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THE ORIGINAL PORTRAYAL OF MOZART'S DON GIOVANNI

Magnus Tessing Schneider



The Original Portrayal of Mozart's Don Giovanni

The Original Portrayal of Mozart's Don Giovanni offers an original reading of Mozart's and Da Ponte's opera *Don Giovanni*, using as a lens the portrayal of the title role by its creator, the baritone Luigi Bassi (1766–1825).

Although Bassi was coached in the role by the composer himself, his portrayal has never been studied in depth before, and this book presents a large number of new sources (first- and second-hand accounts), which allows us to reconstruct his performance scene by scene. The book confronts Bassi's portrayal with a study of the opera's early German reception and performance history, demonstrating how *Don Giovanni* as we know it today was not only created by Mozart, Da Ponte and Luigi Bassi but also by the early German adapters, translators, critics and performers who turned the title character into the arrogant and violent villain we still encounter in most of today's stage productions.

Incorporating a discussion of the dramaturgical thinking of the late Enlightenment and the difficult moral problems that the opera raises, this is an important study for scholars and researchers from opera studies, theatre and performance studies, music history as well as conductors, directors and singers.

Magnus Tessing Schneider (Stockholm University) is a Danish theatre scholar specialising in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Italian opera. He has edited *Mozart's La clemenza di Tito: A Reappraisal* (2018), together with Ruth Tatlow, and Felicity Baker's essay collection *Don Giovanni's Reasons: Thoughts on a Masterpiece* (2021).

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Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
<i>Rewriting the myth of Don Juan</i>	1
<i>The demonising of Don Giovanni: a historical overview</i>	5
<i>Notes</i>	12
1 Luigi Bassi as Don Giovanni	15
<i>The singer and his role</i>	15
<i>Intention and experience: prescriptive and descriptive sources</i>	18
<i>The performer as a phenomenon</i>	27
<i>Grace and gallantry: Bassi's portrayal</i>	33
<i>Performance traditions: Italians and Germans</i>	36
<i>Notes</i>	44
2 The opening scene	54
<i>Notes</i>	65
3 Don Giovanni and the three women	68
<i>Donna Elvira's entrance aria</i>	68
<i>The duettino</i>	75
<i>The quartet and Donna Anna's narration</i>	83
<i>Notes</i>	92
4 The party episode	98
<i>The champagne aria</i>	98
<i>The garden scene</i>	104
<i>The ballroom scene</i>	109
<i>Notes</i>	126

5 The disguise episode	131
<i>The first duet with Leporello</i>	131
<i>The trio</i>	134
<i>The canzonetta</i>	144
<i>The disguise aria</i>	146
<i>Notes</i>	152
6 The graveyard scene	155
<i>Notes</i>	165
7 The second finale	168
<i>The supper</i>	168
<i>The last encounter with Donna Elvira</i>	175
<i>Don Giovanni and the stone guest</i>	181
<i>The final scene</i>	203
<i>Notes</i>	206
Postscript: In defence of the operatic work	213
<i>Notes</i>	224
<i>Bibliography</i>	227
<i>Index</i>	240

Illustrations

1.1	Medard Thönert: ‘Don Giovanni performed by Signor Bassi’ (Act II scene 3). Engraving. 1797	20
2.1	Wilhelm Marstrand: Donna Anna tries to restrain Don Giovanni (Act I scene 1). Paper and ink. Mid-nineteenth century	58
2.2	Wilhelm Marstrand: Donna Anna summons her servants (Act I scene 1). Paper and ink. Mid-nineteenth century	58
2.3	Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Donna Anna tries to restrain Don Giovanni (Act I scene 1). Woodcut. 1921	59
2.4	Johann Friedrich Bolt after a drawing by Vinzenz Georg Kinninger: Don Giovanni and the stone guest (Act II scene 15). Engraving. 1801	65
4.1	Max Slevogt: ‘Scene from <i>Don Giovanni</i> (Francisco d’Andrade on the Forestage)’ (Act I scene 15). Oil painting. 1902	100
4.2	Johann Peter Lyser: ‘Arabesque on the Champagne Aria’ (Act I scene 15). Drawing. 1837	105
4.3	Wilhelm Marstrand: ‘Don Giovanni’ (Act I scene 18). Paper and ink. No date (1860s)	108
4.4	Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni dances with Zerlina (Act I scene 20). Woodcut. 1921	119
4.5	Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni pulls Zerlina into the closet (Act I scene 20). Woodcut. 1921	120
4.6	Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni tries to rape Zerlina (Act I scene 20). Woodcut. 1921	121
4.7	Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni fencing with the peasants (Act I scene 20). Woodcut. 1921	125
5.1	Johann Peter Lyser: the trio (Act II scene 2). Drawing. 1833	139
5.2	Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni in Leporello’s clothes (Act II scene 2). Woodcut. 1921	141
5.3	Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni pummels Masetto (Act II scene 5). Woodcut. 1921	151
7.1	Hagesandros, Athenedoros and Polydoros: ‘Laocoön and His Sons’. Marble. Ca. 200 BC	200

Preface

Is the title character of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* (1787) a charming, non-violent seducer, or is he a ruthless, arrogant rapist and murderer? Even asking that question may seem controversial at a time when stage productions and critical commentaries almost invariably depict him as the latter. But as this book will show, it is important to ask the question. In fact, there is ample evidence that Don Giovanni was *not* portrayed as arrogant and violent on stage originally, just as Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto hardly supports such a reading. But that just raises another question: how did the violent, or demonic, image of Don Giovanni then come to dominate? The present book tries to answer both questions; drawing on a variety of humanistic disciplines, from the histories of theatre, music, literature and art to translation studies, cultural history and philosophical aesthetics, it tries to recapture the original scenic portrayal of the character while also trying to show when, how and why that interpretation was forgotten. Ultimately, this raises other questions, about the transmission of stage works, the role of cultural myths and the social functions of the arts, both today and in the past.

Don Giovanni has been an integral part of my life since I wrote my doctoral dissertation at Aarhus University (Schneider 2008). While the present monograph has grown out of that early work, my interpretation of the opera has matured considerably in the meantime. Back then, I was so thrilled to have realised that historical sources referring to the portrayal of the title role by Luigi Bassi, the singer for whom it was written, were at variance with today's standard representation of the character that I was convinced, naively, that everyone would share my enthusiasm as soon as I had explained to them how everything fitted together. But the examiners of my thesis were not persuaded by my interpretation, and so I came to realise that the work I had done was only a draft. Neither my source criticism nor my poetic close readings had been careful enough, and it became clear to me that in order to challenge, in a fundamental way, the generally accepted interpretation of a classic of such overwhelmingly iconic status as *Don Giovanni*, it is not enough to present a meticulous, historically contextualised counterinterpretation; it is also necessary to show how the standard interpretation emerged.

In 2009, the year of my PhD defence, I wrote an article on the champagne aria for the *Danish Yearbook of Musicology*, which was based on my thesis (Schneider 2009), and in the summer I presented my research at a Mozart conference in

Prague (for my contribution to the proceedings, see Schneider 2016). Here I came into contact with the *Don Giovanni* scholar Hans Ernst Weidinger, founder of the Don Juan Archiv Wien, who encouraged and generously supported my work during the following years. I use this opportunity to thank him warmly. I can truly say that *Don Giovanni*, so often accused of breaking social bonds, has played the opposite role in my career, often forging connections with scholars and performers all over the world. Felicity Baker, another eminent *Don Giovanni* scholar, entered my life in connection with a small conference that I helped organise in Stockholm in 2010. She became my academic mentor, and I regard our conversations and her multiple and invaluable letters, bristling with wisdom and immense knowledge of the eighteenth century, and often revolving around the interpretation of Mozart's opera, as a crucial part both of my education as a scholar and of my formation as a humanist. By helping her publish her collected essays on Da Ponte, I hope to pay some of the debt I owe her: *Don Giovanni's Reasons: Thoughts on a masterpiece* will appear with Peter Lang more or less simultaneously with the publication of the present monograph, and I regard the two books as complementary, revisiting the opera from a literary and a theatrical perspective, respectively.

In 2013 I joined the research group Performing Premodernity based at Stockholm University, led by conductor Mark Tatlow and the theatre scholars Willmar Sauter and Meike Wagner who, together with my (now former) PhD students Maria Gullstam and Petra Dotlačilová, provided me with invaluable encouragement and feedback on various drafts for this book, which is dedicated to them. In particular, I would like to thank Mark for bringing the perspective of an experienced Mozart conductor to the study of *Don Giovanni*. Together, we have not only examined all extant arias written for Luigi Bassi by other composers than Mozart, the results of our efforts soon appearing in the volume *Arias for Luigi Bassi, Mozart's First Don Giovanni* (A-R Editions); we have also gone through the much-discussed metronome numbers for *Don Giovanni* recorded by Wenzel Johann Tomaschek in 1839, which enhanced my understanding of the intimate connection between musical tempo and expression.

After moving to Stockholm, I have spoken on *Don Giovanni* at a few conferences, and a paper on *Don Giovanni* and Kierkegaard was turned into an article (Schneider 2018a). The most instructive experience was when I presented an admittedly provocative paper on Donna Anna at a conference in the summer of 2017, a few months before the rise of the #MeToo movement in the United States. While the majority of the (mainly Swedish) audience received my interpretation and my historical findings very positively, some American scholars reacted very negatively, and I was struck by the way the reactions seemed to divide along national lines. This experience stimulated my interest in the differences between Continental hermeneutics and American pragmatism, between phenomenology and ethical criticism, between the view of art as an autonomous space for the free play of the imagination and the view of art as a form of pedagogical community-building that negotiates the values of the audience – differences I will discuss in the postscript. While the #MeToo movement has spurred me to rethink some of my arguments, I still believe, like Felicity Baker, that a production of *Don Giovanni*

that refrains from portraying the title hero as the stereotypical violent predator has more to offer today's audiences than one that doesn't. Besides, that was also how the role was portrayed originally.

In addition to the people mentioned above, I would like to thank Christine Jeanneret, Ferdinando Maffii, Martin Nedbal, Alan Swanson, Ruth Tatlow, Nicola Usula, Andreas Wahlberg, Ian Woodfield and the anonymous Routledge reviewer of my book proposal for providing me with most valuable comments after reading all or parts of the manuscript in different states of completion. I would also like to thank Elaine Sisman for sharing her important manuscript papers on *Don Giovanni* with me in advance of publication, and Henrik Engelbrecht for generously allowing me to reproduce the two Marstrand drawings in his collection.

Stockholm, April 2021

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Introduction

Rewriting the myth of Don Juan

When Carl Maria von Weber conducted Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Dresden in the 1820s, one of the people sitting in the auditorium was the Italian singer Luigi Bassi who had created the title role back in 1787. And he was not pleased with what he saw. 'Bassi generally passed the judgement on all Don Giovannis whom he and I saw performing', his friend Count Hohenthal recalled a few years after the singer's death in 1825, 'that they, with their pretentious portrayals, represented Madrilenian butchers rather than Spanish gentlemen'.¹ Indeed, people who had seen Bassi himself perform the role tended to emphasise the gentlemanly qualities of his portrayal. According to the daughter of the soprano Luigia Sandrini-Caravoglia, for example, who had sung Donna Anna to Bassi's Don Giovanni in Prague in the early nineteenth century, 'his impeccable, chivalrous elegance and his seductive charm towards the women' not only made him 'the unequalled performer of this part' but also 'the darling of the Prague ladies, even of those belonging to the highest aristocracy'.²

Such memoirs of the original Don Giovanni are remarkable because they reflect a conception of the character fundamentally different from the one we mostly encounter on stage today. In Christof Loy's Frankfurt production of 2014, to mention just one example, Mozart's seducer is portrayed as a cantankerous old lecher, devoid of charm or humour, whose pursuit of sexual conquests has long ago become a mechanical habit. Boorish in his treatment of the women and his servant Leporello, he is outright violent towards Donna Anna, whom he tries to rape in full view of the audience, and towards the jealous peasant Masetto, whom he kicks and batters with the butt of a musket. It remains a mystery why Donna Elvira and Zerlina feel attracted to this brute.³ The contrast between such images of Don Giovanni, which we encounter in most productions today, and the way the role was performed by the singer for whom it was written is the point of departure for this book. Combining the perspectives of the theatre and opera historian with that of the critic, it examines 1) how Don Giovanni was portrayed on stage, scene by scene, by Luigi Bassi; 2) the origins of today's standard image of the character as arrogant and physically and emotionally abusive; and finally, 3) how

2 Introduction

Bassi's portrayal may serve as a key to a historically informed interpretation of *Don Giovanni*.

