard-up aristocrat who doesn't have the money to pay debts and servants, as Leporello says when he declares that to be with Don Giovanni is *mangiar male e mal dormir* ("to eat badly and have poor lodgings"). Already in Molière we have the scene of the creditor, Monsieur Dimanche, whom Dom Juan leads in a merry dance to avoid paying his debt. But bear in mind that Adorno takes these various positions on Don Giovanni in different writings and at various periods of his life. This is a rough summary; I'll send you the exact references that explain the argument more precisely.
- It's complicated, but I get the idea, and it goes in the direction I need.
- The most interesting thing is how Adorno defends Don Giovanni's anti-bourgeois potential. In the eyes of the bourgeoisie, Don Giovanni is not only a demon but also, according to their way of thinking, a clown and a fool.

Given the little social and economic power he has, his role as a messenger of desire ends up being a bit comical in the eyes of the bourgeoisie.

- Well, in some works Don Giovanni's rank is not at all diminished. For example, in Tirso's *Burlador*, he has important relationships with the courts of Naples and Lisbon.
- Adorno is talking about the Mozart opera. What matters there, he says, is that Don Giovanni is powerful enough to represent a potential for freedom against a class-based morality, even at the risk of losing everything in a desperate and fatal bid for it.
- This is very important for defending Don Giovanni.
- I thought you'd like it. There are other interesting things, such as Adorno's criticism of Da Ponte for having described Don Giovanni, in the initial list of characters, as *un cavaliere estremamente licenzioso* ("a very licentious knight"). In his opinion, the librettist opted for a morality that we can understand in the Kantian sense as the unity of the personality in accordance with abstract rational law, a type of morality that is hostile to the pursuit of pleasure. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno says that, against this, Don Giovanni is "dissolute" in the double sense of a subject that is both immoral and fragmented, almost falling apart. This brings into play Immanuel Kant and his idea of the unsolvable contradiction between freedom and necessity.
- I can't completely understand you here, but what you said earlier comforts me. It reminds me of Klee's *Don Chi* mask. The mask is very intriguing, first for its title, which evokes Don Quixote. It is only an aural connection, but it is suggestive because it recalls the quixotic character of Don Giovanni: a character who takes on an unbeatable reality with all the impotence of the individual in today's society. Don Giovanni's insistence on making pleasure and freedom coexist is like the fight against windmills.
- The association you are making with the Klee is personal; it applies to you.

- Maybe, but you've strengthened my sense that it is legitimate to defend Don Giovanni — even for me.
- We still need to discuss that. Think about it while you have dinner at the “Canton Ticino!”

PARIS

Eurocentrisms

early December

I'm in Paris for a few days before leaving for the us and am subletting an apartment in the Marais. You reach it by climbing up a polished wood spiral staircase that requires gymnastics to hoist the suitcase all the way to the fourth floor. The charming accommodation has a small, well-organized kitchen-living room and a bedroom that is freezing, but thankfully equipped with warm duvets. The apartment overlooks a narrow street that leads to the Place des Vosges within minutes. It's above a bakery, so the smell of croissants comes up in the early morning.

In a restaurant on the square, known for its coq-au-vin, I meet Emilia and Kornelia who have come from the first session of the conference "The Don Giovanni Story: Eroticism, Nationalism, Continentalism," dedicated to fiction and theater. Emilia encourages her friend to tell me her news, and after discarding her shield of politeness, Kornelia tells me she is getting married to Etienne. She accompanied Father Silveira as his assistant on his last trip but will soon have to leave him to move to Brussels. Radiantly happy, she welcomes our congratulations graciously, and her calm contentment instills serenity in us all. Emilia slyly says that she had noticed their union from the word "go." Clues revealed during our Venice meetings are now obvious! But Kor-

nelia prefers not to talk about it further because her plans with Etienne aren't entirely settled.

Instead, remembering our meetings in the evenings in Venice when we agreed about the European nature of romantic love, she wants to tell me about the conference, and in particular about the first session, "Don Juan's Europeanness: *Entre politique et seduction?*" — that is, between politics and seduction. The conference was advertised as bilingual but was mostly in English. Kornelia liked the session's introduction given by a Coimbra scholar critical of the argument that the legend of Don Giovanni, unlike the myths of Tristan and Prometheus, was limited to mainland and central European countries. The speaker took as a polemical objective the position of the French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, who characterized the Don Giovanni story as a very rare modern European myth, indeed the only one if we consider the Carmen story simply as his female equivalent. It's not an accident that both are set in Counter-Reformation Spain, which provides the appropriate context for their transgressions.

The clinching example in her talk was the existence of a Portuguese Dom João, the same one "discovered" by Bertrand. This figure intrigued Kornelia first because of the multi-faceted and itinerant figure of the author, who studied mathematics and medicine, moved on to the naval academy, and then followed a diplomatic career in Brazil, Germany, Greece, Turkey, Venezuela, and China. But the plot of the play, written in Constantinople in the 1920s, intrigued her most of all. It's a symbolist drama, set in seventeenth-century Seville, which entwines Eros and Thanatos in a minimalist plot with little action. Known as "ecstatic" theater, it emphasizes attitudes and ideas rather than actions, representing Don Giovanni beyond the myth's narrative tradition. Dom João views the mask as a necessary duplication of himself that enables him to exist in the world. But the object of this mystical Don Giovanni's pursuit via women is the mask of death. Thus, the link between love and death reappears, fascinating Kornelia as it has long fascinated me.

But it doesn't have the same fascination for Emilia, who shifts the direction of the argument, saying that the speaker rightly

emphasized the notion that Don Giovanni's Eurocentric conception goes hand in hand with the claim of a linear development of the myth away from the figure of the seducer in the seventeenth century to the rational man of the eighteenth century and finally to the romantic hero of the nineteenth century. And it is interesting that the connection between the European dimension of the myth and national identity is represented by a little-known work of a so-called European periphery.

Kornelia, though, is very critical of the talk that followed, by a Warsaw scholar. It offered hope, proposing to move the Don Giovanni myth away from its usual center in the Mediterranean, but the speaker confined herself to discussing a 1903 play about a follower of Machiavelli *avant la lettre*, King Boleslao II, who ruled approximately a thousand years ago and claimed the right to commit crimes for reasons of state. Among these was the murder of the Bishop Stanislao who denounced his sins. The king, who was also an unrepentant seducer, is eventually hit and killed by the bishop's coffin in a kind of grotesque reverse miracle.

I realize we have never discussed Don Giovanni's fortune or misfortune with European religions, but Emilia wants to forgo that discussion so we aren't diverted from thinking about the conference. She too is skeptical of the approach adopted by the speaker from Warsaw to widen Don Giovanni's mythic territory into Eastern Europe:

- She did well to introduce the conflict between religious and secular powers when it comes to the figure of Don Giovanni and to link Machiavellian behavior with sexual seduction. I'm also pleased she used Stanislaw Wyspiański as an example because he is a fascinating and eclectic playwright, painter, poet, and set designer, from Krakow like me, who traveled extensively in Europe. He belonged to the late nineteenth century Young Poland movement and was part of a neo-romantic trend that pitted pagan folk culture and the myths against the Catholic tradition. But Kornelia is right: the speaker used the controversy about Eurocentrism to

claim a nationalistic bent to the myth. In our performance, we plan to include a reference to King Boleslao and his expansionist aims, to broaden the myth but also to widen the references to other European countries and above all to the forms of imperialism within Europe.

For her part, Emilia found food for thought in another presentation aimed at dismantling Don Giovanni's claim to European exclusivity, at least on the chronological level. At the conference, a literary theorist of Sudanese origin presented the story of Imru' al-Qays, a pre-Islamic Arab poet who celebrated his amorous adventures, mocking both the rules of morality and his father's warnings, and causing extra scandal because he came from a royal family in southern Arabia.

Emilia and Kornelia enjoyed listening to the ode of Imru', which the speaker recited with great drama, and which tells the story of a cousin of Imru who didn't want to give in to his advances. One day, she and her nomadic tribe leave their camp, but at some point on the journey, the women fall behind with their servants and baggage, stopping at a spring to cool down. Imru' steals their clothes while they are in the water and returns them only at nightfall, when the women give in and come out into the open. In an attempt to stop them being angry, Imru' slaughters his camel for dinner, but the conflict doesn't die down. The women leave again and take the prince's harness and supplies with them, while he slips under his cousin's sun canopy to show off his sexual prowess. The speaker, who teaches Critical Humanities in Abu Dhabi, considers Imru' as the prototype of all the European narratives and argues that without a shadow of a doubt, the figure of Don Giovanni is originally from Arabia.

My two friends tell me that the audience was divided. Some people protested that the particularity of the European versions lies in bringing together amorous seduction and the challenge to the divine. At the same time, in the figure of the Arab seducer, there is no trace of religious rebellion because Imru' combines sexual extravagance with rebelliousness towards the father figure and society. Other people, though, favored challenging the

European monopoly of the Don Giovanni figure, and the discussion continued for a long time, forcing the last speaker to start late. He was a charming and witty teacher of classical Japanese literature from Los Angeles who had deconstructed Don Giovanni figures from different cultures as a way of critiquing Eurocentrism. Emilia:

- He was referring in particular to a Japanese classic, the tales of Prince Genji written by Murasaki Shikibu, the woman in the royal court at the beginning of the eleventh century who is thought to have recited them to an audience of aristocrats. According to the Japanese scholar, the protagonist of the stories had nothing to do with Don Giovanni, despite the apparent similarities.

The stories tell Genji's life by spooling out a chain of narratives that could go on forever. The "shining Prince," the son of the Emperor, begins his career by seducing his stepmother and continues a long series of amorous adventures. Murasaki appears in the story as a child kidnapped and educated by the prince, who ends up making her his second wife. Genji begins to decline and remarries at forty, and Murasaki dies after going into a convent. Genji and Don Giovanni both rebel against familial and social morality, but Murasaki's story relies on the passage of generations and how women are responsible for the continuation of the lineage. Because of his transgressions, Genji is condemned to exile by his brother who becomes the emperor, but he is absolved in the end, and one of his descendants will become emperor in turn. The theme of abandonment is not dominant in his story because Genji never completely leaves the women he seduces. The scholar went on to cite texts of gallant libertinism in seventeenth-century Japan, but the gist was that there is no universal figure exemplified in one place by Genji and another by Imru'. For this reason, any attempt to translate the Japanese character into something familiar is yet another form of ethnocentrism. The UCLA lecturer's take-down, studded with witty comments, was humorous, mocking the western Don Juanists

in a friendly manner, but some of the reactions were touched with bitterness.

— Ah, the old quarrel, I mutter to myself, just like the nineteenth century, when there was squabbling over the Arabian origins of courtly love... the same disputes for and against Eurocentrism...

Colonial Don Giovanni

I walk to the conference at La Maison de L'Europe in Rue des Francs-Bourgeois in the morning, passing the Carnavalet Museum and the Musée des Archives, where giant posters announce a demonstration against the founding of a museum of national culture. The conference venue is an impressive seventeenth-century mansion with a lovely courtyard and conference rooms of various sizes. The participants have come from far and wide: some from Africa or South America, many from Asia, and a good number from Western Europe and North America. I meet up again with Etienne and Ahmad, both of whom are speaking in the session on post-colonial Don Giovanni. We are delighted to see one another, and I congratulate Etienne on his forthcoming wedding. He is a little awkward, with his friend looking on amusedly.

My colleague Xenia, who teaches political philosophy at the Collège de Philosophie, welcomes me with a big hug. She is originally from Slovenia, has a strong sense of the political significance of cultural processes, and works with others to organize events in the “postcolonial humanities.” Petite and dark, with a direct gaze, she often expresses sharp opinions based on her political practice and research. She is also fiercely anti-nationalist due to personal experience and theoretical conviction. I ask her why they chose Don Giovanni, without any particu-

lar political or cultural themes, as the conference's main topic. She believes the idea of Don Giovanni, traditionally a symbol of conquest, is of particular interest to cultural studies scholars who research postcolonialism and decolonization. She assures me that politics will be more evident in upcoming sessions on the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial, which will highlight the links between military and amorous conquest. But she reiterates the criticisms about some of the talks from the day before:

- We cannot limit ourselves to an expanded form of Eurocentrism, which was the Polish speaker's primary intent. Criticizing Eurocentrism has been very fashionable for some time now, but it is too easy to deploy it anachronistically. It goes without saying that Eurocentrism dominated in certain historical periods and circumstances. We need to go beyond that.
- I have written several times against Eurocentrism...
- Yes, but by making it a part of what you do, that is, not denying that you are European and are part of Eurocentrism rather than accusing others of it while excusing yourself, only to put forward a new, worse form of Eurocentrism that is populist and framed as localism. We are still stuck in the problem of Eurocentrism, except that the formulation has changed with the new type of liberalism — at least in France, England, and Germany, where a multicultural approach persists in different ways. This gives rise to a kind of "post-Eurocentrism."
- Are you saying that we need to update the critique of Eurocentrism?
- I am especially scared of Eastern Eurocentrism; the western version is enough for me. The first has emerged as a trend in countries that have long been considered the periphery of Europe, which is a reaction to the old marginalization, but with the addition of strong nationalistic streaks, which at the moment are xenophobic, if not racist.

- Do you think there was something of that in the paper given by the scholar from Warsaw?
- She certainly claimed the right to assert a kind of Polish Euro-nationalism, starting with the history of the play. On the other hand, there has always been a dispute over Don Giovanni's national origins, as we have seen in the argument between Italy and Spain over who invented him and when. But it makes no sense to limit the myth to a single time and place when oral tradition is involved, as you have taught me!

We're told that the session has started, so we go in to listen to a paper given by a historian from Madrid, a specialist on Spain between the wars. We are expecting him to give a critique of the colonial aspects of the Don Giovanni myth. Instead, he offers an ambiguous picture of the opinions of the Spanish fascist writer Ernesto Giménez Caballero on the military and colonial nature of Don Giovanni's enterprises. For Caballero, Don Giovanni represents imperialist Spain, able to create new mixed-race peoples from its encounters with Indigenous women. Don Giovanni is a stud horse, a model for a conquistadors' limitless expansion in the manner of Charles V's motto, *Plus Ultra* ("Further Beyond"). Seen from this perspective, Europe can emerge from decadence only by imposing its culture on the world even though it's done by violence, while Spain's destined role as the conqueror is not limited to places beyond Europe, and will be fulfilled thanks to the marriage of love and fascism. Catalonia, too, must be subjected to the yoke of matrimony, just like two mythical characters, Caballero's Don Juan and Petrarch's Laura, should be forced to marry and have children so that they can emerge from both the serial seducer's sterility and the idealized woman of courtly love. The speaker also insists that the writer's life choices and politics show how European he was since he married an Italian woman and maintained close links with Italian fascists, particularly Bottai and Malaparte.

But the scholar makes no attempt to deconstruct this complex system, so much so that a young woman in the audience

(“One of my doctoral students,” Xenia whispers) objects that although Caballero may be intriguing because of sexism, racism, and the influence of Freud and the Surrealists, the resulting mess is grotesque: not only is Laura portrayed as a Scandinavian blonde, but above all, the March on Rome and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia are described as the work of “a new Don Giovanni,” Caballero’s epithet for Mussolini.

A young professor of decolonial sociology in Abidjan also intervenes. She is incisive and brilliant and compares Caballero and the writer Salvador de Madariaga, talking about the latter’s liberal vision, his love for Europe, and the shared European cultural heritage which ought to contribute to the unity of the continent when faced with American dominance. She introduces an interesting subject: unrequited love — indeed, a love that is impossible to return — might be symbolic of the imperialist encounter and struggle in the 16th century, when colonization was in full swing. This daring idea reverses the relationship between the world of military and economic conquest and the world of feeling. But the session chairman dismisses the argument, postponing discussions to the end of the day. He ignores our protests, and the last speaker winks at us, indicating with a wave that we can see one another later.

Emilia snorts:

- See how hard it is to get away from the colonial mentality?
- Do you know the guy who was the convenor?
- Only by name. He is a lecturer in public history at the Central European University in Budapest, who has followed the same trajectory as Orban, a liberal who became a nationalist and populist. Conference organizers still invite him because he lets his doctoral students air their views and defends them from political interference.

We are joined by our colleague from Abidjan, whom we welcome cheerfully, apologizing for the session convener’s behavior, who is, alas, one of us Europeans. Emilia explains his political background. She nods, smiles, and says in English:

— Yes, I understand. But maybe he also behaved that way because I am a young black woman.

Frames

During the coffee break, Emilia tells me important news about their play:

- We've decided to drop the storyline about age and focus on framing and frames. It's a much more credible way to update the entire production. We're making Hoffmann into a story within a story, as you suggested, and we're turning it into a theater within a theater. It's perfect for illustrating the intertwining of reality and story. Hoffmann has a double frame: the realistic one consists of the hotel and its inhabitants, and the fantastic one is the opera house into which the secret door opens from the narrator's room. We can even speak of a third frame because the story is structured like a letter to a friend, Theodor. Theodor is also one of the author's names; thus, it is a letter to himself. This multiple framework allows the narrative to shift from one level to another and places the story in the liminal unconscious — which is where Don Giovanni's currency is to be found. Hoffmann will be the highlight, but there will also be a prelude or an ending — we don't know which yet — based on Ellery Queen.
- I knew he had written something about Don G., but I didn't know what.

- He wrote a novelette, *The Death of Don Juan*, in the form of a play, in acts and scenes, with several narrative levels. Queen starts by telling us in a factual tone that Don Juan Tenorio, a libertine who lived, according to his own narrative, in the fourteenth century, had no fewer than 2,954 lovers and was killed by Franciscan friars infuriated by his sexual excesses. Apart from the strangeness of this eccentric version, what matters is that the author immediately mocks the whole narrative tradition of Don Giovanni, which has replaced the factual version with a wildly over-the-top story: the one about the Commander and the statue from the other world that will lead Don Giovanni to Hell. Ellery wants to add his own “modest name” to the slew of “affectionate foster-parents” of this fiction, and with this flourish he opens the first frame in which he adds to his role as narrator that of detective: Don G. was actually murdered in a small town in New England while acting in a play staged by the local theater.

Ellery Queen’s split personality is already there in the authorial pseudonym, which covers two writers who were cousins. As a narrator who is author and detective, Queen investigates the murder of the actor, who is a Don Giovanni not only on stage but also in life, and discovers the development of the crime within a drug ring:

- But I don’t want to tell you the ending, Emilia says.
- No, don’t, because I want to see your play.
- The narrator has a surprising flashback within the main story, which makes up the second frame. As a girl, she was in love with the actor who was murdered, who had replaced the injured lead actor at the last moment. There is also the story of an engineer who volunteers as a theater technician to win over the actress. The structure of the frames is ideal for putting on a sequence of the infinite versions of Don Giovanni.

- Well, I know that to get close to Don Giovanni you need a frame — more than one, in fact. The frame shifts our sense of time — or multiplies it — and puts several time frames together like a series of stage curtains that rise one after the other. However, at first glance, it might be better to treat Ellery Queen as a finale than as an opening...
- Yes, I talked about that with Lydia over Skype. She is in favor of the idea and suggested that I also look at a historical novel from the 1930s about a Don Giovanni given up for dead, who actually reappears and turns the whole story upside down in a very ironic way...
- You've heard from Lydia recently? How is she?
- They are having a lot of success with their composite Don Giovanni. Now they're on tour. John is also on a concert tour, so they'll soon meet somewhere or other.
- Okay, very good — now, do you want to tell me something about the attitudes of different European religious groups towards Don Giovanni?
- But I know that doesn't interest you much. The Portuguese speaker was talking about the Don Giovanni exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1991 and the catalog introduction by Le Roy Ladurie, who insists on dating Don Giovanni to the Counter-Reformation. The myth of Don Giovanni, he says, is European and Christian because it is the Christian religion that gives rise to the satanic aspect of the character, as you can see in Stendhal and Kierkegaard. Contrary to other forms of Eurocentrism, the center of gravity of this is not the axis between France and Germany, but the Mediterranean dimension, in fact, the central and western Mediterranean, from where it expands to Catholic European countries.

In the summary that Emilia gives me, the legend would have spread from Spain and Italy to the rest of Counter-Reformation Europe as a normative myth that associated eroticism with blasphemy and justified the subordination of women's bodies to the authority of the Father and the Catholic Church. By contrast,

the Protestant way of thinking wasn't conducive to the symbolism of the statue coming from Hell, the rapacity of Don Giovanni, or his being swallowed by hellfire in the end. There was no prominent example of the myth in Protestant countries, and it only became established in England, Germany, and Scandinavia after the Romantic movement secularized it as a metaphysical interpretation of the human condition.

We've never talked about this because I am skeptical of these generalizations. I would rather drop the subject. Emilia is aware of this and is resigned to my ignorance and indifference. We agree to catch up later and I go off to say hello to Xenia, who is surrounded by her students. She tells me she has recently seen Grace passing through Paris on her endless travels. She was taking part in a workshop on trans issues at the American University of Paris, an event that generated controversy from all sides, including white conservatives and extremists who believe that only trans people can talk about trans issues, just as only Black people can speak to black issues, and so on and so forth.

- *Ça c'est typique de Grace!* one of the PhD students exclaims with admiration and sympathy.
- *Mais oui, en effet: elle n'a peur de rien!* Xenia concludes, laughing. We arrange to meet again on my last evening.

Postcolonial

During the lunch break, Father Silveira arrives; he has come to Paris to hear his friends speak. We are happy to see each other again, and he immediately asks if we can suggest someone to replace Kornelia. He is thrilled for her and Etienne, but acknowledges the transition will not be easy. Emilia promises to put him in touch with an Irish friend.

When the conference resumes after lunch, it falls on Etienne to move the focus from the colonial to the postcolonial. He opens with his usual grace, pointing out that the “post” doesn’t refer so much to chronological time as it does to an approach that includes an awareness of the colonial dimension in the narrative reach, even when we can’t see it being overcome. His talk includes a video produced by an African theater festival in Brussels, in which the staging of *Don Juan* involved the use of lights and sound effects to accentuate the mixing up of theater and variety performance.

According to Etienne, the midway point between the colonial and postcolonial is epitomized by the play *Don Juan ou les amants chimériques*, written by the Belgian Michel de Ghelderode in 1928, revised by the author several times in the following decades, and only staged for the first time in 1962. The play’s protagonist is a small man, thin and nervous. He has blond hair, which is unusual for Don Giovanni, perhaps to accentuate

ate the contrast with his black antagonist, “Beni-Bouftout,” Beni Eatall, who comes from the Congo, the heart of the Belgian empire. Beni embodies the black stereotype: “muscular, in a red shirt and a bowler hat” (the play is dedicated to Charlie Chaplin). Bouftout charges onto the stage, “like a locomotive,” and declares to Don Juan: *Je suis le don Juan africain, parlant d’amour en petit nègre! Une trouvaille, n’est-ce pas? Ta légende, à côté de la mienne...* (“I am the African Don Juan, talking about love in *petit nègre* [a creole used by African soldiers in French colonies]! Quite a find, isn’t it? Your legend, next to mine...”), and setting up a racial competition at the level of the mythical imagination. The protagonist of the European myth pales in the face not only of the sexual performance of his black counterpart, but above all because of the narrative force and multilingual complexity of the colonized man.

In fact, Bouftout speaks a mixed and “incorrect” French: “I am a Black man,” he says, “an optimistic Don Giovanni, in great shape. You others, you European Don Juans, what have you ever been except masked, neurotic chatterers?” Don Juan insults him by saying, “You son of a bitch!” and by employing blatantly racist terms, such as *ganache* (chocolate). Hybrid language is the strong point of the “dramatic farce,” as Gelderode called his first version: French, English, and Anglicisms, but above all, the *petit nègre*, a colonialist term.

The meeting between the two characters is set in a brothel resembling a vulgar carnival, where Don Juan, mocked and beaten by his rivals, tries to kill himself, but fails because the blade of his sword bends instead of penetrating his heart. Other disabled people accompany Bouftout: a blind man, a deaf man, and a man who is mute, who stage a caricatured and violent dispute with Don Juan. All the characters have an aspect of parody: the women are fat prostitutes in their fifties, and the wealthy and once beautiful Olympia is now in her seventies, skeletally thin and moving about like a robot. The declarations of love between her and Don Juan sound grotesque until the old woman dies in her frantic lover’s arms and falls to the ground like a puppet:

perhaps in reference to Don Giovanni's puppet origins, Etienne says.

While the equation of racial difference with physical impairment seems to be an affirmation of colonial stereotypes, a decidedly postcolonial scene in the last act turns everything upside down: the Black man, the deaf, the mute, and the blind man come onto the stage in single file, whistling the Allegretto from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony as a burlesque funeral march, but now they have none of their previous markers of difference. The Black man has a white face "like everyone else," the deaf person no longer needs his ear trumpet, the blind man has discarded his glasses and cane, the dumb man speaks — in short, they are "normal." Don Juan, who doesn't know who he is anymore, runs away from a figure who proclaims himself the real Don Juan, a little green man whose face is a monstrous mask and who chases him on all fours.

Based on this scene, which he illustrates with evocative clips, Etienne interprets the drama as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the figure of the European seducer. The figure of Olympia recalls the mechanical doll of Hoffmann's *The Sandman* and its dramatization in Offenbach's operetta, which is set in a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Offenbach's Olympia, too, whose lover is compared to Don Giovanni, twirls about in an increasingly frenzy to the music of the Barcarolle, until her puppet strings break. Etienne concludes that Gelderode's Don Juan stays within this shambles and cannot emerge from the ruins of his time nor from the degradation of the narrative tradition to which he belongs. There is neither any hint of rebellion nor any possibility of a future. Even the subtitle's reference to the chimeric and fleeting — to *les amants chimériques* — offers no hint of a possible utopia. We are in the disintegration of the colonial, where a real postcolonial or decolonial is not in sight.

Etienne's paper is vigorously applauded, but time is running out, and Ahmad is called to the speaker's podium. It pleases me to see his face; he is a tall, handsome man, with regular features, a broad forehead, a straight nose, and a finely shaped mouth. We're eager to hear his talk on "Turning the Tables on Don

Giovanni as a Colonial Figure,” about the character of Mustafa Sa’eed, the protagonist of *Season of Migration to the North*, a novel by the Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih. Ahmad’s argument is compelling: Mustafa, who represents the overthrow of the European (and colonial) Don Giovanni, portrays his disintegration in a meaningful and innovative way.

Ahmad compares the novel, which, not surprisingly, was admired by Edward Said, with Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, point by point. Mustafa’s story is shrouded in the same gloom and darkness as Conrad’s tale. In the latter, a white man left London for an African colony, where he discovered the abyss and the horror into which western civilization had fallen. In Tayeb’s book, a man born in the heart of Africa, an Arab from Khartoum, takes the path of the colonized back towards the metropolis, from Sudan to London. The colonial journey is reversed, and the protagonist’s actions overturn the relationship between Europe and Africa: the African conquers not only Europe, indeed England — once the ruler of the foremost colonial empire — but also its women. These women represent the weak point and the ornament of western culture, which celebrates the contrast between their freedom and the subordinate state of Asian women. Mustafa conquers one white woman after another thanks to his “exotic” charm, presenting himself with a different name each time. In his coldheartedness, he ensures that they all plunge into despair, so much so that some end up killing themselves.

The novel concentrates precisely on one of the recurring themes of the west, the inseparability of love and death. The English woman who marries Mustafa after a long courtship, even though she despises him, deliberately harms him, destroying precious vases, carpets, ancient manuscripts, and his own writings, of which there is only one copy. By destroying her husband, she aims to destroy herself as well. In one last very violent sexual scene, in which western women are given back the responsibility that colonial ideology has denied them, she pushes him to kill her with a knife. Afterwards, Mustafa, confesses to the murder. He is given a short sentence after a trial

in which defense lawyers use his Arab-African cultural origins to justify his anger. After serving his time, he returns to Sudan, remarries, and has two children. But Mustafa mysteriously disappears after telling his story to the novel's narrator, who has also studied and lived abroad — a kind of doubling.

The inversion of the figure of Don Giovanni extends to his appearance. Mustafa Sa'eed is devoid of cheerfulness, in stark contrast to the Burlador and the other figures of the fun and playful Don Giovanni, who, by definition, embodies the joy of living. But Ahmad concentrates primarily on the differences between the women of the two novels. In *Heart of Darkness*, there are only two female figures. One is a Black woman, a majestic and wild figure in a barbaric world. The other is European, blonde and pale, full of despair, but with a naive and trusting outlook. Both of them loved and were lovers of the protagonist, the colonist admired by his companions but feared by the Africans who were put on their guard by the skulls on top of the palisade around his house. In Conrad's novel, the symbolic value of the female figure in its respective cultures is pointed up by the contrast between the condition of upper-class women in the Western world, who are accomplices and victims at the same time, and that of a Black woman who seems to be the symbol of African civilization, magnificent and proud, but deceived and exploited. The white woman seems ignorant about the degradation of her civilization and is kept in the dark about the real nature of her lover, the colonizer. The novel's narrator leaves her with the delusion that she has been the object of an extraordinary man's great passion, letting her believe that her beloved died with her name on his lips, rather than voicing the horror of the colonial experience. Thus, the woman remains a prisoner of the myth of total love, ensnared in the mystifying character of the European colonial narrative.