As for the last issue, the book is indebted to literary scholar Felicity Baker who argues that today's image of Don Giovanni as a violent criminal and sexual predator is a cultural projection that lacks basis in the text, an argument that we shall delve into in the following. The librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte depicted the seducer as frivolous and individualistic but also as essentially non-violent, in contrast to the way the Commendatore, Masetto and even Don Ottavio are depicted. That is because the opera is a *critical rewriting* of the traditional story of Don Juan and the stone guest, which through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had functioned as a vehicle for anti-libertine beliefs, invariably depicting the seducer as an abominable villain who deserves to die for his sins. In 1787, some audience members would have known that story from its classic dramatic treatments: Tirso de Molina's play *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (1617), Molière's comedy *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre* (1665) and Carlo Goldoni's tragicomedy *Don Giovanni Tenorio o sia Il dissoluto* (1736). Most audience members, however, would have known the story from various crowd-pleasing entertainments, or what I shall refer to as the popular *Stone Guest* tradition, which included everything from *commedia dell'arte* plays, *opere buffe* and *ballets d'action* to All Souls' Day farces, pantomimes and puppet shows. This tradition, which constituted the real backbone of what is sometimes referred to as the 'Don Juan myth', went back to the second quarter of the seventeenth century. The earliest known adaptation of Tirso's play, *Il convitato di pietra* (1632) by the Florentine playwright Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, already contains the stock farcical elements that we find in later versions, including Nunziato Porta's and Vincenzo Righini's opera *Il convitato di pietra o sia Il dissoluto*, which received its world premiere in Prague in 1776 and was produced in Vienna the following year.⁴ For Viennese theatregoers in the 1780s, though, the main reference point is likely to have been Karl von Marinelli's play *Dom Juan oder Der steinerne Gast*, which was performed in the Theater in der Leopoldstadt every year around All Souls' Day (2 November) from 1783 to 1821. Works like these were repeatedly condemned by the cultural elite for their improprieties and absurdities, critics especially pouring scorn on the supernatural ending where a chorus of devils are seen tormenting Don Juan after he has been sent to hell by a walking statue.

For a modern equivalent of this phenomenon, we should think of icons of popular culture such as Count Dracula, Zorro, King Kong or James Bond, not of Shakespeare's Hamlet or Goethe's Faust. This helps explain why artists of the late Enlightenment who appealed mainly to the educated connoisseurs (and that included Mozart, as I argue in the postscript) were disinclined to simply create a 'regular' Don Juan opera. And so Da Ponte 'tells the story in its mythic form but erects a huge question mark above it'.⁵ This approach was probably what the poet alluded to when he later told one of his American friends that Mozart was determined to cast 'exclusively as serious' this opera on the story of Don Juan, which had 'become familiar in a thousand ways'.⁶ It was probably also what Domenico Guardasoni, the impresario who commissioned the opera, alluded

to when he noted how it differed from Gioacchino Albertini's 1780 resetting of Porta's libretto, which had premiered in a Polish translation in Warsaw in 1783. 'This opera is quite different from the one previously presented in this theatre under the same title', Guardasoni announced on the poster for the 1789 Warsaw premiere of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, 'for the poet thought it was a good idea to make many changes in the scenes, with the intent of approaching contemporary taste and the expression of the music'.⁷ And it explains, finally, how we should understand the relationship between Da Ponte's libretto and its immediate model, Giovanni Bertati's one-act libretto *Don Giovanni o sia Il convitato di pietra*, which was set to music by Giuseppe Gazzaniga for a production in Venice in February 1787. According to Da Ponte, Mozart refused to set this trivial text when Guardasoni commissioned a new opera from him in the same year.⁸ Instead, Da Ponte used the Bertati libretto as a basic framework, an exemplary version of the Don Juan story the morality of which he subverted with great wit and subtlety. As Baker writes:

Decisively, Da Ponte sets the old story in the new light of the modern context, where seduction can be recognized as a two-way relationship; even though women's equality remains to be won, women are conscious subjects who may participate actively in any sexual exchange that is not rape. We can infer that our own era's anxiety about violence explains why today's productions focus on that issue, but that approach betrays the libretto in several ways that ... constitute a regression from the opera's fascinating and audacious advances. Locating a whole society's violence in one individual, these current productions take a backward step away from the opera's critical awareness of collective structures and their impact on individual lives. Making the seducer violent, sadistic, crude, they inexorably imply that the women are fools to be affected by him; but the passionate nature of the opera's female characters is, differently in each case, at one with their critical intelligence, and so we are obliged to recognize (and this makes for very much more interesting interpretations) that Don Giovanni's presence gives and promises considerable pleasure to women. Translating on stage a highly critical reworking of our culture's myth of human sexuality, as if the opera itself were nothing but that myth, present-day productions appear to be willing to condemn us beyond recall to an appalling definition of our sexual dimension, in which women are eternal victims of the violent man, the violent man is eternally punished, and that is the best our society can do to improve human life.⁹

Unlike earlier critics, Baker takes seriously Da Ponte's claim that he had Dante's *Inferno* in mind when writing the libretto.¹⁰ On the level of its verbal imagery, she argues, *Don Giovanni* is structured on the principle of the *contrapasso*: the poetic figure of infernal retribution by which Dante indicates that the punishment of each sinner fits his crime. Here, I shall mention just two of her examples. The 'foul stench' (1296) to which Donna Elvira condemns Don Giovanni in the second finale is the *contrapasso* for his 'perfect nose' (131) for women, the seducer

4 Introduction

having remarked just before her first entrance that ‘I think I feel the scent of a woman’ (129–30).¹¹ Similarly, ‘the stone man’ (1400), the walking statue of the Commendatore that comes to punish the seducer, is the *contrapasso* for the latter’s alleged stoneheartedness, Leporello having just complained that his master ‘has a heart of stone or no heart at all’ (1301–2).¹² But Da Ponte’s use of the poetic figure differs from Dante’s in two important respects: each *contrapasso* in the libretto is associated with the manner of Don Giovanni’s death, not with his infernal punishment, suggesting that he is ultimately judged by human rather than divine powers, and each *contrapasso* is comparatively harsher than the transgression. The seducer’s punishment does not quite fit his crimes in the opera, in other words, and in this way, the poet invites the audience to reflect critically on the notion of justice that the traditional *Stone Guest* plays and operas instilled into the minds of generations of theatre-goers.

It is most ironic that the Mozart–Da Ponte opera has come to be identified with the cultural myth it critiques. Faced with the question of how this has come to pass, we ought to keep in mind, however, that there is no such thing as an unbiased interpretation of *Don Giovanni*. For centuries, it has been the most intensely debated and analysed of all operas, which means that people have an opinion about Don Giovanni even before they have seen or heard him on stage. Changes in society’s views of gender, sex, religion and individualism as well as shifting intellectual trends or ideological paradigms have always informed attitudes towards the opera. But opinions are also influenced, on a more concrete level, by stage productions, film versions, recordings, translations, paintings and illustrations, published editions, scenic and musical performance practices and so forth: the complex ways in which the work itself is transmitted to us. All these factors tend to impact each other and have done so for decades or centuries. Hence, it is one of the central arguments of this book that the current violent image of Don Giovanni is indebted to a text that few of today’s performers and commentators are likely to have read: the Leipzig music critic Friedrich Rochlitz’s German singing translation from 1801.

While it remains standard practice to blame his contemporary E. T. A. Hoffmann for the romanticising of *Don Giovanni*, I argue that Rochlitz, whose singing translation was used by most German opera houses throughout the nineteenth century, had a far deeper and longer-lasting impact on the opera’s performance and reception history. The fact that this impact has gone almost totally unnoticed only helps explain its ubiquity. While Hoffmann’s interpretation set a standard according to which performances were judged, at least in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century, Rochlitz’s translation directly informed performance practice. Though many other German singing translations emerged in the second half of the century, the Austrian Mozart scholar Rudolf von Freisauff complained in 1887 that Rochlitz’s (and, to a lesser extent, other early singing translations) remained ‘so closely intertwined with Mozart’s music’ that it seemed able to ‘assert a customary law for itself’.¹³ This intertwining meant that the translator’s radical refashioning of Da Ponte’s characters and the mood of the scenes influenced not only stage practice but also issues of casting, musical tempi

and vocal interpretation. With time, artistic choices turned into performance traditions that became so entrenched that even such well-informed commentators as Freisauff himself were unable to distinguish fully between *Don Giovanni* as a work and the standard way of performing that work.¹⁴ Moreover, due to the influence of German and Austrian conductors, these traditions continued even when continental opera houses north of the Alps, in the course of the twentieth century, began performing the opera in the original Italian. And they left a deep imprint on the sound recordings that began to appear in the 1930s, the majority of which, until the 1970s, were conducted by German-language natives. Recordings, in turn, became points of reference for scholars as well as for performers and stage directors, and although musicologists writing about *Don Giovanni* ostensibly write about Da Ponte's libretto and Mozart's score, the listening experience often colours the sense of what the page communicates. In turn, such academic commentaries influence not just other scholars but also performance practice.

Don Giovanni as a modern cultural icon was informed by a complex interplay of different media and cultural discourses, in short, many of which we can trace back to the nineteenth century. Partly due to the complexity of the issue, I have chosen to focus on the title character; while all the characters in the opera deserve their own studies, the book would be twice as long if I were to do them justice. Moreover, *Don Giovanni*'s early performance history is far better documented than that of the other characters.

The demonising of Don Giovanni: a historical overview

As recent research has made clear, *Don Giovanni* was originally conceived as a Habsburg court spectacle. It was commissioned by Guardasoni for the Prague wedding of Archduchess Maria Theresa, princess of Tuscany and the niece of Emperor Joseph II, to Prince Anthony of Saxony.¹⁵ Since the wedding was later moved from Prague to Dresden, and since the opera was not even ready for the planned gala premiere that was to take place during the princess' brief stay in the Bohemian capital, the intended courtly context was soon forgotten, and so was *Don Giovanni*'s identity as a comic Italian opera, at least in the German-speaking world.

This was the beginning of the reinvention of Mozart's *dramma giocoso* as a German Romantic tragedy. With the notable exception of Guardasoni's company, where the premiere production remained in the repertoire until 1806, dramaturges and translators quickly turned the opera into a singspiel with spoken dialogue instead of recitatives, and it was in this form that most German theatregoers got to know the opera until the middle of the nineteenth century. Though the very first singing translation, by the Bonn composer Christian Gottlob Neefe, was comparatively true to Da Ponte's original, new spoken scenes were quickly added by others, and these considerably changed the portrayal of the title hero. This trend began already with the first German-language production, in Mainz in March 1789, where scenes were added by the local dramaturge Christian Gottlieb Schmieder. But the most notorious alteration was the insertion of the so-called

6 Introduction

'hermit scene' for the 1790 Berlin premiere, which shows Don Giovanni murdering first a hermit and then Don Ottavio in the graveyard: a scene retained in many German-language productions far into the nineteenth century.