In contrast to this, women are at the center of the portrait of the postcolonial that animates *Season of Migration to the North*. Both European and African women struggle against men all the time, especially against those who want to seduce them. The war between men and women persists in incompatibility and

mutual violence, just as the conflict between cultures does. The narrator rejects the romantic closure he could have had if he had acknowledged his love for Mustafa's widow, so he does not have the strength to save her by returning her love for him. He has trouble to resume living, halfway between the north and the south, between life and death. In the end, he decides to choose life and ask for help. The narrator represents the passive side of the colonized, while Mustafa is the violent side, someone who attempts retaliation without a future. But the ending reveals that those who seemed helpless were not completely passive: the novel ends with the cry of the narrator calling for help, comparing himself to a comic actor screaming in a theater.

According to Ahmad, *Season of Migration to the North* is a decolonial gesture representing Don Giovanni's end as the emblem of triumphant colonialism. It shows how, despite the words and gestures of seduction, the amorous or colonial conquest is a bloody confrontation that produces unending hatred. The sarcastic ending, a cry for help on the stage of a comedy show, leaves open the question of whether hope and life can continue to exist.

Ahmad's talk is emotive and unsettling and is greeted with prolonged applause. We remain silent after that, overwhelmed by what we might say but cannot articulate. But it is very late, and the afternoon session, which is also the last one, closes without any debate. Many people congratulate Ahmad as they slowly leave the hall. It almost seems appropriate that there is no time for discussion and that the difficult questions he and Etienne have raised are left hanging in the air, unresolved.

Only Father Silveira laughs behind his mustache. At my questioning look, he resumes his old theme, this time in an almost confiding way:

- It is all right for me if you postcolonials reduce Don Giovanni to military or sexual conquest, but you forget his challenge to divinity. The *conquistador* does not deny transcendence; if anything, he uses it.

- You mean in the sense that colonial conquest included forced conversion. Eurocentrism and colonialism go together. Conceiving the world as centered on Europe lies within the very concept of “conquest,” whether this takes the form of conversion or conquest for economic gain.
- We have now reformulated the theme of evangelization and conversion, which must be free, rejecting proselytizing and fundamentalism.
- That is to say, you would have accepted a few demands from the postcolonial and decolonial perspective?
- If you want to put it that way. But going back to our discussion when we first met, even in that perspective, as we have heard today, there is no third way between damnation and conversion. In fact, if anyone has looked for that compromise, it is us because we have rejected rigidity.
- That doesn’t really lead to a middle way in the sense of a new direction.
- But do you actually want to save Don Giovanni?!
- No. You can only defend Don Giovanni. You can’t save him. The middle way would be for me.

Silveira is deaf to this hint and changes the subject:

- How is your love affair with Don Giovanni going? He is teasing me in a friendly way but is also genuinely curious.
- I watched Losey’s film about Don Giovanni again and discussed it with a friend who loves cinema. Now I think it shows how transcendence is superfluous in a story like Don Giovanni’s: immanence, being fully present in the world, is liberating, but contact with transcendence is destructive.

Silveira comes right back at me:

- You’re hopeless. How long will you lot put so much faith in the myth of Don Giovanni? Or even in being able to be like him?

Luckily, Ahmad arrives after extricating himself from his many admirers, and we thank him warmly for his talk. He is disappointed by the abrupt way the session was brought to an end:

- What a difference between the symposium in Venice, which was offered as an overview, but also created space for debate even if it was heated, and here, which would have been an opportunity for critical exchange had the chance not been squashed!

Emilia and Kornelia, who have arrived with Etienne, share his regret. Kornelia makes it worse by pointing out that there was very little of the “eroticism” that the conference promised. But Silveira cuts them off, taking Etienne by one arm and Kornelia by the other:

- No complaining! We’ll discuss it amongst ourselves over dinner. I’ll take you to a place on Île Saint-Louis! And we must also celebrate...

At the Bottom of the Sea

On the first free day after the conference, Emilia wants to go to the Cinémathèque Française to look for videos of theatrical interpretations of Don Giovanni. Kornelia and I go with her. I hadn't seen Frank Gehry's building before. Its asymmetry provides a good setting for the first film Emilia has chosen, a reworking of Eugenio Barba's *Don Giovanni all'inferno* produced by the Odin Teatret. Kornelia had already been to the show with Lydia when it was first staged at the Ravenna Festival, which commissioned it, but she is curious to watch it again with us and see what we think. We talk about it in the café afterward while waiting to see the next film.

Emilia finds the Odin Teatret show lacking, especially the female characters. Kornelia agrees: "they laugh too much, in fact they shriek," she says sourly. Emilia says that Julia Varley doesn't shriek, but she cannot save the performance. She confesses to being a bit disappointed as well.

There are echoes of the theatrical tradition that refer to ancient topoi in the staging, such as Don Giovanni and Leporello swapping clothes to enable a violent seduction, and there are also echoes of Tirso and Baudelaire. Leporello joins the little orchestra on stage and plays a mangled version of the Catalog Aria on the concertina. The uninhibited actors animate the stage as they jump, laugh, scream, and howl. Many of their movements are

incomprehensible and are performed as if the artists are improvising, resulting in overly condensed or incoherent sequences.

The performance takes place at the bottom of the sea, where the actors repetitively rake the seabed in a futile undertaking that perhaps alludes to the vanity of dongiovanniesque behavior. Or maybe it refers to Sisyphus, whom Camus likened to Don Giovanni. The play is about dissolution: the stone guest self-destructs in a cascade of gravel; the bodies of Don Giovanni's lovers are reduced to bits and pieces, lone hands; only fragments of the music are played, so that the whole deliberately resembles at best a random collage. From the beginning, Don Giovanni tells Leporello that Heaven and Hell don't exist and that after we die, we will all end up as fish food at the bottom of the sea.

Emilia comments that in order to understand something, we must bear in mind that the piece is not about Mozart's *Don Giovanni* but about various figures of Don Giovanni through the centuries:

- Eugenio Barba picks out significant details from different works and mixes them up, putting them back seemingly at random and building an eccentric mosaic. For example, the “I believe that two and two are four” from Molière's *Dom Juan* — which comes from the dialogue in which Sganarelle questions the master about what he does and does not believe — is now put into the mouth of the Commendatore. Molière's drama ends with Sganarelle's last lines, when he shouts at the top of his voice that his pay has gone up in smoke with his master's descent into Hell: “Mes gages, mes gages: my wages, my wages!” Thus in Barba's staging, Leporello obsessively repeats: “Alas, my wages! Who'll pay me my wages?!”

These mash-up scenes take place against a soundtrack that alternates between Mozart's arias, such as *Dalla mia pace* or *Fin ch'han del vino*, and classical Indian flute music by Annada Prasanna Pattanaik and other compositions by Mozart such as the clarinet concerto and the *Requiem*.

Kornelia notes that the gender of the characters is also mixed up: Don Giovanni wears large women's hats and a feminine dressing gown, while one of the women speaks in a cavernous male voice. This mixing doesn't just happen with the people: the monkey that hops about bawdily seems attracted to Don Giovanni, strokes him both when he is alive and when he is dead, and also shows compassion towards other characters.

For my part, I am struck by the bits of the performance that are borrowed from popular culture, such as the rhythmic snapping of the large whips by the floggers from Emilia-Romagna. They could be a reference to Corghi, whose *Il dissoluto assoluto* took the musical theme for his Don Giovanni from popular songs of Emilia-Romagna. All three of us noticed some nice innovations, such as the resurrection of Don Giovanni, who dies and is buried, but reappears, urging Leporello to hurry up: "Leporello, take my body away and let's get ready for a new adventure."

The video has a tracking shot of a perplexed spectator. Kornelia points him out, laughing, and repeats her criticism: "It's all muddled and too over-the-top, so the overall tone is cheap." I agree with her, though Emilia criticizes our refusal of innovation, and urges on us to bring things up to date. According to her, it is our own time that is too much and too over-the-top, and the performance tries to represent that, even if it doesn't quite succeed:

— In short, you must admit that the myth belongs to everyone and that there may be fascist Don Giovannis and liberal Don Giovannis at the same time... Don Giovanni is not yours!

Kornelia is hurt for a moment but immediately reacts:

— Yes he is! He is ours, too. Nobody has the right to own him completely — and he is also a product of his time, which has its own concerns and liberties.

The Transformation of Elvira

The second film we see is Benoît Jacquot's staging of *Elvire Jouvét 40*, directed by Brigitte Jaques-Vajeman at the Strasbourg Theater in 1986. This play is a montage based on the seven *Lessons* of the director and actor Louis Jouvét given to his pupil Paula Dehelly at the Paris Conservatory of Dramatic Art between February and September 1940. The teacher tells the young actress how to play the scene from Molière's *Dom Juan* in which Elvira explains to Don Giovanni how her love for him has been transformed — she no longer chases him, she is not looking for revenge, she bears no grudges — and tries to save him from the terrible fate that is looming over him. It is a short, innovative, and powerful scene compared to so many stories about Don Giovanni that have come down to us.

In addition to the actress, who is called Claudia in the theatrical piece, the other characters on stage were Dom Juan and Sganarelle. The *Lessons* had been transcribed with careful attention to every detail, from silences to movements and breathing, by Jouvét's secretary, Charlotte Delbo, who, like Paula, was of Jewish origin. In June 1940, Paris was occupied by the Nazis, and in early October, the Vichy government issued decrees that excluded Jews from various professions, including the theater. Jouvét went into exile until the end of the war, Paula had to flee, and Charlotte was deported to Auschwitz, but she survived.

The theatrical action takes place against the backdrop of this highly charged history, accentuating its urgent tone. At the end of the fifth lesson, the director inserts the sound of a distant radio broadcasting a Nazi speech, and in the last lesson, Claudia is marked with a five-point star drawn in chalk on her right shoulder, which Jouvét cannot see. The film transmits the restless and passionate character of the stage show. Jouvét's *Lessons*, delivered with extreme care and a certain pitilessness, are full of deep theatrical sensitivity and demand an outstanding performance from Claudia. The director's speech is all about the character's feelings, which the actress must embody herself in order to convey them to the audience.

— Violent, deep, very powerful emotion, Kornelia says excitedly: this is the feeling I was talking about in Venice, do you remember?

We remember well, but after the upheaval caused by Jouvét's subversive words we are even more put out by the complexity of this way of feeling. Emilia says that we need to understand Jouvét's speech strictly as it relates to the world of theater. Kornelia adds to this by highlighting the director Jaques-Vajeman's notes, and she argues that the *Lessons* have a universal application and are applicable to medicine or teaching, as well as other professions.

— That's absolutely right, Emilia says. Everyone who watches ends up a pupil. Jouvét's discussion of feeling is valuable because it shows the risk involved in speaking out, which must incorporate desire into whatever profession anyone practices. This shift is also the basis of the chain of transmission that has gone on for nearly fifty years: from the *Lessons* of 1940 to the transcription by Charlotte Delbo, from the editing of the text to the staging by Jaques-Vajeman and the film by Jacquot — it's a chain that still goes on.

We agree on this interpretation. Using Jouvét's terms, we also wish to operate within the realm of feeling in our respective professions. Jouvét argues that we must not seek either the commonplace intelligence of experts or a mere *application* of feeling, but rather we should follow an inner desire to speak from within. Almost physically obliged to do so, and with words that are not just the product of reason.

I sense that Kornelia is talking about an even broader realm of feeling and of extending the *Lessons* to the whole character and to the myth of Don Giovanni as a whole — perhaps also to daily life. She is happy to admit it:

- This intense emotion — Jouvét calls it “ardent love” and even ecstasy — astounds and shakes even Don Giovanni. And it is not only the basis of the intelligence of how theater — and other professions — operate, but also of individual salvation, because it brings us into contact with the transcendent, with the divine —

Emilia interrupts her:

- With the transcendent, yes, but not necessarily with the divine in a religious sense. During her suffering, Elvira's love has undergone a radical transformation, leading her to a profound understanding of Dom Juan and his dangers. Elvira's path of acceptance liberates her feelings so that she no longer needs them to be reciprocated. It is not a sublimation; it is a transfiguration of love. It is a “heavenly chemistry,” as Jouvét calls it, which allows us to think of the new feeling without needing to understand the transcendent as divine. It interests us because it is a bridge of communication between the religious and the secular conscience.

I'm also touched by this. I like the impatience of the teacher in the video, something I recognize as a characteristic feature of teaching and the research that goes into it. I recognize in Jouvét the desire to anchor all teaching in research, as we used to try

to do in the 1960s and '70s, notwithstanding the differences in procedure, and I try to explain this:

- At times, the relationship between the two subjects involved in the learning process appears unbalanced, and the teacher is too brusquely overbearing when faced with the understandable resistance of the student. However, Jouvet can still share a passion for research even in the times of conflict that teaching involves. Above all, I am convinced by his explanation of Elvira's attitude, which is marked by an urgent need to speak and to do so as soon as possible before time runs out. When Dom Juan invites Elvira to stay the night because it's late, she replies firmly that she is in a hurry and does not want to waste time on unnecessary speeches.
- Yes, Kornelia repeats, the essence of his message is: "I loved you, now you must save yourself." Elvira is compelled to communicate this vital news to save the man she loves, but she can't hang about because as soon as this task is accomplished, the new urgency will become that of living in a way that's true to herself. Or rather, she says, still quoting Jouvét, true to her state of sanctity because her love has been transformed into the love of God. This version of *Dom Juan* is pervaded with concerns about God, even if it is neither a religious nor an irreligious play. This is Don Giovanni, Jouvét declares, not a simple *coureur de filles*: not just someone who chases girls.

Emilia objects to this:

- But the danger from which Elvira wants to save the man she loves so much is not necessarily Hell. The teacher advises her to let go of Hell if she doesn't really believe in it and instead imagine another danger, such as a risky journey, a mortal experience. It could be war and Nazi persecution, or even the death camp.

I followed with trepidation the docile way that Claudia submits to her teacher's constant interruptions and her willingness to review a thousand times the scene when Elvira arrives at Dom Juan's house. This docility has a spiritual quality and harks back to the way that great women mystics made themselves open to and welcoming of all encounters with the divine. In turn, the director is obsessed with Elvira's overflowing "feelings" that Claudia must also take on if she wants to impersonate Elvira. It's essential that an actress must feel the emotions when creating the part. But Claudia replies that she is afraid of not being able to empathize with the character because what Elvira feels is so distant from her own experience. She also expresses my own feelings: that this character seems to be the personification of second-rate femininity in a form that is both ignorant and ecstatic. At the beginning of Molière's play, Elvira presents as an abandoned wife so naive and credulous that she believes Don Giovanni's promises, which is just as unforgivable as the pointless claim to reproach him. She appears insane and absurd in her traveling attire, and she is too preoccupied with pursuing Don Giovanni to behave in a manner befitting her rank. I try to convey this to my companions in a nearly profane sentence:

— For me, the figure of Elvira is indigestible. I continue to see her as the semi-comic character she represents in the first part of Mozart's opera — despite the wonderful aria *Ah chi mi dice mai* — and I still see her as a mad woman in his first finale. I still agree with Don Giovanni in this part: *Lascia ch'io mangi! E se ti piace, mangia con me* ("Let me have dinner! And if you want, dine with me"). But it is Elvira who makes the connection with the afterlife. In Molière, she arrives immediately after the violent scene — in which Dom Juan says he wants his father to die right away — and immediately before the dinner scene when the Commendatore's statue appears. I understand that Elvira's double role is crucial due to Jouvet's masterly transformation, but I can't translate it into my own terms. Perhaps I'm like Dom Juan, aroused by Elvira's words as if by the embers of a dying fire?