While such radical interventions may seem puzzling, the explanation is simple: the early adapters mistook Da Ponte's sophisticated critical rewriting for yet another run-of-the-mill *Stone Guest*, only with better music. That they should make this mistake is not surprising when we consider that German plays and operas, especially in Catholic cities, were subject to stricter moral codes and harsher censorship than Italian operas in Germany (surely, because only a few audience members understood Italian). This meant that German bourgeois opera-goers of the late eighteenth century would have been less familiar with – and probably less appreciative of – the type of radical questioning of gender roles and sexual mores that would have appealed to more cosmopolitan and predominantly aristocratic audiences in Prague and Vienna in the years before the French Revolution.¹⁶ Departing from this cultural discourse, the German adapters instead aligned Mozart's opera with the vernacular *Stone Guest* tradition, the best-known example of which is Marinelli's play. The scenes inserted into Mozart's opera all derived from that tradition, in which the seducer invariably was portrayed as a cold-blooded murderer, rapist and blasphemer. It was here that the opera first was identified with the cultural myth it rejects.

With his influential singing translation, which was published together with Breitkopf & Härtel's premiere edition of the full score, Rochlitz both continued and reacted against this 'traditionalising' of Mozart's masterpiece. The founder and editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and the publisher of a collection of anecdotes about Mozart's life, Rochlitz was staunchly committed to the promotion of German music, and his writings often show an anti-Italian bias, which we also recognise in the preface to his translation. Although omitting the scenes German dramaturges had added to the opera, he openly declared that he had 'departed entirely from the Italian now and then, not only in the words, but even in the meaning', since it was sometimes better 'to derive the text from the wonderful music than from the occasionally somewhat nonsensical rhymes of the poem'.¹⁷

The nature of Rochlitz's 'departures' has been widely misunderstood, however. In an article written around 1870 and later reproduced in Freisauff's book, the music philologist Ernst Friedrich Baumgart accused Rochlitz of portraying Don Giovanni as a Romantic hero reminiscent of Karl Moor from Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber*.¹⁸ Pointing out that Rochlitz's Don Giovanni, unlike Da Ponte's, shows signs of guilt in his encounters with the statue, he stated that Rochlitz had turned the seducer into 'an effeminate hedonist entirely consumed by his passion' while mitigating or obliterating 'his complete lack of respect for anything sacred and moral' as well as his 'foolhardy valour based on that disrespect'.¹⁹ What Baumgart failed to recognise was that it was Rochlitz who had turned the statue into a representative of 'sacred and moral' values in the first place. This shows the degree to which even people who have criticised the Rochlitz translation have remained under its spell. And Baumgart's view has

been followed by later scholars writing on the subject, Christof Bitter even echoing his wording when describing Rochlitz's translation as a 'completely effeminate' attempt to ennoble Don Giovanni and turn him into a Romantic hero in the manner of Hamlet or Karl Moor.²⁰ More recently, Sergio Durante has found the 'seeds of the heroic Don Giovanni' in Rochlitz's translation, while Edmund Goehring refers to his 'sentimentalization of the libertine', although he correctly points out that it was Rochlitz who Christianised the opera.²¹ As my line-by-line comparisons of Da Ponte and Rochlitz will make clear, these descriptions are not accurate. While Rochlitz certainly sentimentalises the other characters, there is nothing noble, heroic or sentimental about his Don Giovanni. Quite the contrary, Rochlitz consistently and emphatically departs from the meaning of Da Ponte's text in order to paint the title hero as arrogant, cynical, cruel and violent, stressing his contempt for other people and his defiance of the divine order, even if he is struck with supernatural terror towards the end. That scholars should fail to notice this is an indication of how closely the translation corresponds to the image of Don Giovanni that dominated in the nineteenth century, and which still dominates today.

Although this is not the only factor to have influenced the reception of *Don Giovanni*, obviously, it is the ultimate blind spot of the opera's reception history. It is only when we have grasped the historical significance of the early translations – in particular that of Rochlitz – that we may grasp the historical significance of Hoffmann's interpretation, and hence the full impact of the opera's nineteenth-century performance history. Rochlitz did not heroise Don Giovanni; he demonised him, enhancing his transgressions in order to justify his punishment. That was necessary partly because he omitted the murders of the hermit and Don Ottavio that traditionally justified the seducer's punishment in German adaptations, and partly because (as Goehring notes) he construed that punishment as Christian, and hence inevitably as just. The religiosity with which he informs the translation is the same as the one he attributed to the composer in one of his Mozart anecdotes in the same year. Here he has him speak 'in the language of emerging Romantic Catholicism *à la* Wackenroder', as Maynard Solomon says, Mozart referring to 'the mystical sanctuary' of the Catholic Church and the 'dark, yet urgent feelings, full of heartfelt inner passion' of those who sit through holy service, while he scorns the opposition to 'Church-imposed subjects' characteristic of 'enlightened Protestants'.²² With its emphasis on Catholic spirituality, Rochlitz's translation can hardly be described as the last of the opera's 'Enlightenment adaptations to bourgeois taste', as Ricarda Schmidt maintains.²³ She disregards Rochlitz's most fundamental change: the introduction of a religious perspective. Ironically, moreover, it seems that his Christianisation of *Don Giovanni* was possible only because his translation was published in Protestant Leipzig. In Prague and Vienna, presenting Don Giovanni's punishment as Christian would hardly have been allowed. Thus, in a 1795 memorandum, the Viennese theatre censor Franz Karl Hägelin made clear that 'religion and religious matters can never become the subject of theatrical shows. Religion is too exalted and dignified to be debased by the profane, and especially by the comic, theatre'.²⁴

The poet and music critic E. T. A. Hoffmann, who wrote his novella *Don Juan: Eine fabelhafte Begebenheit, die sich mit einem reisenden Enthusiasten zugetragen* after studying the Breitkopf & Härtel score (which included Rochlitz's translation), and who first published it in Rochlitz's journal in 1813, was not entirely convinced by the latter's reading of the opera. Schmidt has even described the story, which takes the form of a fictive memoir of an ideal performance of *Don Giovanni* – and here I agree with her – as a 'counterinterpretation' where the poet distances himself from Rochlitz's 'propagation of abstinent bourgeois morality'.²⁵ Hoffmann saw the opera as an existential and psychological tragedy of fate on a par with Goethe's *Faust*; since he did not see it as a morality play, he put less emphasis on the violence permeating the German translations. He was more influenced by Rochlitz than Schmidt acknowledges, however, as he retained the arrogance and blasphemousness of the translator's *Don Giovanni* as well as the Christian punishment, the justification for which he found in the seducer's emotional destructiveness, his inability to love one woman. In effect, commentators who accuse Hoffmann of romanticising a sexual predator overlook the fact that it is Rochlitz's *Don Giovanni* he romanticises, not Da Ponte's. And those who, like Dieter Borchmeyer, are professedly 'pleading for a *Don Giovanni* without the nineteenth century', rejecting Hoffmann's Romantic hero in favour of 'a radical evildoer' condemned by God, are not, in reality, pleading for a return to Da Ponte's eighteenth-century *Don Giovanni*, but rather for a return to the other of the nineteenth century's two dominating images of him.²⁶

Nonetheless, to make matters more complicated, the fact that Hoffmann's *Don Giovanni* is less abusive and more attractive than Rochlitz's explains why some people who knew Bassi or had seen him in the role thought his conception was close to Hoffmann's. For example, in Bassi's obituary, imagining that the handsome actor 'must have shone most seductively in the enthusiastic part of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*', Hohenthal maintained that 'the eccentric Hoffmann could scarcely have fantasised so brilliantly about this masterpiece if he had not seen Bassi himself'.²⁷ There is no indication that Hoffmann ever saw Bassi as *Don Giovanni*, and at least one other collector of Mozart anecdotes rejected Hohenthal's claim.²⁸ 'Hoffmann's *Don Giovanni* is closer to the *Faust* of the north; it is a gloomy nocturne where the demonic that remains invisible in everyday life confronts us face to face, often distorted into a horrible grimace', Johann Peter Lyser wrote in 1833; Bassi, on the other hand, 'although his underlying idea was highly tragic too, was full of the fervour, the *humour*, the decorum of the south'.²⁹

This disagreement is evidence of how Bassi's non-violent, non-arrogant portrayal of *Don Giovanni* was marginalised before it was forgotten, and of how already commentators in the first half of the nineteenth century had difficulties seeing beyond the two dominant portrayals: Rochlitz's ruthless villain and Hoffmann's troubled Romantic. Some writers even condemned portrayals that failed to conform to one of these two interpretations. Thus, in the same year as Lyser commemorated Bassi's portrayal, the playwright Adam Oehlenschläger saw the role performed in Copenhagen by Giovanni Battista Cetti who, in all likelihood, was a grand disciple of Bassi. 'Herr Cetti's pleasant individuality and

jovial nature do not really suit the burning crater Don Giovanni', Oehlenschläger complained, and so 'the young ladies' had for several years been 'delighted with "the sweet Don Giovanni"' while failing to realise that 'Don Giovanni is a villain and a criminal, and that he goes to hell at the end, or is struck down by the lightning of heaven's punishment'.³⁰ Like many of today's commentators, this proponent of the Rochlitzian conception of the seducer maintained that public morality required Don Giovanni to be represented as a criminal.

Richard Wagner, on the other hand, who subscribed to Hoffmann's interpretation, rejected the eighteenth-century portrayal because it failed to resonate, he felt, with the modern audience:

When, ... before the first French Revolution, there existed amongst an entire class of frivolous pleasure-seekers that mood in which a Don Giovanni could be deemed an entirely comprehensible phenomenon, the true expression of that mood; when this type was seized by artists and, in its last process of realisation, embodied by an actor whose whole temperament was as fitted to this personality as was the Italian tongue to give this personality an adequate expression, – the emotional effect of such an exhibition, at such a time, was certainly most definite and unmistakable.

But Wagner, writing in 1851, goes on to state that 'the entirely altered Public of the Present composed of members of the Bourse or State-officialdom', who hears the opera sung in German by German singers, must understand the character 'quite otherwise than as the poet meant'.³¹ The statement is not just significant because Wagner likely knew of Bassi's portrayal: his Dresden childhood coincided with Bassi's tenure as stage director there, and at least one close colleague of the singer, the chorusmaster Johann Aloys Miksch, was a frequent visitor to his childhood home.³² It is also significant because Wagner regards Don Giovanni as a potential figure of identification for the (male) audience, not as a potential object of the audience's desire, smiles and compassion, as female operagoers in Prague and Copenhagen reportedly did.