Emilia knows me well and speaks to me gently in contrast to her usual briskness:

- But I'd say that this contradiction corresponds to your current state of mind and your choices: the idea of forgoing multiple public commitments and the decision to give up on academic projects to obsess over Don Giovanni and, by extension, yourself. It seems to me that understanding Elvira is not only an act of inner necessity for the actress who plays her, but it is also vital for you at this point in your life. It is time to take stock and say what is important to say. For Molière's Elvira, the crucial thing is to announce her transformation to Dom Juan, hoping the impact will cause him to undergo a reformation that will remove him from mortal danger. You must comprehend your own sense of urgency. Elvira's need is extraordinary and gives her character inner resolve...
- I'm also fixated on Don Giovanni, and it seems imperative to talk about him. But in Jouvett's film, I miss the deep connection between the character's ecstasy, the desperate historical moment, and the master's persistence in returning Elvira's speech. A discourse that must precede her disappearance or withdrawal because there is nothing left to say.

Kornelia also feels the personal resonance that these words have for me and warmly expresses her sympathy for my situation:

- In other words, if I've got it right, it is the deep connection between your state of mind, the current historical moment of general political impotence, and your insistence on chasing Don Giovanni. It's not for me to say, but disappearance and withdrawal seem like big words with regard to your life. Perhaps there are stages in life where it becomes necessary to reevaluate something you haven't looked at before. Not Elvira absolutely, but this Elvira; not the feminine in general, which does not exist in actuality, but a feminine that displaces all of the traditional stereotypes.

Similar recommendations from my psychoanalysts come back to me, and I appreciate the concern of my young friends. I promise I'll take their kind wisdom into account.

Pan-Politicism

The night before I leave for New York, I go to Xenia's for dinner; she lives on the same street, the Boulevard Richard-Lenoir, as Inspector Maigret and his wife. There's a nice market for general goods during the daytime and in the evening, it's pretty quiet. Xenia has a small apartment chock-full of objects and fabrics from India and the Balkans. Dinner also has lots of things in it: many small vegetarian dishes based on samosas, pita stuffed with cheese, wraps with cabbage, broad beans and cucumbers, rice, lentils — and of course, halva. Xenia and her husband, who is teaching a course at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi, are always very knowledgeable about world politics and the artistic life of Paris, where their daughter Slavenka works in the audiovisual arts. I haven't seen Slavenka since she was a teenager, but she joins us for dinner and immediately asks me about Grace, whom she got to know on a recent visit to Paris. I'm curious to know when and where Grace and Xenia met.

— It was when I was a visiting scholar researching private rights and global politics in Utrecht. Now we are both very active in an international network for LGBTQ+ rights, mainly with cis and trans women, though not just them.

I observe that we didn't talk much about women at the conference on the colonial and postcolonial Don Giovanni, or rather we talked about them incidentally, even though Ahmad's report made women a central theme.

- We did that on purpose so we didn't have separate sessions called "Women and..."
- By the way, Grace argues that women are more prominent in Byron's *Don Juan* than in Mozart and Da Ponte's opera...
- Well, she is a born provocateur. When she was here in July, we went to see Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in the joint Opéra de Paris and New York Met production at the Palais Garnier. We were both very fed up with it.

Slavenka protests that the group of young singers was exceptionally talented and that Philippe Jordan coaxed an effective and vivid performance from the musicians, giving the opera an unusual coherence, even between recitatives. She says she liked the playful mixture of costumes that mixed modern style with eighteenth-century clothes, the tiered sets on a rotating platform, and the puppets now *de rigueur* for Don Giovanni. And the show as a whole was beautiful, with the interplay of light and color and the blossoming of flowers at the end, when the set rotates and shifts from somber to very bright colors as Don Giovanni vanishes.

- Well, this already gives you an idea of the emptiness of the interpretation, Xenia says. According to this version, the whole world is powerless in the face of the overwhelming force of a seducer who massacres Masetto but is beaten up by the Commendatore. Don Giovanni is a real monster that cannot bring joy.

Slavenka acknowledges that the setting in a small southern Italian town in the 1950s, where people walk around with guns on their belts, was absurd and was possibly introduced to justify

the questionable gimmick of Don Giovanni carrying the gun he uses to shoot the Commendatore. But Xenia insists:

- The production eliminates the playful side of the opera, though Don Giovanni's rebelliousness, cruelty, and outspoken arrogance are continuously on display. The latter is part of his character, but it contrasts too strongly with the presumed and excessive meekness of the others, whereas Anna and Elvira vocalize forms of fitting violence.
- In fact, Slavenka admits, when Don Giovanni's music of seduction becomes sublime, the director physically removes him from the scene so that, for example, he sings the serenade *Deh vieni alla finestra* from a distance.
- That way, Xenia says, you get rid of the built-in ambiguity of Don Giovanni and reduce him to the representative of evil on earth without any political or social message. The evil he embodies is all-powerful, and the other characters are paralyzed by it, not fascinated. But Don Giovanni is nothing if he doesn't have the potential for subversion or, at least, opposition. He ends up merely a sexual seducer, someone who often rapes women and is only capable of eating and giving orders. He becomes too patriarchal to be decisively opposed to the Commendatore, who, in this interpretation, is also violent and abusive and contradicts his dual nature as a gentleman and representation of transcendence. Neither of those roles fits with his grabbing Don Giovanni by the scruff of the neck!

Slavenka also joins the criticism, especially of the first finale, in which the protagonist gorges on spaghetti and salad, spitting food boorishly, while Leporello stages a rebellion by pouring wine all over the glasses and putting his feet up on the table, which the two of them then overturn. Xenia's indignation is fired up again by these off-key or unnecessarily vulgar goings-on:

- How stupid and out of place it is, too, that Don Giovanni lobs a sandwich at Elvira in this scene! The so-called playful ending is done in a banal way: Elvira has a travel bag, Masetto has a broom, and Anna and Ottavio hug each other. But more than the debasement of Don Giovanni, what disturbed Grace and me the most was the absence of any political resonance. The nastiness and the playfulness are both sickening when they lack any element of political or religious rebellion. Ivo van Hove, whom we esteem, directed Kushner's *Angels in America* in Amsterdam, among other things, and has sometimes helped our LGBTQ+ network, really should have directed a different opera.

I remember the Boris Godunov that van Hove directed at the Opéra Bastille, which was both beautiful and political, but I am struck by the passion and certainty of the two women, and I thank them:

- I thought or rather intuited all this, but I had never heard it expressed so clearly. Many productions make the same mistake, but it took someone who aimed right at the target to hit the nail on the head and come up with these criticisms convincingly, without equivocation or half-measures.
- Pan-politics is the defect of your generation, Slavenka says simply.
- But even Grace agreed, and she is younger than us, halfway between your generation and ours! says Xenia.
- Grace is different; she has another kind of politics. She is the one who introduced me to the director, who is a friend of hers, even if she doesn't like this particular show.

Slavenka addresses van Hove as Ivo and supports his directing style, which has the effect of highlighting the arrogant entitlement of men like those denounced by #MeToo. That's obviously anachronistic in the case of Mozart, but it's precisely this anachronism, coupled with a fidelity to the libretto and the music, that creates a contrast that draws in the viewers. This point creates a

typical intergenerational quarrel between my two guests, who seem more like friends and colleagues than mother and daughter. I listen to them sympathetically, and it makes me remember my father and our friendly quarrel about an excessively updated production of *Rigoletto*. I think about how he would react to certain productions of our day!

- You are falling asleep, dear one, Xenia says with affectionate concern, and tomorrow you have to go off early. Luckily, you're staying nearby, so you can walk back with Slavenka, who's going the same way. Don't worry, we'll come to visit you in Italy next summer.

So Slavenka and I set off into the Parisian night, Slavenka telling me about her dreams for a sort of multimedia Theater of the Oppressed, with people of various generations and backgrounds. What she is really doing is challenging terms like "second and third generation" and she expands on how they will try to transform and translate them. I agree with her, but then I can't help myself:

- Don't you think that politics permeates everything, even words?

Slavenka smiles at me:

- Yes, I think so, but we say it in different ways.

FINALES

Endgame: *Seventh Imaginary Dialogue*

mid-December

At Paris Charles de Gaulle airport, waiting for the flight to New York, I find a spa where they give Ayurvedic foot massages. Soon after the treatment begins, I begin to relax. Swirling thoughts distract me from the pressures of everyday life, as always happens when I begin a journey. I wonder if Don Giovanni's political significance might not just be fundamental to his character as an element of continuity beyond variations on his myth, but might also correspond to my personal connection with him and my own images of him. I realize that the figure of my father is not just the cheerful bon vivant who appears briefly at the beginning of this narrative as a connoisseur of women and food. His political beliefs, though never flaunted or overtly displayed, were fundamental to me. I found out about his contribution to the Resistance almost by chance, slipped into a conversation, never advertised, stated simply and without giving it any special importance, as if it were a normal thing to do. Respect, inconspicuous dignity. He occasionally showed he was uncomfortable with my extreme leftist views, but he indulged me if I leaned towards forms of radical populism...

Back comes the old familiar voice:

- Didn't we agree to let go of relatives and autobiographical coloring? Enough with reminiscing and revisiting!
- Good for you that you don't have memories or leave others to deal with them. As I get older, it gives me more and more pleasure to look back. But let's leave memories for another time. It's been a long time since you showed up.
- It's you who always runs after your so-called searches. But are you looking for something that really interests you and is worth finding?
- These days, I have my doubts. I know you're only interested in women, even if some people think you're gay and in a relationship with Leporello.

He grins:

- That's not ruled out; everything is possible, but for me it would be something on the side.
- Only women count?
- What sort of question is that? Power counts, as you said at the *Colloquium*, even if you can't reduce erotic seduction to colonial conquest. It's right to highlight the violence in erotic relationships, although there is more to it. In any case, the two kinds of conquest gesture to one another and make each other possible.
- You're right about that. The postcolonial gaze, in your case, can indeed be reductive. It is us today who primarily see the bloody conquest in the Don Giovanni myth.
- Rostand does too. Do you remember Lydia and Ludovic's show? As Rostand says: "For me, woman was just a pretext" for domination. In any case, I liked the conference at the Collège de Philosophie. Especially that intelligent guy Ahmad.
- So you agree with him? Is he right to talk about the overthrow and disintegration of the European Don Giovanni?
- Of course he's right.

- And how do you deal with that in your court of favorites?
- But it is you, and all those like you who keep me alive — and in a less grim form than Mustafa in *Season of Migration to the North* because your version is anachronistic and reassuring.
- Yes, Tayeb Salih's novel is very good, but its protagonist is cruelly hostile to women.
- Why, are European Don Juans not cruel? I think the behavior of Kierkegaard's seducer is even more revolting. He is all calculation, spinning a web of pre-planned moves like the one he weaves to seduce sixteen-year-old Cordelia. Johannes claims to be in love with her but is really only interested in himself. And all his nonsense about arousing a spiritual love in her that could be transformed into erotic passion? It's obvious he has little understanding of eroticism. Beyond the pleasures of the flesh, Johannes is fed by intellectual stuff — so much so that he prepares for his meeting with Cordelia by reading Plato's *Phaedrus!*
- But the main pleasure for Johannes may be making an aesthetic vision of life.
- How is such a cold, pre-planned aesthetic credible? How can it include pleasure? He plans to disappear after just one night of love with the inexperienced young woman, and he does so deliberately so that she will pine for him eternally. He wants to be desired forever, which is an impossible and stupid goal. In Johannes's system of power, sexuality has a secondary and instrumental role, while *joie de vivre* plays no part.
- And he says horrific things like, "When a woman has given everything, she has lost everything, and the best thing for her would be to turn into a man."
- That's an awful statement. What a nasty character.
- I detest him, even though I think the whole point of it eludes us when we take the *Diary of the Seducer* so literally. American feminists have reevaluated it, and Kierkegaard did write enthusiastically about Mozart's opera...

- But all that insistence on the spiritual essence of sensuality and on Christianity: how dull it is. Kierkegaard himself admits he knows nothing about music and that he only knows about “language.”
- He’s often right about you, though. For instance, when he writes that for Don Giovanni every girl is an ordinary girl, and what excites him is what she shares with every other woman. Or that only a girl of poor character wouldn’t want to be unhappy so as to be happy once with Don Giovanni. But I recognize that Johannes’s cold, calculating version of Don Giovanni has nothing to do with glorying in life, which is one reason why I am so fascinated with you.
- Thank goodness. You’ve got to admit that I have a form of sincerity even when I lie, and that I think above all about pleasure, even if it sometimes creates misery —
- You don’t want to paint a saccharine picture of yourself at the very end!?!
- Touché. But as Dom Juan says to Sganarelle, “it’s no longer shameful to be a dissembler; hypocrisy is now a fashionable vice, and all fashionable vices pass as virtues.”

Now my foot massage is over and I have to go to the gate:

- We could close our conversation, at least temporarily, by borrowing Kierkegaard’s words to mark the end of our sparring: a “platitudinous postlude.”
- But we weren’t seeking a conclusion. I just advised you to follow a path, rearrange your notes, and make a provisional inventory.
- In that case — to quote Beckett — we could continue playing like amateurs, even when the game is pretty much finished.
- No, I’ll retire as a professional does when it ends. Without repenting, it goes without saying. But for now, okay. Have a good trip! I’ll wait for you in Europe.

Second Finale

a few months later

I was away from Italy longer than expected because I was involved in a European research project on the “memory of migration,” and I made several stops on the way back. This wandering caused by research prompts me to another return, after a very long time.

I arrive by train in Asti, where I was born, and take the road I’ve gone down so many times, from the train station to Piazza San Secondo. Passing the “Stretta del Teatro,” the narrow street that runs down the side of the Town Hall and connects the square to the Alfieri theater, I am surprised to hear the familiar voice, that has been silent for so long:

- Time for you to come back!
- Don Giovanni! It’s been ages! Did you really wait for me? I didn’t think you meant it.
- I haven’t been waiting. Dream on! I don’t hang around, or at least not for long. I did other things, without losing sight of you. I was afraid you were wasting your time on bureaucratic projects...
- Do you call the time spent working with migrants, students, and artists wasted?

- Not in itself. But where that imposes a heavy bureaucratic and managerial load that you detest, with the current state of the European Union on top of that? And talking about stuff like the cultural heritage of Europe? Ha! It's your other side, the side that should be dealing with me — and with you — that you are neglecting and need to come to terms with.

We are in front of the corner where the back entrance to the theater once was. Here, people queued from early evening to buy a ticket in “the gods” for operas by Verdi, Puccini, Rossini, Donizetti, and Mascagni. Those companies were made up of older, slightly rusty actors and singers who toured the provincial theaters, but that world of opera was wonderful for me.

I don't want a dispute about my professional choices with Don Giovanni:

- I'm very happy to hear from you; I've missed you. But why right here?
- What do you mean “right here?” Since you were born close by, it isn't a strange place to meet, even if you rarely return to this city. But I was sure you'd keep the appointment...
- What appointment?
- Not an appointment directly with you. It's connected with the story that led me down this path.
- You are more mysterious than usual.
- It's a mysterious story. If you come with me to that bar on Piazza Alfieri where your grandfather used to go for an aperitif, I'll tell you about it.
- Back then, only the men went there. They stayed to chat for hours, standing in a circle. But one time, my grandfather saw me walk by and offered me an Aperol; I remember that as if it just happened.

Going along via del Teatro Alfieri, you come to the Corso Alfieri on one side and Piazza Alfieri on the other — there's little imagination in local street names. We go past the main entrance to

the theater, now fitted with see-through glass doors, and walk along Via Grandi, which is changed now because of a new passage that I did not remember. Don Giovanni confirms this:

- It wasn't there before. An entrance for artists and a new cinema have been put in behind the opening that leads to the back of the church, and is also called Alfieri, after the theater, for a change! My story takes place here on the corner of Via Grandi and the new opening, where there was a palazzo. Right here on the corner of via Grandi and the new opening was the hotel where my story takes place.

The Story Told by Don Giovanni

Fifty years ago, on a late autumn day in the early 1960s, a young lady traveling with her driver to Genoa from the Italian part of Switzerland came through this place. She had straight brown hair and very fair skin, and was well-proportioned, of medium height. Her driver and friend, Greta, was tall and reassuringly solid, and at about forty-five, a little younger than the lady. The car was a gray Mercedes with mahogany trim and dark red leather upholstery. Leaving their summer house in Crans-sur-Sierre early one Friday morning, they went to Sion to see Rilke's tomb; then, from Martigny, they drove through the Gran San Bernardo tunnel and down to Aosta, heading toward Turin.

They had to stop in the early afternoon on the edge of Asti because the car broke down. The mechanic explained that the necessary replacement part would not arrive before Monday; he advised them to leave the car and offered to take them into the city, where he left them at a hotel near the Alfieri Theater.

The hotel was created by restoring the middle house of three old houses. It was three stories high with no lift, but it was nicely restored and hospitable. The travelers' luggage was hauled up on the service lift and the two women walked up to the top floor, which was entirely occupied by their apartment. The rooms radiated off the main room, lit by skylights, and the two bedroom windows faced the street. The women who ran the

building explained that the second floor was divided into two small apartments where two tourist couples, one Russian and one American, were presently staying. The first floor was the same: an elderly man who was a tenant lived on one side, and she and her husband had the other. The ground floor included the kitchen and a small restaurant reserved for residents.

The dining room, where the diners all shared a single table, was brightened from a large fireplace, where the sparks were jumping about in the dimness coming from the wall lights. The two Russian tourists were there for dinner, but the person who held the stage was the first-floor tenant, a great traveler born and bred in Asti until he was eighteen and who had only come back when he was old. He told everyone all about the Barbera di Giacomo Bologna wine served with the marinated rabbit and the special dry Asti spumante the Swiss guest offered diners with dessert. The old man, who had a passion for cars, took a liking to Greta and recommended a journey for the next day from the Vittorio Alfieri house to the Roman walls and Boschetto dei Partigiani, which was close to where he had gone to school. But he thought snow was in the air because the fog had cleared up and it was getting colder.

The night was very quiet, the next morning even more so. Going from her bedroom to the main room, the lady found herself in the glowing reflection of snow diffused by the skylights. Greta didn't regret the enforced stopover because she loved walking in the snow. So they put on their boots and set off through the city, which was still half-asleep. Going up the central Corso, they visited the Alfieri House museum, lingered over the rebel poet's European and Italian travels, and went into the garden with its old plane tree covered with snow. The guide, a girl who attended the nearby Liceo Alfieri, told them that the plane tree had been planted in 1849 to mark the centenary of the poet's birth. The two then went to the majestic cathedral with its stripes of bricks and white stone and from there to the old walls, strolling through the park recommended by their fellow diner the night before. Finally, they went down the Corso Dante to the

main square of the city, where the Saturday market had moved to under the arcades because of the snow.

In the early afternoon, after Greta had left to spend the weekend with friends in Milan, the lady was napping in her room when she was awakened by jarring sounds, amongst which she could occasionally recognize some familiar harmonies. She called the hotelier to find out what disturbed the weekend quiet. "It's the rehearsal, madam! Your room is right next to the theater. Only a corridor separates it from the left proscenium boxes. If you want, I'll come and take you to see the theater." At the far side of the bedroom there was a little door the lady had not noticed, covered with the same paper as the walls. It opened onto a corridor with green painted walls, lit by lamps hung above faded mirrors reflecting the light. From there, another door opened directly into a private box in the second tier.

The house lights were off in the gilded theater decorated in luscious red velvet. The two women were almost invisible in the dark, so they stood and listened to the orchestral rehearsal. The conductor, a tall young man with long black hair and quick movements, announced, "Overture, from the top." On hearing the first few bars, the lady blurted out, "Mozart! Don Giovanni!" Fortunately, nobody heard her because the conductor had stopped the orchestra and was loudly directing them. As the two quietly withdrew, the lady noticed another small door to the right. "It's locked," said the hotelier, "because it leads into the other boxes."

— Will the box be occupied tonight? the lady inquired.

The hotel manager replied that the box — described as *dij forestè* ("for the strangers") in Piedmontese, because it was connected to the hotel — was occupied only when the theater was sold out, which, given the snow, would not be the case that evening. She offered to reserve the box for her and to arrange for a cold supper to be served during the interval if the lady would allow the waiter to enter her apartment. She gladly accepted and asked what clothing was recommended for the performance.

— Ah, madam, we're in the provinces here. The audience will be in evening dress, except up in the gallery. Luckily, coming directly from your room, you won't have the problem of boots...

In the evening, just before eight o'clock, the lady entered the box by the stage. From the box's other door, now wide open, the theater attendant brought her the program. The singers were well known, he stressed, and the orchestra excellent because the show was one of several events commemorating the theater's opening in the autumn of 1860. There would be only two performances; Saturday evening and the Sunday matinee. He went on to talk about the history of the theater, which originally had four tiers of boxes. Now there were only three because the bottom ones had been turned into bigger boxes so that the proscenium ones began at the second tier. With over two thousand seats, it was a large theater for a small town, though the lady considered its size normal for Italy.

The sets and costumes were inspired by the post-war years when the will to live was rekindled. The whole production and the singers were actually very good. Don Giovanni was an excellent baritone, not in the first flush of youth, with a full figure but not heavy; he was perfect for the role. In the second scene, right after the killing of the Commendatore, when Leporello accuses the master of seducing the daughter and then dispatching the father, Don Giovanni looked up with a snort of impatience as his eyes seemed to meet the lady's. But he immediately hurled himself on Leporello and threatened to beat him. A consummate actor, he repeats the same impatient gesture when he is with Donna Anna and Don Ottavia later and Elvira turns up unexpectedly. His eyes were again raised towards the proscenium box, seemingly by chance. The same thing happened during the aria "Viva la Libertà." The lady thought that her obsession with the opera was playing tricks on her mind; she was well aware of its powerful emotional effect, although the reasons for it were obscure to her.

The end of the first act was enthusiastically applauded by the elegant and noisy audience, which flooded out into the foyer. The difference between the few tourists and the people of Asti was clear, with the latter dressed up for the evening and endlessly greeting one another. The theater was close to capacity, and the lady looked on from her box. From the door leading to her apartment a waiter and an attendant arrived to prepare a table for dinner.

- There is a mistake, said the lady. I ordered dinner for one.
- No mistake!

A figure in costume appeared through the right-hand door, adding:

- Forgive me!

Bewildered, the lady gathered herself together:

- Don Giovanni!
- In person. Will you let me invite you to dinner?
- Oh no, you will be my guest. This box is connected to my apartment.
- I know — Don Giovanni laughed with a touch of complacency — I know the secret passage well.

Amused by his tone, the lady imagined his past adventures and invited him to sit down. She was enchanted by the singer's banter, listening intently to his stories about world tours and this production's narcissistic and fascinating young director.

When the house lights flickered on and off to announce the end of the interval, and the audience began to flock back into the auditorium, the singer apologized, promising that they would see one another again soon. In the second act, Don Giovanni found a way to look up at the lady's box as he sang the serenade *Deh vieni alla finestra* to the mandolin accompaniment. The staging was clever, managing to reconcile the ancient flames

of Hell with contemporary scenes and costumes thanks to the explosion of a sports car. The sextet of the second finale was brilliant. When Don Giovanni came out for his bow, he gave the lady a sidelong glance as she applauded enthusiastically.

Returning to her apartment, she sat beneath the skylights in the central room to watch the glistening snow falling outside. She was pensive, thinking about the emotional connections between opera and life, and between the box and the stage, telling herself that in the end it was still theater. It seemed to her that only a minute had passed when there was a light knock on her apartment door.

- But where did you manage to get in from? she asked the singer, who had changed his clothes and reacted with a knowing little smile.
- From a passage that connects the ground floor of the hotel with the artists' entrance at the back of the theater.
- Why not straight from the theater through the door in my box?
- Because this is a private visit. So — I advise you to lock every door.
- I see you know all the moves.
- Yes, but not for the reasons you think... Anyway, I'm not here as Mozart's Don Giovanni.

The lady laughed quietly and closed the front door.

- But you're here as a private Don Giovanni?

Late on Sunday morning, the lady shared a Piedmontese-style brunch with the older man and the couple on the second floor she had not yet met: two men from Chicago who were on a wine holiday tracking down Barolo and Barbaresco vintages along with Barbera and Dolcetto wines in the Monferrato and Langhe regions. One of the Americans spoke some Italian and the other two spoke English. The equable good humor of the two Americans increased the familiarity of the group, and they began to

use their first names with one another even though they still used formal pronouns for address when they spoke in Italian. The older man wanted to be addressed as Amedeo (the middle name of Vittorio Alfieri) but preferred to continue to address the lady as signora, saying that it suited her.

After brunch, the two Americans were collected by car to go off and meet the wine producers Bruno Ceretto and Bruno Giacosa, while the other two guests sat down by the fireplace to have coffee. The lady told the older man about the opera and the box, inviting him to the matinée that afternoon. Amedeo accepted happily and suggested they take a stroll first since the streets were no longer frozen and the sun was shining brightly. They walked slowly around the church of San Secondo, discussing their shared interest in the figure of Don Giovanni, in whom they both recognized their restlessness. Amadeo regretted that his wanderings were over, and the lady asked him to come and stay in Genoa for a few days. He stopped, surprised and happy, and said he would think about it.

Two hours later, they were settled in the box, which Amedeo had reached thanks to the theater lift. The matinée was shorter than the evening show because the interval was curtailed, but Don Giovanni came to the box anyway, curious to see who the lady's companion might be. The two men shook hands, comrades straight away, confirming her impression that Amedeo had a Don Juan past. The baritone invited them to dinner in a restaurant known for its local food, its *taiarin* pasta and *eccellente grignolino*, as the singer jokingly put it, paraphrasing Da Ponte's *eccellente marzimino*.

Over dinner, the two men talked about their travels, gallantly remembering to turn to the lady, who acted as a playful witness to their mutual reflections as they swapped stories. She invited them for drinks in her apartment after dinner. Amedeo enquired whether Greta might be there, but the lady explained that she would return late from Milan. Amedeo said he would talk to her the next day and ask her a few questions about a car he wanted to buy. He apologized for refusing the invitation, but the stairs tired him too much and it was at this time that he

settled down to his correspondence with people from various countries of the world. The lady and the singer said goodbye to him warmly and went up to the third floor together.

Monday was gray and cold. Sunday's sun had melted the snow, which had turned into sheets of ice during the night. In the middle of the morning, the repaired Mercedes was brought around, and Greta was ready to leave. But Amedeo, who had decided to accept the invitation to go to Genoa with them, asked if they could wait until early afternoon to allow him to prepare and have lunch calmly. Greta immediately agreed, giving the reason that the streets could still be frozen. The lady agreed and went upstairs to finish packing. Around noon, she heard a bustle on the other side of the wall. She opened the little door, turned on the lights in the corridor, and went into the box. The theater was partly lit as they were cleaning the auditorium. She sat in the auditorium on stage right and saw a figure in costume reflected in the mirror on the opposite wall.

- I'm in my work clothes, Don Giovanni joked.
- Aren't you supposed to have left already? — the lady started in surprise — or are you an optical illusion, as you say to Leporello when he tells you that the statue's head has moved?
- I'm leaving, I came to say adieu.
- That's not your usual way; you usually avoid goodbyes.
- This is a special goodbye: the last goodbye.
- Always so melodramatic!
- That's my nature; you should expect it.
- Farewell then, Don Giovanni!

He bowed his head and vanished. The lady went down to meet Greta and Amedeo, who were ready. While they were having a little snack for the journey, the hotelier hurried up breathlessly. There had been a car accident early that morning. The car carrying the two baritones who played Don Giovanni and Leporello had collided at high speed with a stationary truck and burst into flames. The driver died instantly and the passenger was in hos-

pital with serious, but not fatal, burns. The driver was wearing Don Giovanni's costume.

- When was this? the lady asked, almost breathless.
- Three or four hours ago, but I just heard about it from a reporter we know.

After a moment of silence, Amedeo placed his hand over the lady's.

- Come on, he said softly, it's time to leave for Genoa.

Fade Out

I'm still sitting in the bar where Don Giovanni told me this story.

- The story is partly copied, but it's still beautiful.
- There are no new stories. They are all stories of stories.
- And how much of it is made up?
- Even the stuff you have teased out in this book is only partially true. There's a lot of invention.
- An inventory can be partly invented. But what would Hoffmann have said about the transformation of his hero into a young Swiss lady?
- Maybe he wouldn't have liked it, but then my history is a story generated by his, and by those of Mozart, Da Ponte, Molière, and others. It is yours and my history, too, at this point in life.
- Our version lacks the playful ending.
- It can't be anymore. There is no moral to be drawn about who harms or does good. There is no balance to be restored of the sort Klee wanted.
- But I've always liked the final sextet, with each person saying where they will go and what they will do...
- So you tell me: how do our own characters end up?
- Well, we only know about some of them. Silveira goes on moving between Rome, Maputo, and Brussels, which is

where Etienne and Kornelia also settle down. Günter writes the second volume of his autobiographical novel, Emilia stages a version of the Hoffmann mixed up with Ellery Queen in Warsaw and Krakow.

— And you? And us?

— I have finished writing about myself, even though I haven't really settled the mystery of my obsession with you. But I've done enough to turn the obsession into a presence. You will still accompany me, even if I no longer record our conversations. Your story is heading somewhere else, and someone else will tell it.