This conception continued into the twentieth century, and the multiple paintings and drawings of scenes from *Don Giovanni* by the German impressionist Max Slevogt are evidence of how it was now projected onto the Italian original.³³ Slevogt always gave Don Giovanni the features of the Portuguese baritone Francisco D'Andrade whom he first saw in the role in Munich in 1894 and regarded as its ideal interpreter. His conception of the character as an embodiment of demonic boldness and defiance was heavily indebted to Hoffmann, however, though it was also marked by the outbreaks of physical violence we find in Rochlitz and by an orgiastic vitality characteristic of an age fascinated with Wagner and Nietzsche. Slevogt's paintings contributed importantly to the twentieth century's iconic image of Don Giovanni. His influence is clearly discernible in Paul Czinner's film version of the opera, which was based on Austrian director Herbert Graf's Salzburg production of 1954; Samuel Ramey was costumed to look like one of Slevogt's paintings of d'Andrade on the cover of Herbert von

Karajan's 1985 recording, and so was Christian Gerhaher in Loy's 2014 Frankfurt production.³⁴

It should be stressed, of course, that not all nineteenth-century interpretations of *Don Giovanni* can be described as either Rochlitzian or Hoffmannesque; there have always been commentators who treated the seducer with more sympathy and humour. That Hoffmann was not only reacting against Rochlitz's crude villain but also against a more light-hearted contemporary conception emerges from a dialogue in his novella where a lady complains that the performer of the title role, whom Hoffmann's narrator considers ideal, 'had been far too sinister, far too serious and had not performed the frivolous, jolly character lightly enough at all'.³⁵ The non-condemnatory conception found its most eloquent proponent in Søren Kierkegaard whose famous treatise on the opera, 'The Immediate Erotic Stages or The Musical-Erotic', was included in the first volume of his magnum opus *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* from 1843. The Danish philosopher, who described Don Giovanni as the personification of seductiveness, drew attention to a central feature of the opera's dramaturgy, which has led some commentators to denounce not only Don Giovanni but also his composer as immoral: the fact that Mozart employs all his musical charm in order to depict and embody the seducer's erotic charm.³⁶ It was awareness of this feature, clearly, that led John Ruskin, one of the principal ideologues of Victorian womanhood, to criticise Mozart's decision to set Da Ponte's libretto, one of the 'foolishest and most monstrous of conceivable human words and subjects of thought', in the harshest terms. 'No such spectacle of unconscious (and in that unconsciousness all the more fearful) moral degradation of the highest faculty to the lowest purpose can be found in history', he declared in 1867, later opining that 'young English ladies' ought to teach peasant girls to join in 'choirs of innocent song' rather than study the melodies of *Don Giovanni* and *La traviata*.³⁷ George Bernard Shaw, who on several occasions took it upon himself to defend Don Giovanni, later poked fun at Ruskin's 'explosion of pious horror', arguing that it is not 'by any means an established fact that the world owes more to its Don Ottavios than to its Don Juans', and concluding that the opera 'is eminent in virtue of its uncommon share of wisdom, beauty, and humor; and if any theory of morals leads to the conclusion that it is foolish and monstrous, so much the worse for the theory'.³⁸ However, Kierkegaard's and Shaw's more favourable views of the Mozartian seducer remained exceptions to the rule, in the nineteenth as well as in the twentieth centuries.

While scholars have long focused on the opera's nineteenth-century reception history, it is indeed on time that we begin to recognise the impact of its more recent reception as well. No doubt, the most sinister trend during the twentieth century was the Nazi abuse of Mozart as an icon of German art. While it is well-known that Wagner's heroes were used by the Third Reich for propagandistic purposes and interpreted according to fascist ideology, it is less known that the Nazis tried to use Don Giovanni in a similar way. This emerges, however, from a 1938 book by the dramaturge Siegfried Anheisser, a committed Nazi who made it his mission to supplant the singing translations of the Mozart-Da Ponte operas that the Jewish conductor Hermann Levi had prepared at the end of the nineteenth

century, and which had finally supplanted Rochlitz's as the most widely used versions.³⁹ Echoing Wagner's rejection of the eighteenth-century conception of Mozart's seducer, Anheisser objected to what he saw as the old 'confectionary Don Giovanni' whom singers portrayed as a mere 'reckless gentleman', and his interpretation of the opera carries both of the nineteenth century's dominant images of the character to an extreme.⁴⁰ On the one hand, he intensified Rochlitz's demonising of Don Giovanni whom he describes as 'Lucifer become man, bathed in all his splendour', who 'does not even have a spark of feeling for any woman'; on the other hand, he intensified what might be described as Hoffmann's 'amoralising' of that demonic character, as when he describes Leporello, in Nietzschean terms, as 'the human, all too human side of this superman'.⁴¹ As a means to promote this distorted image as authentically Mozartian, Anheisser intensified Baumgart's depiction of the difference between Da Ponte and Rochlitz, describing the latter's Don Giovanni as a 'sentimentally ennobled' and 'effeminate dreamer' and (again) comparing him to Karl Moor and Hamlet.⁴² More explicitly than Baumgart, he suggested that the nineteenth century had mitigated – rather than aggravated – Don Giovanni's transgressions.

When a new generation of German artists and scholars struggled to reassess their disgraced cultural heritage in the decades after the fall of the Third Reich, they repudiated the 'amoral' image of Don Giovanni, which was now associated with Hoffmann, but not the 'demonic' image, which was retained. We find the central elements of this approach in the 1961 doctoral thesis of the young theatre historian Christof Bitter. As the most thorough study of *Don Giovanni's* German performance history to date, this little book has been a point of reference for most later scholars working on the topic, and it has contributed significantly, directly and indirectly, to the shaping of today's standard image of the character. One of the merits of the book is that Bitter, in a break with previous commentaries and the nineteenth-century reception history, insists that *Don Giovanni* is a work of the Enlightenment. By 'Enlightenment', however, he refers exclusively to the bourgeois dramas of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, without taking account of the differences between courtly and bourgeois culture, between Catholic and Protestant contexts, between Italian and German theatre and between critical and didactic art. This led him to ignore the opera's parodic layers and see Don Giovanni, as most nineteenth-century commentators had done, as 'someone who digresses from the human and the divine order, who is unable to use the respite given to him but remains rigid, for which reason he is expelled from society and perishes'.⁴³ Central to Bitter's view was his interpretation of the full title, *Il dissoluto punito o sia Il Don Giovanni (The Debauchee Punished, or Don Juan)*, which has been echoed by multiple later scholars. Read simply, the title is a mere statement of facts: Don Giovanni is a debauchee who is punished. It only contains a moral verdict for those who regard debauchery as a crime or all punishments as just, and so Da Ponte plays with the preconceptions of the audience. Projecting a note of moral censure into the title, however, Bitter argues that Don Giovanni is punished by 'society', his death following as a natural consequence of his actions. What this modernist critic offered, in effect, is what we might call a 'historicised' version of

the nineteenth-century German *Don Giovanni*. Therefore, he was unable to provide a convincing analysis of the difference between Da Ponte's and Rochlitz's representations of the seducer, and this was probably what led him to take over the traditional description of Rochlitz's *Don Giovanni* as an 'effeminate' and 'ennobled' Karl Moor or Hamlet.

For all its weaknesses, Bitter's book set a new standard for the contextualisation of Mozart's opera, and the moralistic attitude only became more pronounced in the following decades. Joseph Losey's film version from 1979 also offered a historicisation of the demonic *Don Giovanni* though with a more explicit political colouring and an emphatic denunciation of the title hero who is portrayed as the embodiment of a corrupt and abusive aristocracy. Losey described him as a 'dangerous, ice-cold and steel-hard man' who 'drives the behaviour of his class to its extreme absurdity'.⁴⁴ More recently, the emphasis may have changed from class to gender, but the demonic structure – developed by the early German translators, heroised by the Romantics, radicalised by the Nazis, historicised and moralised by the post-war generation – still dominates. Hence, Slavoj Žižek attributes to *Don Giovanni* 'an autonomy so radical' that one can 'discern the contours of what Kant called "radical Evil"', elsewhere describing Mozart's seducer as 'a pure machinelike drive to conquer lacking any "depth" of personality: the ultimate horror of this person resides in the fact that he is not a proper person at all'.⁴⁵ Some even echo the Ruskinian uneasiness about the seductiveness of Mozart's music and its potential effects on the audience, Daniel Herwitz concluding that 'the Don makes the music more sexist, because the Don is also a rapist, a bastard to women, and a man who beats up other men'.⁴⁶

The difference between this conception of the role and its original portrayal could not be more fundamental. In the following chapter, I will trace the general outlines of Bassi's *Don Giovanni*: what we know about his collaboration with Mozart; his characteristics as a stage performer; and general assessments of his portrayal. The last six chapters then follow the title character through the opera, placing Bassi's performance in individual scenes or numbers in the context of Da Ponte's critical engagement with the *Stone Guest* tradition and an examination of how the violent, predatorial image of the role was shaped by the Rochlitz translation and nineteenth-century performance practice. I focus on the opening scene with the duel, on the Act I street scene in which *Don Giovanni* encounters the three women in succession, on the party episode that concludes Act I, on the disguise episode that opens Act II, on the graveyard scene and on the second finale. In the postscript, I show that *Don Giovanni* was regarded as a connoisseur's opera by its first audience and that it was one of the first operas to attain the status of an autonomous work of art, which conflicts with the current tendency to subject it to a moral framework.

Notes

- 1 Heinse 1837: 211, in Schneider 2016: 404n. Hohenthal's review was originally published in *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 3 July 1830, 210–14.

- 2 ‘damals ... besass er nur noch geringe Stimmittel, wusste aber dieselben so trefflich zu verwerthen, und gab die für ihn componirte Rolle mit so vollendeter Meisterschaft, dass jenes glänzende Resultat, welches er Anfangs damit erzielte, sich auch auf diese späte Leistung übertrug und denselben noch immer als bevorzugten Liebbling der Prager Damen, selbst der höchsten Aristokratie bezeichnete. / Von tadelloser, ritterlicher Eleganz und verführerischer Liebenswürdigkeit den Frauen gegenüber, nannte ihn meine Mutter stets unerreichten Vertreter dieser Partie’; Börner-Sandrini 1876: 213.
- 3 A 2020 performance of this production, with Christopher Maltman in the title role, was streamed from the Liceu in Barcelona during the global pandemic.
- 4 Along with the other Italian *Stone Guest* librettos from the eighteenth century (apart from Da Ponte’s), Porta’s libretto is reproduced in Russell 1993, as are revisions made for Gioacchino Albertini’s 1780 version. For a comparison of Da Ponte’s libretto to earlier versions of the story performed in Prague, see Eisendle 2011.
- 5 Baker 2005: 95.
- 6 John W. Francis, *Old New York, or, Reminiscences of the Past Sixty Years*, New York, 1866: 266, in Heartz 1990: 174.
- 7 ‘Ta Opera wcale się różni od tey którą już reprezentowano na tym Teatrze pod tymże tytułem, albowiem Poeta za dobre osądził wiele czynić odmian w Scenach, w zamiarze zbliżenia się więcej do terażniejszego gustu i do wyrazu Muzyki’; poster reproduced in *Echo Muzyczne i Teatralne*, 15 December 1883, 120. My thanks to Daria Skjoldager-Nielsen for helping me with the transcription and translation from Polish. Żorawska-Witkowska suggests that ‘scenes’ refer to the stage sets; see Żorawska-Witkowska 2011: 235–7. Da Ponte was not involved in the Warsaw production, however; more likely, Guardasoni was referring to the standard episodes of the *Stone Guest* story as the audience would have known them from the Albertini-Porta opera.
- 8 The commissioning of the opera is described this way in Da Ponte 1999: 58.
- 9 Baker 2005: 105–6.
- 10 See Da Ponte 1976: 125.
- 11 Baker 2005: 92. All references to the libretto are to Da Ponte 1995.
- 12 Baker 2005: 92.
- 13 Freisauff 1887: 73.
- 14 Sergio Durante has shown how Rochlitz’s 1796 translation of Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito*, which also made radical changes to the motivations of the characters, had a similar strong influence on that opera’s nineteenth-century reception history; see Durante 1994.
- 15 For a reconstruction of the commission and genesis of the opera, see Weidinger 2002: I, 18–71; see also the chapter ‘Dynastic Alliances: The Genesis of *Don Giovanni*’, in Woodfield 2019.
- 16 On this subject, with a focus on early censorship of German singing translations of *Don Giovanni*, see Nedbal 2017a.
- 17 Rochlitz 1801: ii, in Schneider 2009: 40n. All quotations from Rochlitz’s translation are from this edition.
- 18 Freisauff 1887: 95.
- 19 Freisauff 1887: 92–3.
- 20 Bitter 1961: 87–8.
- 21 Durante 2012: 64; Goehring 2013: 63.
- 22 Solomon 1991: 39–40. The anecdote appeared in *AmZ*, 15 April 1801: 494–5.
- 23 Schmidt 2009: 72.
- 24 Franz Karl Hägelin, *Denkschrift*, Vienna, 1795: 69; in Weidinger 2002: IV, 864.
- 25 Schmidt 2009: 69, 75. On Hoffmann’s novella as a reaction against the German singing translations’ combination of moralism and farcicality, see also Markx 2005, though she only mentions Rochlitz in passing.
- 26 Borchmeyer 2005: 165.