Notes and Bibliography

Epigraph

Rilke, Rainer Maria. "Don Juan's Childhood." In *New Poems*, translated by Len Krisak, 311–12. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2015.

Overture: *First Imaginary Dialogue*

Primary Sources

da Ponte, Lorenzo. "Il dissoluto punito ossia Il Don Giovanni." In *Don Giovanni: Variazioni sul mito*, edited by Umberto Curi, 193–270. Venice: Marsilio, 2005. An English version of the libretto, *Don Giovanni or The Rake Punished*, can be accessed online at <https://www.opera-arias.com/mozart/don-giovanni/>.

Molière. *Don Juan*. Translated by Richard Wilbur. San Diego: Harcourt, 2001.

Tirso, Molina. *Three Plays of Tirso de Molina: New Translations of Don Juan: The Jackal of Seville; A Sinner Saved, A Saint Damned; and The Timid Young Man at the Palace Gate*. Translated by Raymond Conlon. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2017.

Background Readings

- Bonino, Guido Davico, ed. *Sulle orme di Don Giovanni*. Turin: Aragno, 2017.
- Pierre Brunel, ed. *Dictionnaire de Don Juan*. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999.
- Losada, José Manuel, ed. *Bibliography of the Myth of Don Juan in Literary History*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1997.
- Obliques: Littérature Théâtre* 5. Special Issue: "Don Juan: Analyse d'un Mythe, Volume 2." Paris: Roger Borderie, 1974.
- Singer, Armand E. *The Don Juan Theme, Versions and Criticism: A Bibliography*. Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1965.

... compiled by a scholar at a university in Virginia.

- Will, Richard. *"Don Giovanni" Captured: Performance, Media, Myth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022.

Chap. 1: Theological Jokes

... the story of a young man who meets a dead man and invites him to dinner.

- Petzoldt, Leander. *Der Tote als Gast: Volkssage und Exempel*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1968. Petzoldt lists 253 versions of the legend in Europe.

... the story of the young count Leonzio, protagonist of a play staged by the Jesuits in 1615.

- Macchia, Giovanni. *Vita avventure e morte di don Giovanni*. Turin: Einaudi, 1978. Esp. 109–17, the account of the performance of the play about Leonzio at the Jesuit College in Ingolstadt in 1615, written in 1643 by the Jesuit Paul Zehenter.

Father Silveira is critical of the interpretation that suggests that Leonzio could be an imperfect version of Don Giovanni.

D'Ancona, Alessandro. "La leggenda di Leonzio." In *Miscellanea di studi critici edita in onore di Arturo Graf*, 621–44. Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'arti Grafiche, 1903.

On Tirso de Molina's play El Burlador de Sevilla:

Banús, Enrique, and Luis Galván. "Sentido y recepción de *El Burlador de Sevilla*." *Revista Estudios* (April–September 1995): 27–43.

Bergamín, José. "Moralidad y misterio de don Juan (lo que va del hombre al nombre)." In *Tirso de Molina: Immagine e rappresentazione*, 253–91. Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1991.

Dolfi, Laura. *Tirso e don Giovanni: Scambi di ruoli tra dame e cavalieri*. Rome: Bulzoni, 2008.

The Dutch scholar alluded to Arturo Farinelli's theory about Italian origin.

Farinelli, Arturo. *Don Giovanni: Note critiche*. Turin: Loescher, 1896.

It seems that there is indeed a Roman satire from the sixteenth century, almost a hundred years before Tirso...

Sanfilippo, Matteo. "Storia e immaginario storico nella rete e nei media più tradizionali." https://dspace.unitus.it/bitstream/2067/25/1/sanfilippo_storia_immaginario.htm.

There is little talk about the appropriation that the new spirit of capitalism made of the claims of the '68 generation.

Boltanski, Luc, and Ève Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. 1999; repr. London: Verso, 2018.

That's from John Berger's essay...

Berger, John. "Twelve Theses on the Economy of the Dead" (1994). In *Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance*, 3–5. New York: Pantheon, 2007.

Chap. 2: A Venetian Dinner

... he and I have Mozambique in common...

Ambrose, Jillian. *The Guardian*. <https://theguardian.com/profile/jillian-ambrose>.

Burke, Jason. *The Guardian*. <https://theguardian.com/profile/jasonburke>.

Caritas, <https://www.caritas.org/>.

Columbo, Emilia. "Supporting Mozambique's Response to the Growing Insurgent Threat in Cabo Delgado." *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 9, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/supporting-mozambiques-response-growing-insurgent-threat-cabo-delgado>.

Comunità di Sant'Egidio, <https://www.santegidio.org/>.

Fruehauf, Anne. "Mozambique's LNG Revolution: A Political Risk Outlook for the Rovuma LNG Ventures." *The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, April 2014. <https://oxfordenergy.org/publications/mozambiques-lng-revolution-a-political-risk-outlook-for-the-rovuma-lng-ventures/>. DOI: 10.26889/9781784670016.

Longari, Marco. *Agence-France Presse*. <https://correspondent.afp.com/marco-longari>.

Manes, Luca. *Nigrizia*. <https://www.nigrizia.it/?s=Luca+Manes>.

Missioni della Consolata, <https://consolata.org/>.

...the dinner served to the dead man on a black table decorated with black plates

Macchia, Giovanni. *Vita avventure e morte di don Giovanni*. Turin: Einaudi, 1978, 139.

... as it happens in the *Don Juan Tenorio* of Zorrilla.

Arias, Judith H. "The Devil at Heaven's Door: Metaphysical Desire in *Don Juan Tenorio*." *Hispanic Review* 61, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 15–34. DOI: 10.2307/473284.

Zorrilla, José. *A Translation of José Zorrilla's Don Juan Tenorio*. Translated by Robert G. Trimble. Lewiston: Mellen, 2003.

In 1948 Salvador de Madariaga wrote a radio play...

de Madariaga, Salvador. *Don Juan y la Don-Juanía*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1950.

Labanyi, Jo. "Political Readings of Don Juan and Romantic Love in Spain from the 1920s to the 1940s." In *New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena, and Alexander C.T. Geppert, 197–212. New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.

... a mid-nineteenth-century utopian, *Désiré Laverdant*...

Laverdant, Gabriel Désiré. *Don Juan Converti*. Paris: J. Hetzel, 1864.

Chap. 3: Don Giovanni's Lover

Kierkegaard makes him "handsome, not altogether young" ...

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or, Part I*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. 48–135, 190–203.

Chap. 4: *Second Imaginary Dialogue*

So it's true — the story that the Franciscans...

In one version of the death of Don Giovanni, he is killed by Franciscan monks, from which version his descent into hell is possibly derived. Albert Camus found this version consistent with his character: "A chronicler relates that the true 'Burlador' died assassinated by Franciscans who wanted 'to put an end to the excesses and blasphemies of Don Juan whose birth assured

him impunity.' Then they proclaimed that heaven had struck him down. No one has proved that strange end. Nor has anyone proved the contrary. But without wondering if it is probable, I can say that it is logical. I want merely to single out at this point the word 'birth' and to play on words: it was the fact of living that assured his innocence. It was from death alone that he derived a guilt now become legendary."

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*.

Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Vintage, 1979. 71–72.

That's a version endorsed by Camus and Ellery Queen.

Crochet, Monique. *Les mythes dans l'œuvre de Camus*. Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1973. 55–68.

Gay-Crosier, R. "Camus et le Donjuanisme." *The French Review* 41, no. 6 (1968): 818–30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/386169>.

Queen, Ellery. "The Death of Don Juan." In *Queens Full*, 7–8. London: Penguin, 1971.

There's even a rather interesting book...

Curi, Umberto. *Filosofia del Don Giovanni: Alle origini di un mito moderno*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2002.

Chap. 5: Douglas Fairbanks and Marlon Brando

Emilia is convinced that Don Giovanni can't be dead as others maintain...

Macchia, Giovanni. *Vita avventure e morte di don Giovanni*.

Turin: Einaudi, 1978. 3–14.

Farce was the mood of the first film that she saw yesterday, The Private Life of Don Juan.

Korda, Alexander, dir. *The Private Life of Don Juan*. United Artists, 1934.

...Otto Rank's theme of the Double...

Rank, Otto. *The Don Juan Legend*. Edited and translated by David G. Winter. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

———. *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Edited and translated by Harry Tucker, Jr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971.

But then, I say, there is Hoffmann's version...

Hoffmann, E.T.A. "Don Giovanni." In *Il cavaliere Gluck: Don Giovanni; Il gorgheggio; Il Barone von B.*, translated by G. Pierotti, 23–44. Turin: Araba Fenice, 1999.

Wellbery, David E. "E.T.A. Hoffmann and Romantic Hermeneutics: An Interpretation of Hoffmann's 'Don Juan'" *Studies in Romanticism* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1980): 455–73. DOI: 10.2307/25600263.

... as evidenced by last night's second film, *Don Juan DeMarco*.

Leven, Jeremy, dir. *Don Juan DeMarco*. New Line Cinema, 1995.

I saw a revival of a play that was first performed at the Odéon at the beginning of last century, called The Old Age of Don Giovanni.

Mounet-Sully, Jean, and Pierre Barbier. *La vieillesse de Don Juan*. Paris: L'illustration théâtrale, 1906. 1–40.

... the finest interpretation of an aging seducer, written by Schnitzler, is about Casanova.

Schnitzler, Arthur. *Casanova's Return to Venice*. Translated by Ilsa Barea. London: Pushkin Press, 1998.

Chap. 6: European Myths

"Kornelia looks at him in trusting anticipation of his comments on her version of Zorilla:"

Randi, Elena. "Il Don Giovanni di Zorrilla tra demonismo e salvezza." *Il castello di Elsinore* 8, no. 23 (1995): 61–87.

Some interpreters, from Otto Rank to Camille Dumoulié...
Dumoulié, Camille. *Don Juan, ou, L'héroïsme du Désir*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993.

Rank, Otto. *The Don Juan Legend*. Edited and translated by David G. Winter. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.

... the end of the Catalogue Aria from Mozart's opera.
da Ponte, Lorenzo. "Il dissoluto punito ossia il Don Giovanni." In *Don Giovanni: Variazioni sul mito*, edited by Umberto Curi, 193–270. Venice: Marsilio, 2005. An English version of the libretto, *Don Giovanni or The Rake Punished*, can be accessed online at <https://www.opera-arias.com/mozart/don-giovanni/>.

... Oscar Milosz in the theatrical Mystery...
Milosz, Oscar Vladislav De Lubicz. *Miguel Mañara*. Translated by Edo Mörlin-Visconti. Tampa: Human Adventure Books, 2016. The play premiered in 1912.

I turn to one of my old battle horses, Denis de Rougemont's Love in the Western World...
de Rougemont, Denis. *Les Mythes de l'amour*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1996.
———. *Love in the Western World*. Translated by Montgomery Belgium. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Don Giovanni is the mirror image of Tristan...
Blanchot, Maurice. "Reflections on Hell: Orpheus, Don Juan, Tristan." In *The Infinite Conversation*, translated by Susan Hanson, 187–94. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Yesterday I saw The Adventures of Don Juan (1948) at the film festival...
Sherman, Vincent, dir. *The Adventures of Don Juan*. Warner Brothers, 1948.

One critic saw the film as a saga about an American spy...

Conrad, Peter. "The Libertine's Progress." In *The Don Giovanni Book: Myths of Seduction and Betrayal*, edited by Jonathan Miller, 81–92. Baltimore: Faber & Faber, 1990.

Chap. 7: *Third Imaginary Dialogue*

Oh, now you are siding with that American professor...

Wolff, Larry. *Paolina's Innocence: Child Abuse in Casanova's Venice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.

... which improved the version that he copied from Giovanni Bertati...

Bertati, Giovanni. *Don Giovanni, Dramma Giocoso*. Text by Giovanni Bertati. Music by Giuseppe Gazzaniga. Premiere in Venice, Italy, February 5, 1787.

Paesani, Luciano. *Porta, Bertati, Da Ponte: Don Giovanni*. Milan: LED Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, 2012. 106–7n61.

Chap. 8 / Seduction and Clinical Cases

... the orgiastic Don Giovanni we saw at the Komische Oper...

Konwitschny, Peter, dir. *Don Giovanni*. Libretto by Da Ponte. Music by Mozart. Komische Oper, Berlin, 2003.

The Peter Brook version I saw at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan...

Brook, Peter, dir. *Don Giovanni*. Libretto by Da Ponte. Music by Mozart. Piccolo Teatro di Milano, 1998–1999.

Have you read Julia Kristeva?

Kristeva, Julia. "Don Juan, or Loving to Be Able To." In *Tales of Love*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez, 191–208. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

As far as that's concerned, I thumbed through The Game...

Strauss, Neil. *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists*. New York: ReganBooks, 2005.

Rank had to break with his 'patron-father' Freud...

Rank, Otto. *The Trauma of Birth*. London: Routledge, 2020.

DOI: 10.4324/9781315010618.

———. *Don Juan et le double: Études psychanalytiques*. Paris: Payot, 1973.

Otto Rank's two essays on "The Double" and "Don Giovanni" were published respectively in 1914 and 1922 in *Imago: Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften*, a review journal promoted by Sigmund Freud in Vienna and Leipzig between 1912 and 1937. Rank was a member of the editorial team, and many of his and Freud's writings came out in this journal.

He quotes Foucault about Don Giovanni...

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. 39.

Porter, Roy. "Libertinism and Promiscuity." In *The Don Giovanni Book: Myths of Seduction and Betrayal*, edited by Jonathan Miller, 1–19. Baltimore: Faber & Faber, 1990.

There is the interpretation of Juliet Mitchell...

Mitchell, Juliet. *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effect of Sibling Relationships on the Human Condition*. London: Allen Lane, 2000. 246–66.

Only Nikolaus Lenau's Don Juan...

Lenau, Nikolaus. *Don Juan*. Translated by Walter Thomas. Paris: Aubier, 2015. German–French edition of an unfinished poem written in 1842–44, and originally published in 1851.

The idea of Don Giovanni's oedipal fixation is put forward by, among others, the German-American historian Peter Gay:

Gay, Peter. "The Father's Revenge." In *The Don Giovanni Book: Myths of Seduction and Betrayal*, edited by Jonathan Miller, 70–80. Baltimore: Faber & Faber, 1990.

Chap. 9: Byron at the Colle Della Maddalena

And just think that only thirty years after Mozart's Don Giovanni...

Byron, George Gordon, Lord. *The Complete Poetical Works, Vol. 5: Don Juan*. Edited by Jerome J. McGann. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. DOI: 10.1093/actrade/9780198127574.book.1.

... the seraglio filled the imagination of libertines...

Porter, Ray. "Libertinism and Promiscuity." In *The Don Giovanni Book: Myths of Seduction and Betrayal*, edited by Jonathan Miller, 1–19. Baltimore: Faber & Faber, 1990.

Chap. 10: *Fourth Imaginary Dialogue*

For example, in Molière, when Dom Juan talks about his jealousy...

"Never had I seen two people so enchanted by each other, so radiantly in love. Their open tenderness and mutual delight moved me deeply, it pierced me to the heart, and aroused in me a love that was rooted in jealousy. Yes, from the moment I saw them I found their shared happiness intolerable; envy sharpened my desires, and with keenest pleasure I began to consider how I would mar their felicity, and disrupt a union which it pained my heart to behold. But thus far all my efforts have been in vain, and so I must resort to extreme measures."

Molière. *Don Juan*. Translated by Richard Wilbur. San Diego: Harcourt, 2001. 18.

Chap. 11: Confidences on the Train

Brunel, Pierre. *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires*. Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1988. See entries for “Père”; “Psychanalyse”; “Mère.”

In the case of Don Ottavio's conformism, it is a question of loyalty...

Escobar, Roberto. *La Fedeltà di Don Giovanni*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014.

Gay, Peter. “The Father's Revenge.” In *The Don Giovanni Book: Myths of Seduction and Betrayal*, edited by Jonathan Miller, 70–80. Baltimore: Faber & Faber, 1990.

Chap. 12: Bitter Laughter

The first piece is based on a storyline from the Commedia dell'Arte...

Macchia, Giovanni. *Vita Avventure e Morte di Don Giovanni*. Turin: Einaudi, 1978. 119–50.

It's taken from Phantom of the Opera...

Leroux, Gaston. *The Phantom of the Opera* (1910). Translated by John L. Flynn. New York: New American Library, 2010.

Schumacher, Joel, dir. *The Phantom of the Opera*. Warner Brothers, 2004.

Webber, Andrew Lloyd, et al. *The Phantom of the Opera*. Musical. London, 1986-2020.

... explains that this scene in Molière's Festin de Pierre...

Molière. *Le Festin de Pierre (Dom Juan)*. Edited by Joan DeJean. Geneva: Droz, 1999. 7–44.

The original version was performed only once, on February 15, 1665. It was censored after the second performance and banned after about a month. The play was staged again in 1682 with many cuts imposed by a new censor. The Amsterdam edition of 1683, which seems to have come from an original manu-

script because it has traces of the oral version (for example, in the punctuation: 31n), is thought to be the closest to Molière's original text, which itself was lost because the work was banned for so long. DeJean stresses the differences in censorship in a Catholic versus a Protestant country, as paying someone to blaspheme might appear plausible within a Catholic environment (25n). Thomas Corneille's version, popular in France until 1942, substituted the scene of the poor man with one of a girl being seduced. This emphasized Don Giovanni as a seducer rather than a freethinker. DeJean describes the Amsterdam version as "European" (32–33, 39).

Dario Fo and Delia Gambelli, in their translation of Molière's *Don Giovanni* substantially follow the Amsterdam version and hint at the twists and turns in the story of the original manuscript. See *Notizie sull'opera*, 53–56, and *Note al testo italiano*, 191–208, in which they mention the costume that Molière wore in *Festin de pierre*.

Molière. *Don Giovanni*. Edited by Delia Gambelli. Translated by Dario Fo and Delia Gambelli. Venice: Marsilio, 1997.

See also:

Balmas, Enea. *Il mito di Don Giovanni nel seicento francese*.

Rome: Lucarini Editore, 1986.

Garboli, Cesare. *Il "Dom Juan" di Molière*. Milan: Adelphi, 2005. 37–96.

... a silent scene based on the Baudelaire poem...

Baudelaire, Charles. *Don Giovanni e Wagner*. Translated by Bruna Filippi. Milan: Ubulibri, 1988.

———. "Don Juan in Hell." In Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, translated by James McGowan, 35. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

... or the ridicule of the Trickster...

Hyde, Lewis. *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010.

Radin, Paul. *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. London: Routledge, 1955.

Wright, Sarah. *Tales of Seduction: The Figure of Don Juan in Spanish Culture*. London: Tauris, 2007. Wright's book takes up the theme of the Trickster in an interdisciplinary framework that situates the figure of Don Giovanni along various points of Spanish history during the twentieth century.

... a nice trick I've also seen used by Ariane Mnouchkine.

Performed at the 2003 Ruhrtriennale, Ariane Mnouchkine's "Le Dernier Caravansérail" was inspired by events surrounding the destruction of the Sangatte camp and what happened to the last refugees there. The Sangatte refugee camp, which opened in 1999 on the northern coast of France on the Channel, attracted thousands of would-be asylum seekers and was the site of strong tensions between London and Paris.

Chap. 13: G.

He says that the only Don Giovanni who interests him is John Berger's G.

Berger, John. G. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972.

... the proletariat and underclass of Trieste fighting against the Italian leanings of the elites.

Fabi, Lucio. *Trieste 1914–1918: Una città in guerra*. Trieste: MGS Press, 1996.

Isnenghi, Mario. *Storia d'Italia: I fatti e le percezioni dal Risorgimento alla società dello spettacolo*. Rome: Laterza, 2014.

... he wants to collaborate with the Orchestra of the Piazza Vittorio.

The Piazza Vittorio Orchestra of Rome (OPV) was commissioned in 2017 to stage *Don Giovanni* by the Accademia Filarmonica of Rome and Les Nuits de Fourvière Festival, Lyon. Other per-

formances were staged in many cities, including Naples, Milan, Pistoia, and Palermo. The production was overseen by Mario Tronco, founder of the OPV, and directed by Andrea Renzi, with musical direction by Leandro Piccioni. The performers included Petra Magoni (Don Giovanni), Mama Marjas (Zerlina), Omar Lopez Valle (Leporello), Hersi Matmuja (Donna Elvira), Evandro Dos Reis (Don Ottavio), Houcine Ataa (Masetto), Simona Boo (Donn'Anna), and many others.

Think of Mastroianni's Casanova in Scola's film, Il mondo nuovo.
Scola, Ettore, dir. *Il mondo nuovo*. Triumph Films, 1982.

... the contrast between Giovanni and Ottavio...
Ford, Charles. *Music, Sexuality and the Enlightenment in Mozart's Figaro, Don Giovanni and Così fan tutte*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

... an example of yet another kind of masculinity...
On the plurality of masculinity, see, among many others:
Ciccone, Stefano. *Maschi in crisi? Oltre la frustrazione e il rancore*. Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2019.

Chap. 14: Puppets and Comedians

... especially in puppet theatre.
Leydi, Roberto, and Renata Mezzanotte Leydi. *Marionette e burattini: Testi dal repertorio classico italiano del Teatro delle marionette e dei burattini*. Milan: Edizioni Avanti!, 1958.

We have revived an old play from the repertoire of the Girolamo Theatre in Milan.
Teatro Girolamo di Milano. *Don Giovanni il disoluto, ovvero Il castigo impensato, con Famiola disgraziato in amore*. Milan, n.d.
The theater was built in 1868 specifically for puppet plays.

We have moved on to the drama of Edmond Rostand...

Rostand, Edmond. *The Last Night of Don Juan: La Dernière Nuit de Don Juan*. Translated by Sonia Yates and Sue Lloyd. London: Genge Press, 2018.

The Samarago: it's more dramatic.

Corghi, Azio, and José Saramago. *Il Dissoluto Assolto*. Milan: Ricordi, 2006.

Mellace, Raffaele. "L'opera in Breve." In Corghi and Saramago, *Il Dissoluto Assolto*, 104–36.

Saramago, José. *Don Giovanni o Il Dissoluto Assolto*. Translated by Rita Desti. Turin: Einaudi, 2005.

Seminara, Graziella. "Genesi di un Libretto." In Corghi e Saramago, *Il Dissoluto Assolto*, 137–77.

Günter wants to know why they preferred Saramago to Max Frisch...

Frisch, Max. *Four Plays: The Great Wall of China; Don Juan; or The Love of Geometry; Philipp Hotz's Fury; Biography, A Game*. Translated by Michael Bullock. London: Methuen, 1969.

On the myth of Coyote, see:

Papanikolas, Zeese. *Trickster in the Land of Dreams*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

And Goldoni? Isn't Goldoni in your comic rundown?

Goldoni, Carlo. *Goldoni, Volume 2: Don Juan; Friends and Lovers; The Battlefield*. Translated by Robert David MacDonald. London: Oberon Books, 1994. Comedy in five acts and rhyming verse, first performed at the Venice Carnival in 1736.

The opinions expressed by Lydia on Goldoni come from:

Farinelli, Arturo. *Don Giovanni: Note critiche*. Turin: Loescher, 1896. 76.

The “anonymous libel” against Molière is:
Observations sur une Comédie de Molière Intitulée Le Festin de Pierre, 1665, published as an Appendix to Molière, *Le Festin de Pierre (Dom Juan)*, edited by Joan DeJean, 262–80. Geneva: Droz, 1999.

Chap. 15: Don Giovanni the Feminist

This chapter refers to the writings of Alida Cresti, especially:
 Cresti, Alida. *La seduzione di Thanatos: Percorsi di passione e morte nel mito e nell'arte*. Trento: L'Editore, 1990.

———. “Mozart, Don Giovanni o La Seduzione di Thanatos.”
 In *Il Signore delle Canzoni: Letture Mozartiane*, chap. 3. Trento: L'Editore, 1991.

According to Jungian theory...

Carotenuto, Aldo. *Riti e miti della seduzione*. Milan: Bompiani, 1994. 2, 154–56, 172, 177, 181, 186.

... experimenting in sexual and loving relationships.

Lonzi, Carla. *La donna clitoridea e la donna vaginale*. 3rd edn. Milan: Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, 1971.

On feminist critiques of romantic love, see:

Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectics of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: William Morrow, 1970.

Greer, Germaine. *The Female Eunuch*. London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970.

Mitchell, Juliet. *Women: The Longest Revolution: Essays on Feminism, Literature and Psychoanalysis*. London: Virago, 1984.

Chap. 16 / Mozart's Freedom

... three or four arias were added between the Prague premiere in October 1787 and the version in Vienna...

Of the many texts about the different versions of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Prague and Vienna, see:

Kerman, Joseph. "Reading Don Giovanni." In *The Don Giovanni Book: Myths of Seduction and Betrayal*, edited by Jonathan Miller, 108–25. Baltimore: Faber & Faber, 1990.

Mila, Massimo. *Lettura del Don Giovanni di Mozart*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1988. For references to Dallapiccola, see, in particular, 5, 43, 71n119, 211–12, 225–26, 231.

For Mozart's female characters, see *ibid.*, 62, referring to: Singer, Irving. *Mozart and Beethoven: The Concept of Love in Their Operas*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

This is an old transcription for piano...

Mozart, W.A. *Don Giovanni: Opera Buffa in Due Atti*. Piano-vocal score with libretto. Milan: Banfi, n.d. 90.

Gluck's ballet music is based on a fine libretto by Calzabigi...

von Gluck, Christoph Willibald. *Don Juan ou le Festin de Pierre*. Libretto by Ranieri de' Calzabigi. 1761.

Okay, there's the Marquise de Merteuil in Les Liaisons Dangereuses...

de Laclos, Pierre Choderlos. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Translated by Douglas Parmée. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

I read a bad American novel, Don Juan in the Village...

Davidson, Guy. "Bar and Dog Collar: Commodity, Subculture, and Narrative in Jane DeLynn." *Genders 1998–2013*, University of Colorado Boulder, March 1, 2010. <https://www.colorado.edu/gendersarchive1998-2013/2010/03/01/bar-and-dog-collar-commodity-subculture-and-narrative-jane-delynn>.

DeLynn, Jane. *Don Juan in the Village*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1990.

Chap. 18: Between Two Rivers

... the crooner Fred Buscaglione was from Torino...

Filippa, Marcella. "Cultura di massa e rappresentazioni del maschile negli anni cinquanta in Italia: Il caso Fred Buscaglione." In *Genere e Mascolinità: Uno Sguardo Storico*, edited by Sandro Bellasai and Maria Malatesta, 303–15. Rome: Bulzoni, 2000.

———. "Popular Song and Musical Cultures." In *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, edited by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, 327–43. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Isabella points out the corner restaurant named after Porfirio Rubirosa...

Levy, Shawn. *The Last Playboy: The High Life of Porfirio Rubirosa*. London: Harper Perennial, 2006.

Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth, and Eva Woods Peiró. "Porfirio Rubirosa: Masculinity, Race, and the Jet-Setting Latin Male." In *Latin American Icons: Fame across Borders*, edited by Dianna C. Niebylski and Patrick O'Connor, 125–33. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014.

Wall, Marty, Isabella Wall, and Robert Bruce Woodcock. *Chasing Rubi: The Truth about Porfirio Rubirosa*. Newport Beach: Literary Press, 2005.

Chap. 20: Prequel: Porfirio

According to the Harlem poet Langston Hughes...

Paravisini-Gebert, Lizabeth, and Eva Woods Peiró. "Porfirio Rubirosa: Masculinity, Race, and the Jet-Setting Latin Male." In *Latin American Icons: Fame across Borders*, edited by Dianna C. Niebylski and Patrick O'Connor, 125–33. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014.

Chap. 21: The Footballer

Truman Capote claimed he had a coffee-colored penis...

Capote, Truman. *Answered Prayers*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012.

It's about a bastardized Don Giovanni, a footballer...

Cassano, Antonio, and Pierluigi Pardo. *Dico tutto: E se fa caldo gioco all'ombra*. Milan: Rizzoli, 2008.

See “Don Juan,” 686, and “Playboy”: “a man about town, roué, rake, debauchee, gay dog, womanizer, Don Juan, Casanova, Lothario, Romeo,” 334, in:

The Oxford Thesaurus. Edited by Laurence Urdang. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Look, I went to Rome to see OperaCamion's adaptation of Mozart's opera...

Opera Camion was a project of the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, which in 2017 produced *Don Giovanni* as a one-act version of the Da Ponte-Mozart opera, directed by Fabio Cherstich, with sets, videos, and costumes by Gianluigi Toccafondo.

Chap. 22: The Seducer's Legacy

Losey also says that the valet is the “guardian” of Don Giovanni's soul.

The quotes from Losey are taken from the sleeve notes of Columbia Records' 1960 *Don Giovanni*, UK Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus with Carlo Maria Giulini as conductor. The film was edited by Reginald Beck, who collaborated with Losey on sixteen films and received the César award for best film editing in France in 1980 for his work on Losey's *Don Giovanni*.

Joseph Losey, dir. *Don Giovanni*. Gaumont, 1979.

The conversation with Isabella on interpretations of Losey's *Don Giovanni* is based on the following texts:

- Canby, Vincent. "Losey Brings Mozart's Don Giovanni to the Screen: Philanderer Bar None." *The New York Times*, November 6, 1979. <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/11/06/archives/movie-losey-brings-mozarts-don-giovanni-to-the-screenphilanderer.html>.
- Gardner, Colin. *Joseph Losey*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- . "The Eternal Return of Immanence: Becoming-toward-death in Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni*." *Critical Secret 6: Cinématographies*, 2001. <https://www.criticalsecret.com/n6/textes-html/giovanni-gb.html>.
- Jeffries, Stuart. "Don Giovanni — Hero or Villain?" *The Guardian*, April 11, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/apr/11/don-giovanni-hero-or-villain>.
- McLellan, Joseph. "Bringing Mozart to the Movies." *The Washington Post*, November 4, 1979. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1979/11/04/bringing-mozart-to-the-movies/>.
- Tambling, Jeremy. *Opera, Ideology and Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987.