14 Introduction

- 27 Heinse 1825: 6, in Waidelich 2001: 208.
- 28 According to Hoffmann's publisher Carl Friedrich Kunz, the model of his Don Giovanni was Franz Ignaz von Holbein whom he saw in the role in Bamberg in 1810–1; see the commentary in Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 674–5.
- 29 Lyser 1833: 126, in Schneider 2009: 47n.
- 30 Oehlenschläger 1868: 110, quoted from Schneider 2018a: 47.
- 31 Wagner 1993: 282. Translation adapted.
- 32 See Wagner 1983: 27–8.
- 33 For reproductions of all Slevogt's depictions of Don Giovanni, see Imiela and Roland 1991.
- 34 The Czinner-Graf film, with Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting, has been released on DVD by Deutsche Grammophon.
- 35 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 91.
- 36 For an examination of Kierkegaard's interpretation of *Don Giovanni* in the context of the Copenhagen production, see Schneider 2018a.
- 37 Ruskin 1867: 23; Ruskin 1871: 17–18.
- 38 'Ruskin on Music', 2 May 1894, in Shaw 1981: 196.
- 39 On Siegfried Anheisser, see Levi 2011: 58–67.
- 40 Anheisser 1938: 60.
- 41 Anheisser 1938: 53, 54.
- 42 Anheisser 1938: 47–50.
- 43 Bitter 1961: 138.
- 44 Interview with Joseph Losey featured on the extra track of the DVD version, Concorde 2006.
- 45 Žižek 1993: 167–8; Žižek 1997: 112.
- 46 Herwitz 2006: 134.

1 Luigi Bassi as Don Giovanni

The singer and his role

According to an autobiographical sketch that Luigi Bassi (1766–1825) wrote at some point after 1806, and which was reproduced in his obituary, the title role in *Don Giovanni* had been ‘composed for’ him.¹ And according to a rumour that circulated in Dresden in his later years, Mozart even ‘had Bassi’s personality in mind’ when he composed it.² Most probably, it was Bassi’s vocal abilities and stage personality Mozart had in mind, but the claims remind us of the high extent to which eighteenth-century operas were the results of collaborative efforts. Mozart wrote his arias for concrete singers, which inevitably affected the portrayal of the characters.³ And Da Ponte, too, insisted that ‘the real Aristotles of a dramatic poet are in general, not only the composer of the music, but also the first buffo, the prima donna and not very seldom the 2d 3d and 4th buffoon of the company’.⁴ Therefore, Luigi Bassi was not simply the first interpreter of the character of Don Giovanni; he was, in more than one sense, its creator and thus inseparable from its original conception.

Mozart probably heard and saw Bassi during his trip to Prague in early 1787, since Bassi is likely to have sung Count Almaviva in the performance of *Le nozze di Figaro* he attended at the National Theatre on 17 January and in the one he conducted three days later.⁵ This means that the composer would have been able to draw on his own impressions of the performer when Guardasoni commissioned him to write a new opera for the company during the summer. He may also have had the singers of the Vienna Court Opera in mind when writing the opera, anticipating a later production in the imperial capital; and it is possible that he specifically had the famous *buffo* Stefano Mandini, the original Count Almaviva, in mind for Don Giovanni, as Julian Rushton has argued.⁶ However, since Mandini never sang the role, we will never know if Mozart would have adapted it for him.

Mozart does seem to have adapted, if not composed, the role for Luigi Bassi. In his study of the autograph score, Alan Tyson showed that both Don Giovanni’s Act II solos and both his duets with Leporello as well as the second finale were written on paper the composer had acquired in Prague.⁷ This is striking, since only the overture, Masetto’s aria, the postlude of Zerlina’s Act II aria and a few recitative passages were written on similar paper, which could suggest that large

parts of Don Giovanni's music were composed or adapted for the singer at a late point. Since Mozart probably knew Bassi's voice, this could mean that the casting of the role was an unsolved matter when he arrived in Prague, less than four weeks before the premiere on 29 October. Ian Woodfield has argued that Gioachino Costa – another baritone in Guardasoni's company who would sing Don Giovanni in the Leipzig premiere the following summer – might have been a candidate for the role in the Prague premiere as well.⁸ What supports this theory is the fact that Masetto's aria was written on Prague paper too, although Mozart must have been familiar with the voice of Giuseppe Lolli, the original Commendatore and Masetto, who had sung in Vienna in 1786.⁹ Possibly, neither the role of Don Giovanni nor the double role of the Commendatore and Masetto had been cast when the composer arrived. In that case, all three baritones in the company might have been in play for these roles, and hence Mozart may only have had Bassi's voice and stage personality in mind when he wrote the duets with Leporello, the Act II solos and the second finale.

Such last-minute casting and composing might be the source of an often-told anecdote, which I have only been able to trace back to the French music historian Castil-Blaze. In 1852, he claimed that Bassi had urged Mozart to rewrite Don Giovanni's and Zerlina's duettino four times because the singer found it too difficult and therefore musically ineffective.¹⁰ This is unlikely since the duettino is written on Viennese paper, and Castil-Blaze's depiction of Bassi as a single-minded star performer hardly fits the historical image of a twenty-one-year-old baritone in a small, provincial company.¹¹ If authentic at all, the anecdote is more likely to have referred to another part of the opera originally. Bitter's suggestion that it was the canzonetta Mozart revised on Bassi's instigation is plausible, but the story could also have referred to one of the three other numbers written on Prague paper.¹² Or perhaps the orally transmitted story about Mozart's (*re*)writing of four numbers necessitated by the late casting developed into the story of a capricious star singer demanding *four rewritings of one number*.

The only one of Don Giovanni's solos that was written on Viennese paper was the so-called champagne aria. In the obituary, Hohenthal recounted that Bassi had been 'so dissatisfied' with the aria when he first saw it 'that he asked the composer to write him a bigger aria in the style of those days instead'. Mozart had calmly told him to wait and see how it was received at the premiere, however, and as it happened, 'the enthusiastic Prague audience, with rapturous applause, immediately demanded that the number was sung *da capo*'.¹³ In a later version of the anecdote, Hohenthal presented Bassi's initial reaction as an example of 'how little the artists of Guardasoni's company were able to rise above the conventional', and the singer, who so badly wanted 'an aria composed according to all the rules', had dismissed the champagne aria as a 'bagatelle', prompting Mozart to explain 'the dramatic context' to him.¹⁴ To Hohenthal, the idea of a young performer asking the greatest composer of all time to revise the title role in his most famous opera might have seemed close to blasphemy, but in the eighteenth century such negotiations were the order of the day, and Mozart did, after all, revise or write Don Giovanni's two other solos for his lead singer.

This does not mean that he regarded him as the perfect Don Giovanni. According to another of Hohenthal's anecdotes, Mozart 'thought the actor too young for his idea of the character, and Bassi would perhaps discover for himself that he would only be ripe for a satisfactory performance of the role at a later point'.¹⁵ Hohenthal adds that the older Bassi tended to agree with Mozart. This hardly suggests that the composer had envisioned the character as being older than Bassi's age at the time, though, as Hohenthal proposes, influenced as he is by Hoffmann's vision of the seducer. Da Ponte describes Don Giovanni as 'an extremely licentious *young* gentleman' in the list of characters (author's emphasis), of which Hohenthal was unaware since the description was omitted in the Dresden libretto, which was probably the only Italian edition he knew.¹⁶ More likely, Mozart's reservations concerned the artistic immaturity of the actor. Incidentally, Karl Ludwig Costenoble had described the nineteen-year-old Bassi as 'somewhat wooden', though he found his singing 'pleasant' and he was 'generally admired' by the Leipzig audience.¹⁷ And Mozart himself is known to have been unimpressed with Guardasoni's singers. He admitted that he was unable to concentrate during their performance of Giovanni Paisiello's *Le gare generose* in January 1787.¹⁸ And when he returned to Prague in October, he noted that the company was 'not as adept as that in Vienna when it comes to rehearsing such an opera in such a short time', complaining that the singers refused, 'out of laziness', to rehearse on days when they had to perform in the evening.¹⁹

This criticism adds context to one of Lyser's anecdotes, included in a fictive memoir of Bassi from 1847. Bassi 'assured me in later years that he always attempted to sing and play the role exactly as Mozart wanted', Lyser states, 'and the "gran maestro" was very pleased with him'.²⁰ In Lyser's novella *Don Juan* from 1837, Bassi tells Mozart as follows: 'I will do my utmost so that you'll be *pleased* with me'.²¹ And in his 1856 novella *Don Giovanni*, Bassi says: 'If you'll rehearse the part with me yourself, ... then I think you'll be pleased with me'.²² Lyser had never met Bassi, but he drew on the memoirs of people who did know him, and the fact that he used the same formulation in three contexts, over a twenty-year period, could suggest that he was drawing on an oral tradition that went back to Bassi himself. Bassi promising Mozart – who found the Prague singers generally lazy and unprofessional, as we know – to do his best to 'please' him fits Hohenthal's story about the composer finding him too young: while he was unable to do full justice to the role at the premiere, the youthful performer may have recognised that practice and experience eventually would allow him to perform it adequately. At the end of the book, I shall return to the topic of the late eighteenth-century concept of the performer's fidelity to the composer's vision.

Bassi had plenty of time to refine his portrayal. In Prague, *Don Giovanni* was performed 116 times between 1787 and 1798 (though not exclusively by Guardasoni's company), and between 1799 and 1806 it was performed thirty-five times in Italian.²³ Bassi is likely to have sung the title role in the majority, if not in all, of these performances, reviews of the company from 1794, 1800 and 1807 listing it among his most admired portrayals.²⁴ He most probably sang the role in the Warsaw premiere on 14 October 1789; he sang it in Leipzig in the summer of

1794, and he almost certainly sang it in the summer seasons of 1792 and 1793 as well.²⁵ He also sang it in some or all of the performances given at the Bohemian country estates of Prince Joseph Franz Lobkowitz, at Raudnitz (Roudnice nad Labem) in 1804 and 1806, and at Eisenberg (Jezeří) in 1808.²⁶ All in all, he sang the role almost every season for about twenty years. Naturally, the portrayal developed as the actor matured, though we can assume that it continued to follow the outlines drawn by Da Ponte, Mozart and Guardasoni in October 1787. The last time Bassi sang the role he was around forty, at which point his Don Giovanni was regarded as authoritative by those who had seen him on stage. That the actor and the character had grown together in the awareness of contemporaries is suggested by Weber's reference to 'old Don-Giovanni Bassi' when he first met him in Prague in 1814, seven years after the singer had last appeared on the stage of the local theatre.²⁷

Intention and experience: prescriptive and descriptive sources

For the reconstruction of something as ephemeral as an actor's portrayal of a role in the pre-recording era, it is useful to draw on a combination of what I refer to as prescriptive and descriptive sources.²⁸ While prescriptive sources inform us about what the actor intended or was intended to do on stage, descriptive sources inform us about what he, in fact, did on stage but also of how spectators experienced those stage actions. The individual aesthetic experience inevitably differs from the artistic intention, which is especially true of a theatrical performance; by definition, it is a co-created event where the dramatic text or score, the actor and the spectator meet and interact.

As for Bassi's Don Giovanni, the most important prescriptive sources are, of course, the libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749–1838) and the musical score by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91). But changes and variations in early versions of these two texts provide insights into the process of creation, which included the active participation of the performer. Giovanna Gronda's edition of the libretto lists the several differences between 1) the preliminary libretto printed in Vienna in 1787, 2) the text notated in the autograph score, 3) the libretto printed for the premiere in Prague on 29 October and 4) the libretto printed for the Viennese premiere on 7 May 1788. In addition, variations in the 1789 Warsaw libretto give hints as to how Bassi's portrayal developed in the years immediately after the first performance.