Chap. 23: Don Ottavio Restored

And I found a Portuguese version of Don Giovanni...

Patrício, António. *D. João e a máscara: Uma fábula trágica*. Lisbon: Publicações Europa-America, 1924.

So you mean "colonial melancholia"...

Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

And that means the seduction...

Baudrillard, Jean. *Seduction*. Translated by Brian Singer. New York: St Martin's Press, 1979.

Carotenuto, Aldo. *Riti e miti della seduzione*. Milan: Bompiani, 2000.

Ford, Charles. *Music, Sexuality, and the Enlightenment in Mozart's Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così fan tutte*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Perniola, Mario. "Lo Charme Venusiano." In *Ipotesi di seduzione*, edited by Paolo Meneghetti and Stefano Trombini, 101–26. Bologna: Cappelli, 1981.

Centre de Création Industrielle. *Traverses* 18. Special Issue: "Séduction — La Stratégie des Apparences." Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980.

But it's convenient for you to slip away discreetly, à la Leporello, as Klee writes...

Klee, Paul. *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*. Edited by Felix Klee. London: University of California Press 1992. 410.

Chap. 24: *Sixth Imaginary Dialogue*

For example, who is the one you called your maestra? Giorgina.
Passerini, Luisa. "Notre mère l'Europe": Giorgina Levi and Heinz Arian." In *Women and Men in Love: European Identities in the Twentieth Century*, translated by Juliet Haydock and Allan Cameron, 279–320. Oxford: Berghahn, 2012.

And what is this mitobiografia...

Bernhard, Ernst. *Mitobiografia*. Edited by Hélène Erba-Tissot. Translated by Gabriella Bemporad. Milan: Bompiani, 1977.

Fresko, Susanna, and Chiara Mirabelli, eds. *Qual è il tuo mito? Mappe per il mestiere di vivere*. Milan: Mimesis, 2016.

Part of this triumph of vision is Losey's setting the film in a landscape that is created by a series of montages...

Losey's script co-writer was Francis Savel, who called himself Franz Salieri. The film's locations are the islands of Murano and Torcello, the Palladian Basilica, the Piazza dei Signori and the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, the Palladian villa "La Rotonda," the Villa Valmanara, and the Villa Caldogna.

*There is a little illustrated story by the nineteenth-century writer
Edmondo De Amicis...*

de Amicis, Edmondo. "Un don Giovanni innocente." In *Nel Regno dell'Amore*, 480, 484, 490. Milan: Fratelli Treves Editori, 1908.

Chap. 25: The Four Hundred and Sixty-First Adventure

*As early as 1899–1900, I've seen that Klee referred to a "little
Leporello catalogue"...*

Klee, Paul. *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*. Edited by Felix Klee. London: University of California Press 1992. 34.

On Klee, see also:

Aichele, Kathryn Porter. "Paul Klee's Operatic Themes and Variations." *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 3 (1986): 450–66. DOI: 10.1080/00043079.1986.10788363. Includes commentary on Klee's "The Last Stages of Don Juan's Infatuation" (titled "Don Juan" at the Paul Klee Zentrum in Bern).

Hopfengart, Christine. "Oh, La Vendetta! Klee, Mozart und Die Liebe zum Pathetischen Stil." In *Paul Klee: Melodie und Rhythmus*. Exhibition catalogue. Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland, September 9–December 11, 2006. 131–43.

Klee, Paul. *Creative Confession and Other Writings*. Postscript by Matthew Gale. London: Tate Publishing, 2013.

Plant, Margaret. *Paul Klee: Figures and Faces*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1987.

In the Diaries, he records the night he spent with Cenzi...

Klee, Paul. *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*. Edited by Felix Klee. London: University of California Press 1992. 43–45.

Klee's letter to Ernst Lazlo (February 12, 1926) is quoted by: Felix Klee, "Mozart in Salzburg: Reminiscences of Paul Klee's Family: 'Don Giovanni,'" in *Mozart in Art 1900–1990*. Salzburg: Mozart's Geburtshaus, 1990. 46–47

Christine Hopfengart, "Oh, la vendetta!: Mozart und die Liebe zum pathetischen Stil." In *Paul Klee: Melodie und Rhythmus*, edited by Michael Baumgartner and Marianne Amiet-Zeller. Exhibition catalog. Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2006. 136–37.

... Klee says he heard it conducted by Strauss himself in Zurich in 1903.

Richard Strauss, comp. *Don Juan*, Op. 20. Symphonic tone poem in E Major. 1888.

Klee mentions Strauss's *Don Juan* in his *Diaries* (see above), 138 (no. 495) and 148 (no. 546).

On the meaning of letters and numbers in Klee, see:

Laude, Jean. "Paul Klee: Lettres, 'Écritures,' Signes." In *Écritures: Systèmes idéographiques et pratiques expressives*, 349–402. Paris: Actes du Colloque International de l'Université, 1982.

However, his 1934 painting "Don Chi" does speak to me...

Plant, Margaret. *Paul Klee: Figures and Faces*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1987. 100.

See also:

Boulez, Pierre. *Le pays fertile: Paul Klee*. Edited by Paule Thévenin. Paris: Gallimard, 1989.

Dantini, Michele. *Klee*. Milan: Jaca Book, 1999.

On the role of music in Klee's art, see:

Franciscono, Marcel. "The Place of Music in Klee's Art: A Reconsideration." In *Klee og Musikken*, 272–91. Høvikodden: Sonja Henie-Niels Onstad Collection, 1985.

Kagan, Andrew. *Paul Klee: Art and Music*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Will-Levaillant, Françoise. "Paul Klee et la musique: I. Psychobiographie et représentations." *Revue de l'art* 63 (1984): 75–88.

There could be other Klee Don Giovannis...

This refers to the small calendar page that looks like, and might be an early version of, the untitled 1913 calendar sheet at the Zentrum Paul Klee, “Kalenderblatt – Don Juan,” with the inscription “November 22/23/24,” and the “Terzett mit don Giovannino” of 1939 (Zentrum Paul Klee, no. 1247), which shows a woman’s face with a tear running down its cheek.

For Klee’s puppets, see:

Klee, Paul. *Handpuppen*. Edited by Zentrum Paul Klee. Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2007.

Chap. 26: Serious and Playful

Yes, Adorno’s.

Adorno, Theodor W. *Ästhetische Theorie*. Edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1973.

———. “Klemperers Don Giovanni.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 24, 1967.

———. *Negative Dialektik: Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1973.

Bacht, Nikolaus. “Adorno and the Don.” In *The Don Giovanni Moment: Essays on the Legacy of an Opera*, edited by Lydia Goehr and Daniel Herwitz, 225–38. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

On the Finale of *Il Dissoluto Punito*, see:

Mila, Massimo. *Lettura del Don Giovanni di Mozart*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1988. 242–55.

Chap. 27: Eurocentrisms

... limited to some countries of mainland and central European countries.

In the 1950s, Micheline Sauvage acknowledges the pre-Christian origins of the Don Giovanni myth but maintains that, unlike

the myths of Tristan and Prometheus, Don Juan could be found only in Europe. See:

Sauvage, Micheline. *Le cas Don Juan*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1953.

... *the position of the French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie...*

Ladurie, Emmanuel Le Roy. "Preface." In *Don Juan*. Exhibition catalogue, April 25–July 5, 1991. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1991. 12–13.

... *the existence of a Portuguese Dom João...*

Ciccia, Marie-Noëlle. "As máscaras da vida e da morte em *D. João e a Máscara* (1924), de Antônio Patrício." *Conexão Letras* 7, no. 8 (2012). <https://seer.ufrgs.br/conexaoletras/article/view/55434/33699>.

Kornelia, though, is very critical of the talk that followed, by a Warsaw scholar.

Aszyk, Urszula. "Don Juan en el teatro polaco." *Cuadernos del teatro clásico* 2 (1988): 79–84.

Cabral, Maria de Jesus Reis. "Do (e)terno mito de D. João na 'fábula trágica' de Antônio Patrício: A Travessia da máscara em palavras." In *Mitos e heróis: A expressão do imaginário*, edited by Ana Paula Pinto, João Amadeu Carvalho da Silva, Maria José Lopes, and Miguel António Gonçalves, 399–406. Braga: Publicações da Faculdade de Filosofia, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 2012.

Wyspiański, Stanisław. *Bolesław śmiały*. Staged in Krakow, 1903.

On Imru' al-Qays, see:

Saad, Youssef. "The Don Juan of Classical Arabia." *Comparative Literature Studies* 13, no. 4 (1976): 304–14. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40246005>.

... the figure of Don Giovanni is originally from Arabia.

Molho, Mauricio. "Don Juan en Europa." *Cuadernos de Teatro Clásico* 2 (1988): 79–84. Molho notes that Arturo Farinelli ("il gran Farinelli") insists on the Italian origin of the myth of Don Giovanni.

He was referring in particular to a Japanese classic...

Field, Norma. *The Splendor of Longing in the Tale of Genji*.

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Shikibu, Murasaki. *The Tale of Genji*. Translated by Royall Tyler. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003.

Shirane, Haruo, ed. *Envisioning the Tale of Genji: Media, Gender, and Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

A good example of libertine novels in 1600s Japan is:

Saikaku, Ihara. *The Life of an Amorous Man*. Translated by Kengi Hamada. North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 1964.

Chap. 28: Colonial Don Giovanni

... the Spanish fascist writer Ernesto Giménez Caballero...

Caballero, Ernesto Giménez. "Dialoghi d'amore tra Laura e Don Giovanni o il fascismo e l'amore." *Antieuropa* 5 (1935): 567–99.

———. *Exaltación del matrimonio: Diálogos de amor entre Laura y Don Juan*. Madrid: Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1936.

Labanyi, Jo. "Political Readings of Don Juan and Romantic Love in Spain from the 1920s to the 1940s." In *New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena, and Alexander C.T. Geppert, 197–212. New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.

Sinclair, Alison. "Love, Again: Crisis and the Search for Consolation in the 'Revista de Occidente,' 1923–1936." In *New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourses on Europe and Love*

in the Twentieth Century, edited by Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena, and Alexander C.T. Geppert, 178–96. New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.

Chap. 29: Frames

We're making Hoffmann into a story within a story...
Hoffmann, E.T.A. "Don Giovanni." In *Il Cavaliere Gluck: Don Giovanni; Il Gorgheggio; Il Barone von B.*, translated by G. Pierotti, 25–44. Turin: Araba Fenice, 1999.

... based on Ellery Queen.
Queen, Ellery. "The Death of Don Juan." In *Queens Full*, 7–8. London: Penguin, 1971.

I also take a look at a historical novel from the 1930s...
Warner, Sylvia Townsend. *After the Death of Don Juan*. London: Virago, 1989.

The story, in which Doña Ana travels to Spain with Don Ottavio to announce Don Giovanni's death to his father, is set in the 1760s but reproduces social tensions in Spain during the Civil War, in which Warner served as an ambulance driver. In this book, the frame in which Leporello recounts the disappearance of Don Giovanni is overturned by the latter's reappearance in his father's house. This structure lends itself well to the grotesque transformation of the traditional story.

Chap. 30: Postcolonial

... the midway point between the colonial and postcolonial is epitomized by the play Don Juan ou les amants chimériques...
De Ghelderode, Michel. *Don Juan ou les amants chimériques*. Brussels: Labor, 1999. On the modernity of the play and the post-colonial character of its linguistic variety, see Michel Lisse's "Lecture" in this volume, 203–20.

... the protagonist of *Season of Migration to the North*...

Salish, Tayeb. *Season of Migration to the North*. Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies. London: Penguin Classics, 2003.

... *Conrad's Heart of Darkness*...

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin Classics, 2007.

We have now reformulated the theme of evangelization and conversion...

On free evangelism versus proselytism by the Catholic Church, see the dialogue between Pope Francesco Bergoglio and the Jesuits of Mozambique:

Spadaro, Antonio. "La Sovranità del Popolo di Dio." *La Civiltà Cattolica, Quaderno* 4063, Vol. IV (October 5, 2019). <https://www.laciviltacattolica.it/quaderno/4063/>.

Chap. 31: At the Bottom of the Sea

This chapter is based on material drawn from the Odin Teatret Archives of *Don Giovanni all'inferno (Don Giovanni in Hell)*, directed by Eugenio Barba and produced by the Ravenna Festival and the OdinTeatret/Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium for the 2006 Ravenna Festival.

For the Corghi/Saramago opera, see the references above for Chap. 14, "Comedians and Puppets."

Chap. 32: The Transformation of Elvira

On *Elvire Jouvet 40*, see:

Jacquot, Benoît, dir. *Elvire Jouvet 40*. France Regions 3, 1987.

The director traced Paula Dohelly, the actor who had played Claudia, and interviewed her for the 1987 documentary *La Scène Jouvet*.

Jaques-Vajeman, Brigitte. *Elvire Jouvet 40*. Arles: Actes Sud Papiers, 1992. Along with the text of the piece made up

from Louis Jouvet's seven lessons, the volume contains the director's notes: "*Elvire Jouvet 40, encore et toujours*," 49–55. Molière. *Dom Juan*. Translated by Richard Wilbur. San Diego: Harcourt, 2001. 156–60.

Chap. 33: Pan-Politicism

The Teatro do Oprimido was created in Brazil by Augusto Boal, inspired by the works of Paulo Freire in the 1970s.

Chap. 34: Endgame: *Seventh Imaginary Dialogue*

On *Endgame*, see:

Beckett, Samuel. *Fin de partie*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988.
Bloom, Harold, ed. *Samuel Beckett's Endgame*. New York: Chelsea House, 1988.

I think the behavior of Kierkegaard's seducer is even more revolting.

Kierkegaard, Sören. *Don Giovanni: La musica di Mozart e l'eros*. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1976.

———. *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin Classics, 1992.

Chap. 37: Fade Out

I would like to thank Claudio Canal for suggesting this title and pointing me to William Weir's article on the meaning and decline of the fade-out in music. In music, the fade-out allows a song to continue beyond its physical limit so that the listener feels that it never truly ends: "So the fade-out offers us hope in the face of death and a sense of the infinite. Perhaps it's an escape from the physical world, or a bittersweet yearning for all that can't be known."

Weir, William. "A Little Bit Softer Now, a Little Bit Softer Now: The Sad, Gradual Decline of the Fade-Out in Music." *Slate*, September 14, 2014. <https://slate.com/culture/2014/09/the->

fade-out-in-pop-music-why-dont-modern-pop-songs-end-by-slowly-reducing-in-volume.html.