While Mozart's autograph score contains clues concerning last-minute adjustments and the rehearsal period, as already discussed, conductors' and prompters' scores as well as vocal parts associated with productions in which Bassi sang not only contribute to our understanding of how his portrayal developed during the twenty years he sang the role; they may also contain information about changes Mozart himself ordered during rehearsals but neglected to write into the autograph or the conductor's score. Milada Jonášová's several articles on Czech *Don Giovanni* manuscripts contribute importantly to the mapping of this situation.

Playbills may be regarded as a third type of prescriptive source since they show the manager's view of what the audience was to expect in the theatre; and in the company of Domenico Guardasoni (c. 1731–1806), the manager also happened to be the stage director. A surviving playbill for a 1794 Leipzig performance of *Don Giovanni*, featuring Bassi in the title role, which was brought to light by Ian Woodfield, even contains a summary of the action that may be said to represent one authorial interpretation of the action.

In the absence of prop lists and stage protocols, we must turn to oral traditions for further insights into how Mozart and Da Ponte intended the opera to be performed. The most important anecdotal source of this type is Count Peter Wilhelm von Hohenthal (1799–1859) who met Bassi and 'learned to become truly and sincerely fond of him' after returning to his native Dresden in 1819.²⁹ In addition to Bassi's obituary, Hohenthal wrote, likewise under the pseudonym 'Friedrich Heinse', a review of a *Don Giovanni* guest performance by the Italian department of the Royal Saxon Opera in Leipzig in 1830, in which he told several anecdotes about Mozart and the premiere of the opera that Bassi had told him.³⁰ While the young count was certainly influenced by Hoffmann's reading, which coloured his interpretation of some of these stories, we have no reason to doubt their basic authenticity.

Another set of anecdotes can be traced back to Johann Aloys Miksch (1765–1845), a renowned voice coach and a singer of the Royal Saxon Opera who retired from the stage in 1817 and then served as chorusmaster of the company's German department from 1820 to 1831. In 1816, after Bassi had become the stage director of the Italian department, Miksch took over the role of Masetto in the production of *Don Giovanni*, and Weber's diaries and letters show that the German Kapellmeister often socialised with Bassi and Miksch together in the years 1817 to 1819.³¹ Among a few anecdotes about Bassi and *Don Giovanni* that can be traced back to Miksch is an entry in the handwritten journal of another local singing teacher, Karl Näke (fl. 1839–71), who on 13 January 1855 recorded a conversation with a grandson of Miksch in which he heard of Mozart's instructions concerning the performance of the champagne aria. The present whereabouts of the journal are unknown, but the Dresden music historian Otto Schmid cited the relevant passage in an article about Bassi from 1926, which Till Gerrit Waidelich has brought to the attention of modern scholars.

Descriptive sources reflect the experiences of people who had actually seen Bassi as *Don Giovanni*. The earliest and best-known source of this type is also our only pictorial source: the famous picture by the Leipzig engraver Medard Thönert (1754–1814), which shows Bassi as *Don Giovanni*, singing the canzonetta below the window of Donna Elvira's chambermaid (see Figure 1.1). Ernst Ludwig Gerber dates the engraving to 1797, three years after Bassi's last performance in Leipzig, which could suggest that it was based on an earlier drawing, possibly one made after a performance in Prague.³²

We find the earliest descriptions of Bassi's portrayal in reviews of the German-language production mounted at the Royal Theatre of the Estates (under which name the National Theatre was known after 1798) after the dissolution of the



Figure 1.1 Medard Thönert: 'Don Giovanni performed by Signor Bassi' (Act II scene 3). Engraving. 1797. Photo ©: Lebrecht Music & Arts / Alamy Stock Photo.

Italian company in 1807. In the decade after he relinquished the role, Bassi was still the model to which performers were compared. Another Prague source is the composer Johann Wenzel Tomaschek (1774–1850) who first heard *Don Giovanni* performed by Guardasoni's company in 1791 and continued to hear it 'countless times' during the next fifteen years, which enabled him 'to play the entire opera on the piano, merely from hearing it'.³³ In 1839 he was asked by the editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* to record the metronome numbers for the tempi of Guardasoni's production as he remembered them. These tempi have generally received bad press from scholars and conductors who have accused them of missing the character of the music and the dramatic situations, of giving in to the habits of singers and Romantic tastes and, above all, of being unreasonably fast.³⁴ We can trace this view back to the musicologist Walter Gerstenberg who wrote, erroneously, that Tomaschek had only heard the opera in 1791, hence objecting that the old man's memory must have failed him after half a century. This error has been repeated by all later scholars discussing the source, which has added to the scepticism. Certainly, Tomaschek paid little heed to tempo markings, time signatures and the smallest note values, but he seems to have based his metronome numbers on what he remembered as being the expressive character of the music, and the generally high speed does agree with what we can gather from other sources. Considering the extent to which twentieth-century conductors tended to rely on nineteenth-century performance traditions too, a reassessment of Tomaschek is therefore called for. Austrian conductor Josef Wallnig has defended his plan, observing that it challenges the rigid reliance on tempo proportions among some modern conductors and that it includes tempo relations and non-relations that do not reflect a dramaturgical justification after the fact. In his memoirs, published 1845–46, Tomaschek described his first encounter with *Don Giovanni*, moreover, and also briefly compared Guardasoni's production, including Bassi's portrayal, to a German-language performance he saw in Vienna in 1814, clearly relying on his handwritten account from the time.

One group of sources is associated with people who had seen Bassi as Don Giovanni in Leipzig in the early 1790s. The fact that they could not have seen him more than a few times in the role explains why some of them are coloured by the opera's nineteenth-century literary reception.

The most important of these sources are the reminiscences of one of two 'judicious dramaturges' who reviewed performances at Hamburg's municipal theatre in the local periodical *Originalien aus dem Gebiete der Wahrheit, Kunst, Laune und Phantasie*.³⁵ The critic in question published between 1817 and 1826 under the letter 'a'. Describing Bassi as 'the prototype of Don Giovanni', he included his performance among the four operatic portrayals that had made the deepest impression on him, and it clearly constituted the ideal against which he measured later performances.³⁶ I have not been able to identify this anonymous critic whom I will simply refer to as the 'Hamburg Critic', but it can be inferred from his references to other performers that he had seen Bassi in the 1790s, probably in Leipzig.

The Leipzig-born poet Johann Friedrich Kind (1768–1843), otherwise known as the librettist of Weber's *Der Freischütz*, mentioned, in an 1822 review of the

German-language production in Dresden, that he had seen Bassi perform the role ‘in times long past’.³⁷ Kind had lived in Dresden since May 1792, but it is reasonable to assume that he visited his family in Leipzig in the summer of that or one of the two following years.

An ‘old actor’ whose reminiscences were published in Berlin in 1852, providing a detailed description of Bassi’s *Don Giovanni* costume, had definitely seen him in Leipzig. He might be identical with Christian August Leissring (1777–1852), a longstanding member of the Frankfurt theatre who had attended the St. Thomas School in Leipzig from 1792 to 1795.³⁸

In Bassi’s obituary, Hohenthal mentions that he, ‘with rapture’, had heard three ‘connoisseurs whose voice carries the greatest weight’ speak of ‘individual performances’ by the singer.³⁹ These were the music critic Friedrich Rochlitz (1769–1842), the poet Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853) and the music theorist Amadeus Wendt (1783–1836).

Rochlitz spent almost all his life in Leipzig where he saw several operas produced by Guardasoni, ‘the very knowledgeable but also – according to the Italian manner – niggard entrepreneur of a small yet excellent Italian opera company’.⁴⁰ It is unlikely that he did not see Bassi as *Don Giovanni* during these years, which would suggest that his singing translation represented a deliberate rejection of the Italian original.

Neither Rochlitz nor the two other writers mentioned by Hohenthal ever refer to Bassi in their writings, but Tieck is known to have been impressed with his portrayal of Count Robinson in Domenico Cimarosa’s *Il matrimonio segreto*, which he saw in Leipzig in 1792.⁴¹ He must have seen him as *Don Giovanni* during that summer, too, for a friend of his, the Shakespeare scholar Baron Hermann von Friesen (1802–82), mentioned him in an 1871 memoir among certain ‘old men who had seen Bassi as *Don Giovanni*’, recounting what Tieck had told him about Bassi’s portrayal after Friesen met Tieck in Dresden in 1825.⁴²

Wendt wrote a short essay about *Don Giovanni* for a Leipzig periodical in 1818, an excerpt of which was reproduced in Hohenthal’s 1830 review. A native of the city, Wendt was barely eleven years old when Bassi performed there the last time, but he is likely to have seen him as *Don Giovanni* as a child, since he sang as a chorister at the local theatre in 1794 in return for free admission to the performances.⁴³ His view of Bassi and of *Don Giovanni* was probably more indebted to oral traditions, though. This was certainly the case, too, with the Hamburg-born critic Karl Wilhelm Reinhold (1777–1841), who compared the portrayal of *Don Giovanni* in the Weimar company’s guest performance in Leipzig in 1807 to Bassi’s.

The most important group of descriptive textual sources consists of anecdotes that can be traced back to the soprano Luigia Sandrini-Caravoglia (1782–1869), the last *prima donna* of Guardasoni’s company and a long-time colleague of Bassi. Her daughter wrote of the nineteen-year-old Luigia Caravoglia’s first encounter with *Don Giovanni*:

When my mother ... joined the Italian Opera in Prague in the year 1802, she was immediately entrusted with the role of Donna Anna in Mozart’s *Don*

Giovanni! A task, indeed, that caused no little anxiety in the youthful singer who had only been engaged in comic operas in Italy so far. That she now possessed the difficult part after a few rehearsals and gradually became able to master it entirely was, to the best of her belief, merely a consequence of her great enthusiasm for Mozart's ravishingly beautiful music, and also thanks to Bassi's masterful performance of the title role, which spurred my mother to her utmost in the difficult task of representing a Donna Anna appropriate to this excellent Don Giovanni.⁴⁴

In the fall of 1806, Caravoglia took part in opera performances at Raudnitz where Bassi acted as stage director. He 'also performed Don Giovanni on urgent request', however, 'and was, as mother affirmed, despite his fifty years [*sic*], still the most elegant, charming and irresistible performer of this difficult role, which she claimed never to have seen acted as excellently by *any* other singer'. On this occasion, Caravoglia 'sang Zerlina for the first time, although she had always sung Donna Anna in Prague'.⁴⁵ After the dissolution of Prague's Italian opera company the following year, Sandrini-Caravoglia (as she became after her marriage) remained briefly as the leading singer of the German company before she joined the Royal Saxon Opera in Dresden in 1808. When Bassi joined that company as a singer and stage director in 1815, he and Sandrini-Caravoglia became colleagues once more; on 10 May 1817, they appeared together as Masetto and Donna Elvira, respectively, which was the last time Bassi ever sang in *Don Giovanni*.⁴⁶ Sandrini-Caravoglia continued to sing with the Royal Saxon Opera until her retirement at the end of 1831, shortly before the dissolution of the Italian department.

Sandrini-Caravoglia's reminiscences of Bassi's portrayal of Don Giovanni were written down by her daughter, Marie Börner-Sandrini (1808–90), who had sung with the Royal Saxon Opera from 1824 to 1829. In 1815, at the age of seven, she had shared the stage with Bassi in Antonio Salieri's *Axur re d'Ormus*, and she also claimed to 'clearly remember having seen and heard him once as Don Giovanni at that time'.⁴⁷ There is no record of such a performance; what Börner-Sandrini remembered is more likely to have been Bassi's single appearance as Masetto when she was eight years old. Her meticulous description of his acting in the opera was based entirely on her mother's account, which was obviously very vivid; Börner-Sandrini's first collection of anecdotes, included in the first volume of her memoirs from 1876, was reproduced by Otto Schmid, while her second collection, published in a commemorative article about Bassi from 1888, was brought to light by Waidelich. The fact that these anecdotes appeared in print so late might lead us to regard them with suspicion, but that is to leave their peculiar nature and manner of transmission out of account. Sandrini-Caravoglia, who had sung all three female roles in *Don Giovanni* in productions in which Bassi sang, and two of which he directed, is bound to have had a clearer image of his conception and portrayal of the title role than most people. And Börner-Sandrini, who was a professional performer and voice coach like her mother, often heard her tell these stories. This explains the high level of detail in her accounts.

The accuracy of Börner-Sandrini's accounts is also corroborated by earlier sources. The first of these is the journalist Karl Ferdinand Philippi (1795–1852) who, around 1816, moved to Dresden where he became a feared theatre critic. In February 1825, seven months before Bassi's death, he wrote a review of the local German-language production, referring to the rumour about Mozart having had 'Bassi's personality in mind' when writing the title role and adding that the old singer 'still lives in the veneration of our ageing contemporaries, and in their hearts remains inseparable from the glory of the godlike Mozart'.⁴⁸ Philippi's idea of the character was clearly based on stories of Bassi's portrayal, and a number of correspondences between his dramaturgical observations and Börner-Sandrini's anecdotes indicate that he relied on Sandrini-Caravoglia's stories as well, though he never mentions her by name.

No nineteenth-century writer was as committed to the promotion of Bassi's conception of Don Giovanni as the poet, journalist and draughtsman Johann Peter Lyser (1803–70) who never met the singer but who heard stories of his portrayal from Kind and, as I aim to show, from Miksch and (possibly) Sandrini-Caravoglia.⁴⁹ Instead of simply retelling these stories, however, he made use of them in a series of more or less fictionalised contexts, adding his own poetic and pseudo-autobiographical elaborations. Though it is often difficult to distinguish between the oral tradition and Lyser's literary embellishments, the task is worthwhile if we want to get an image of Bassi's Don Giovanni that is as complete as possible.

Born in Flensburg, Lyser probably first heard of Bassi after moving to Leipzig in April 1831. He visited Dresden in that summer, arriving on 16 May, and there he met the local-born composer Joseph Rastrelli (1799–1842) who had returned to the city in 1817 after studies in Italy. Rastrelli had served as a violinist in the court orchestra from 1820 to 1824 and as musical director of the Italian department since 1830. Bassi had created a small role in his opera *Velleda ossia Il paladino mutolo* in 1823: the singer's last known stage appearance.⁵⁰ It was agreed that Lyser and Rastrelli should write the first opera for Dresden after the dissolution of the Italian department, which was marked with a final performance of *Don Giovanni* on 31 March 1832. At the end of 1831, Lyser returned to Dresden for a few weeks in order to work on their opera *Salvator Rosa oder Zwey Nächte in Rom*, which premiered on 22 July 1832. Lyser must have met Miksch on one of those visits, and through Rastrelli he might also have met Sandrini-Caravoglia who had created a leading role in *Velleda* and whose daughter had been his voice student.⁵¹ Sandrini-Caravoglia was in Leipzig with the company in the summer of 1831, when Lyser first visited Dresden, however, and she moved to Prague after Easter 1832; so it is possible that Lyser never met her but rather heard her stories from Rastrelli.⁵² After the latter's death, Lyser certainly made a point of his commitment to a faithful performance of *Don Giovanni*, specifically with regard to the tempi.⁵³

Notably, Lyser's first reference to Bassi's Don Giovanni occurred shortly after his third visit to Dresden, in the first and only issue of *Cäcilia: Ein Taschenbuch für Freunde der Tonkunst*, which he published in 1833, but the preface of which

was signed in Leipzig at Michaelmas (29 September) 1832. It had been his original intention to include contributions by some of the most prominent German composers and music critics of the time, but since only one contributor came forward he had to write almost everything himself. This seems to have prompted him to write three short essays on opera in which he assumed the literary guise of ‘an old musical director’ who offers his opinions on singing and acting to the younger generation. The second essay is a fictive first-hand account of Bassi’s portrayal of *Don Giovanni*, which has some striking similarities with anecdotes recorded by Näke and Börner-Sandrini many years later, indicating that he relied on the same oral sources: Miksch and Sandrini-Caravoglia. The fictive memoir is framed, moreover, as a refutation of Hohenthal’s claim that Hoffmann’s conception of *Don Giovanni* was inspired by Bassi. The peculiar mixture of opera criticism and literary fantasy in Hoffmann’s novella, which is styled as a letter from a composer to his friend, helps explain why Lyser adopted a similar pseudo-autobiographical format.

Lyser befriended Kind in 1834, and according to his posthumous memoir of the *Freischütz* librettist, music was the only subject about which they ever quarrelled. Kind ‘would never stop speaking with rapture of *Don Giovanni*’, and the older poet was the only person whom Lyser ever acknowledged as a source of information about Bassi’s portrayal of the title role.⁵⁴ He moved to Dresden in 1835, and his second essay on Mozart’s opera was published in 1837, this time in the shape of the novella *Don Juan* that commemorated the opera’s fiftieth anniversary: a fictionalised account of Mozart’s stay in Prague in October 1787 and of the rehearsals preceding the *Don Giovanni* premiere. The novella engages critically with the demonic conception of the title character that Kind stood for, promoting the more comic conception Lyser had already defended in the 1833 essay. This was made even more explicit in Lyser’s fairy-tale version of the *Don Juan* story, *Don Juan oder Der steinerne Gast*, which was published in 1838. Closely following Da Ponte’s libretto, this story was another explicit attempt to refute Hoffmann’s interpretation.

Lyser’s writings on *Don Giovanni* took a new turn in the 1840s. In November 1844 he published an article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in which he claimed to have met Mozart’s younger son, the recently deceased Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart, in Dresden in 1834. Allegedly, Mozart’s son had shown Lyser an incomplete German singing translation of *Don Giovanni* prepared by his father, and he had allowed Lyser to copy the translation of the introduction and the first two scenes of the second finale, encouraging him to translate the rest of the text in a similar manner. Lyser now hoped, he wrote, to produce a singing translation that might supplant Rochlitz’s. In April and May 1845, after moving from Dresden to Vienna, he then published the two said fragments of ‘Mozart’s own German translation of the *Don Giovanni* text’ in the same journal. In support of the alleged authenticity of the manuscript, Lyser cited the frequent deletions and alterations in the text as well as traces of Mozart’s Viennese orthography. Nonetheless, responses to the forgery were very negative, and Lyser soon had to defend himself in the press. Hence, on 8 July, he published a short article in a Viennese journal,

stating that if he had wanted to produce a forgery he would surely have stayed closer to the published score and not have inserted extra lines for Don Giovanni in the supper scene. Only Mozart himself, he maintained, would have treated the text with such liberty, and the composer had done so because he wanted an improvised manner of performance in this scene. In support of this claim, Lyser cited, 'to the benefit of all Don Giovanni-players, what the late Luigi Bassi (the first performer of Don Giovanni) told me regarding this matter'.⁵⁵

This was the first time Lyser claimed to have known Bassi personally. Surely, the reason he dared to do so now was partly that he had moved to Vienna where fewer people knew he was lying, and partly that some of his sources of Bassi anecdotes, on which he continued to draw in his writings, were no longer alive: Rastrelli had died in 1842 and Kind in 1843. The only people still around were Sandrini-Caravoglia (who might not have been Lyser's immediate source) and Miksch, who died less than three months later, on 24 September, at the age of eighty. Significantly, in his obituary of Miksch, Lyser recalled that the deceased had expressed approval of his 1839 novella *Johannes Schenk*, to which many others objected 'because it was not based on historical facts'. Miksch, however, 'laughed and reckoned, just as I reckoned, that one should stay true to the spirit'.⁵⁶ Lyser's intention with that novella had been to promote Schenk's unjustly forgotten singspiel *Der Dorfbarbier*, he wrote, and he had succeeded in achieving that. This admission tells us a great deal about the motivation behind his controversial use of the Bassi anecdotes as well; objecting to Rochlitz's translation, Hoffmann's interpretation and the standard portrayals by German singers, Lyser promoted a conception of *Don Giovanni* that he found was truer to Bassi's portrayal and therefore to Mozart's and Da Ponte's intentions.

He must soon have realised that anecdotes deriving from the first Don Giovanni represented a more popular and less contentious way of influencing the public perception of Mozart's opera than the forgery, for, already four days after his first article about Bassi and the supper scene, he published a second one in another Viennese journal, which made very similar points. And in 1847 there followed a more extensive collection of anecdotes, in which Lyser's defence of the authenticity of the singing translation had receded into the background. Instead, he met 'the request of older musicians of high renown to communicate what I learned about Mozart from the old Bassi, which I have withheld from the public so far, as I was so poorly rewarded for my first publications'.⁵⁷ During a visit to Dresden, he wrote, he had read Hoffmann's novella aloud to the old singer who, although 'enchanted by the story itself', had insisted that 'Hoffmann's hero is quite different from Mozart's'.⁵⁸ Bassi had then proceeded to present his alternative interpretation of the opera, Lyser naming his friend Kind as a first-hand witness of the singer's portrayal. The title of the essay, 'Der alte Bassi: Aus den Erinnerungen eines wandernden Enthusiasten', directly alludes to the full title of Hoffmann's tale. This suggests that Lyser's peculiar brand of fictionalised history, or historicised fiction, was used as a rhetorical means to engage in a critical debate with Hoffmann. Lyser's last publication on the subject emerged after he moved to Hamburg in 1853; the *Mozart-Album* he put together for the 1856 Mozart

centenary centres less on interpretation, however, than on biographical anecdotes. Among the sixteen novellas included in the volume is a novella about Mozart in Prague, which is presented in the preface as a reprint of the 1837 story but is in fact an entirely new creation. Each novella was 'based on the truth, on facts as they really occurred', Lyser wrote to the publisher Johann Friedrich Kayser, 'and only the form in which I communicate them is poetical, i.e. insomuch as it was possible without compromising the truth'.⁵⁹

While the latter claim should be taken with a very large pinch of salt, obviously, there is reason not to dismiss Lyser's writings as fabrications altogether: quite often, his anecdotes are corroborated by more reliable written sources of which he was unaware, or which were published much later. Unlike Schmid and Bitter (as well as many later opera scholars) who have simply taken Lyser's stories at face value, I will subject them to a critical reading that takes account of their polemical context and their dependence on oral narratives.

The performer as a phenomenon

Theatre is a process of communication where spectators react to the actions of performers. As Willmar Sauter argues, the former need to take an immediate interest in the person on stage in order to enjoy his artistry; and they need to enjoy his artistry in order to find meaning in his portrayal of a role. In other words, we can distinguish between three modes of theatrical communication, or types of scenic actions, that often occur simultaneously. The first level is what Sauter calls the actor's 'sensory mode', within which he uses 'exhibitory actions' to draw attention to himself and create a personal connection to the audience. To understand why people were so fascinated with Bassi's *Don Giovanni*, we first need to envision the singer as a stage presence. The second level is the actor's 'artistic mode', within which he sets the performance apart from everyday life by means of 'encoded actions', inviting the audience to enjoy and evaluate his dramatic and musical skills. To understand the type of virtuosity with which Bassi portrayed *Don Giovanni*, we need to get a picture of his style of acting. The third level is the actor's 'symbolic mode', within which he uses 'embodied actions' to generate effects of identification and recognition in the audience. What do the sources tell us specifically about Bassi's portrayal of *Don Giovanni*, and of the reactions of spectators?

Considering how crucial the voice is to the sensory and artistic modes of communication within opera, audiences were strikingly uninterested in Bassi's singing. From a handful of arias written for him when he was still a teenager, we know that the young Bassi was in possession of a rather big bass-baritone voice; Costenoble found the singing of the nineteen-year-old 'pleasant', and Heinrich August Ottokar Reichard wrote of the twenty-five-year-old that there were few actors or singers 'for whom nature has provided as generously as for this her favourite son. His voice is as well-sounding as his acting is masterly'.⁶⁰ But according to Franz Xaver Niemetschek, the twenty-eight-year-old Bassi was 'a rather good actor, but no singer, since he lacks the primary requisite: a

voice!’⁶¹ According to a review of the thirty-three-year-old singer (probably also by Niemetschek), he

was an excellent singer before the loss of his voice, and he is still able to wield and use the remains very well: it holds the middle between tenor and bass, and although it sounds somewhat hollow, it is very flexible, mellow and pleasant.⁶²

The following year another critic wrote that he ‘has lost his voice, but his animated, funny and cheerful acting is very entertaining and secures him applause’.⁶³

These negative assessments of the voice of the mature singer are extraordinary because Bassi continued to perform till he was fifty-six at least, even though he never recovered from the vocal crisis that struck him when he was in his late twenties. Clearly, this was possible only because he was capable of attracting the attention of the audience with his acting skills and his stage personality. He was ‘generally admired’ by the Leipzig audience at the age of nineteen, even though Costenoble found his acting (his encoded actions, as it were) unsatisfactory. Six years later, Reichard described him as the darling of the Leipzig audience with words that tell us about the extent of his charisma: ‘As soon as he enters the stage, joy and mirth spread to the whole house, and he never leaves the stage without undivided, loud applause’.⁶⁴

No doubt, the young Bassi’s ability to win the favour of the audience partly depended on his good looks. Thönert, whose engraving shows the singer when he was thirty-one or younger, clearly strove to capture some of his erotic charm as Don Giovanni, his gracefully turned posture displaying the harmony of his youthful body, his slim waist and well-shaped calves, as well as his handsome profile and expressive eyes. Here we get the impression of an actor who uses his physique deliberately to draw attention to himself and his stage performance. This impression is confirmed by contemporary descriptions of Bassi’s appearance, though these all refer to his later years. Johann Friedrich Reichardt described the forty-two-year-old singer as ‘a handsome man of great dignity’.⁶⁵ Eduard Genast described the fifty-year-old as follows:

Bassi ... was one of the most handsome old men I ever saw. These large, black, glowing eyes with their long eyelashes and finely shaped eyebrows, this white curly hair and nobly shaped face, and this well-proportioned figure were still bound to arouse admiration, and I could not have blamed any young girl for falling in love with that curly white head.⁶⁶

Hohenthal, who first met Bassi when the singer was fifty-three, described him in the obituary:

Nobody who has seen Bassi will deny that he possessed excellent means for practicing the art of the stage. A thoughtful brow, beautiful, expressive and fiery eyes whose interior soulful glow not even the frost of age was able to

extinguish, a noble profile and a most charmingly shaped mouth distinguished the head which, even in old age [*sic*], remained beautiful and most expressive. His figure was not powerful, but the more nobly-delicate, especially his beautiful hands and feet; besides, he always had a most noble bearing.⁶⁷

Börner-Sandrini also described him as he looked in his fifties:

I clearly remember the image of Bassi from my youth: his figure was medium-sized and slim; his thick but entirely greyed hair was always finely curled and coifed, and his suit and shirts, too, were most elegant and impeccable. His features were noble, yet always serious, even gloomy; his eyes were expressive and penetrating, always concealed behind golden spectacles.⁶⁸

The natural charm and expressiveness of Bassi's brow, mouth and large dark eyes were important tools for an actor admired for his facial expression. And his well-proportioned arms, legs, hands and feet were assets in an era that put emphasis on the graceful eloquence of gestures and postures. Bassi's noble physique helps explain why he was particularly admired as royal or aristocratic characters for whom a dignified bearing was appropriate, such as Don Giovanni, Count Almaviva and the title characters of Paisiello's *Il re Teodoro in Venezia* and Salieri's *Axur re d'Ormus*. There were also characters, however, that at least one critic found unsuitable for his figure, possibly for the same reason. When Bassi, at the age of fifty, appeared as the maniacal pseudo-Ariostan Count Orlando in Pietro Carlo Guglielmi's *La scelta dello sposo*, he was told 'not to accept such vigorous and uninhibited characters; they suit neither his voice nor his age nor his figure'.⁶⁹ And when he appeared as Masetto shortly afterwards, the same critic complained that his 'figure does not suit the role of young Masetto'.⁷⁰ Since the critic admired Bassi's portrayal of the young officer Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* three months later, it seems to have been the absence of a powerful build no less than his advanced age that made him inappropriate for these roles.⁷¹ This is noteworthy because it shows that the physique of the original Don Giovanni differed from the image of the character developed by the German Romantics, Hoffmann envisioning the seducer with a 'powerful, gorgeous figure: the face is virilely handsome; a noble nose, piercing eyes, softly shaped lips' (author's emphasis).⁷²

As we move from the sensory to the artistic mode of communication, it is striking, above all, that audiences were more impressed with Bassi's integration of vocal, facial and bodily expression than with his singing in purely musical terms, which explains why we have more descriptions of his performance in ensembles and recitatives than of his performance of arias. In 1800, a Leipzig critic referred to 'the rare union between singing and acting' that had characterised Bassi's performance of Don Giovanni.⁷³ One critic described the delivery of the forty-eight-year-old performer as impeccable, 'and the correctness of the delivery characterises the master', even if his voice was 'very feeble'.⁷⁴ And a Dresden critic wrote three years later that his 'lively facial expression, his rounded, ingenious acting, and his richly expressive declamation in recitative and song still remain for

the younger artist a model worthy of imitation and not easily touched'.⁷⁵ In 1823, the Hamburg Critic described Bassi's Don Giovanni as having 'the worth of a self-contained work of art', remarkable for 'the poetry of the individual moments' and for 'the beautiful coherence of the whole, in which there [was] no gap and no loosening anywhere';⁷⁶ and he maintained that Bassi's 'simple, powerful acting, in the music as well', could make the spectator forget, 'just as in a spoken play, that one [was] looking at a theatrical stage'.⁷⁷

Though Bassi had joined Guardasoni's company already in 1782, the year in which he turned sixteen, he had sung in Italian theatres since the age of twelve, and he had received his first instruction in the art of acting at the age of fourteen from the famous Florentine *buffo* Filippo Laschi.⁷⁸ Laschi had been admired for the subtlety, propriety, nobility and naturalness of his acting, for his declamatory skills and for his avoidance of comic effects extrinsic to the character and the dramatic situation.⁷⁹ These qualities, for which Bassi was later admired as well, were all characteristics of the *buffo di mezzo carattere*: a vocal-dramatic *fach* that emerged with Goldoni's reform of comic opera at the middle of the century. In contrast to the more straightforwardly comical *buffo caricato*, the *mezzo carattere* strove for a rounded and subtle depiction of character, mixing comic and serious elements.⁸⁰ Bassi's roles were described as *Mezzokaraktere* in a German overview of the company from 1797; in overviews from 1799 and 1807, they were described as 'erste Buffons und hochkomische Rollen', and as 'Serieuse und hochkomische Charakterrollen'.⁸¹ A *Charakterrolle* represented 'a specific, singular individual with all his follies, peculiarities etc., with no particular regard for the representation of the genre that comprises that character'.⁸² And the *hochkomische* style depicted 'ridiculousness in an artful manner in the form of the ingenious and the witty', in contrast to the *niedrigkomische* style, which depicted 'the crudities of the common rabble without an ingenious conception'.⁸³ While *niedrigkomisch* was the German equivalent of the *caricato*, *hochkomisch* was the equivalent of the *mezzo carattere*.

Hochkomisch was also used synonymously with *feinkomisch* ('subtly comical'), and Bassi 'especially stood out due to his masterful acting and as a subtle comedian', a Prague critic wrote in 1807.⁸⁴ *Feinheit* and *Schattierung* were German equivalents of the French terms *finesse* and *nuance*, which were keywords in the theatrical aesthetics of the period – and all these terms occur frequently in assessments of Bassi's dramatic skills. Aiming to reveal nature at its most beautiful, the excellent actor of the late eighteenth century used *finesses*, or *nuances*, to convey his idea of the character. Not a mere imitation of external reality or a social type, the nuanced performance aimed to make the character unique, human and appealing:

sometimes the nuances are an imperceptible gradation in the motions of the soul; sometimes they are a sudden transition from one shade to another, from rapid to slow, from joy to sadness, from energy to serenity; but they always conform to the author's conception and to the situation of the character. Sometimes they are brushstrokes that serve to stress or characterise a

maxim, a thought, a witty idea or joke, which would only achieve half its effect without the assistance of the shading. ... Nuances often emerge, too, from the well-matched playing of two actors who contribute to the lustre of each other by alternately putting each other in the light and in the shade. Hence the extraordinary fieriness of the one will only make the great cold-bloodedness of the other stand out, and vice versa. ... In short, the nuances of the art of acting can be aptly compared to the *forte* and *piano* of music, and to the light and shade of painting when applied according to the rules of art, nature and taste.⁸⁵

While Laschi laid the foundation of Bassi's technique, it was in Guardasoni's company in Central Europe that he completed his training, and in this way, his acting style came to represent an amalgam of Italian and German traditions. 'He has the best taste among all his fellows and recognises the advantages of German artists', wrote Niemetschek in 1794, though this claim should be taken with caution, considering the critic's anti-Italian bias.⁸⁶ After Bassi's public debut in Vienna in 1807, in the title role of *Le nozze di Figaro*, a local critic wrote that his acting 'manifests itself with an endless wealth of expression, always within the boundaries of the appropriate'.⁸⁷ *Schicklichkeit* (propriety) corresponds to *convenance*, a central concept in French classical theatre that signalled adherence to the conventions of polite behaviour on stage. This was not peculiar to 'German artists', in other words, but the critic implied that it was unusual in Italian comedians. This was stated explicitly in a review of Bassi's portrayal of the deaf Kapellmeister Cisolfaute in Joseph Weigl's *L'amor marinaro* two years later. 'One so rarely sees, and must therefore doubly commend, the avoidance of *exaggeration* and *lazzi* in the acting of an Italian comedian, while *studied subtlety* and *correct apprehension of the presented character* are seen to rule in their place!'⁸⁸ It was probably the same critic who reviewed Bassi's performance as the class-conscious armourer Pasquale in Weigl's *Il rivale di se stesso* in 1812.

This portrayal was not, as many believe, in the vein of Italian *buffos* who only indicate the outline of a character and try to replace nuanced acting with *lazzi* and grimaces: Herr Bassi's acting was delineative and correctly measured for the character.

After listing some highlights from the performance, the critic concluded that his 'facial expression announced the great thinking artist, excellently revealed in a hundred tiny shades'.⁸⁹ Similarly, when Bassi appeared as Signor Geronimo in *Il matrimonio segreto* in Dresden in 1818, he 'attested that he is the independent, thinking actor who is free of all imitation'.⁹⁰

To German critics in the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, the actor's idealising of the character was encapsulated in the concept of 'the thinking artist'. This approach allegedly differed from that of French tragic actors who were thought to rely on formalised dance poses and rhetorical gestures, while Italian comic actors were thought to prefer caricatured

portrayals and the semi-improvised routines known as *lazzi*. The concept derives from Act I of Lessing's tragedy *Emilia Galotti* (1772) where the painter Conti gives a famous definition of the artistic process. 'Art is obliged to paint as plastic nature thought the form, without the deduction which the opposing materials necessarily cause – without the deduction occasioned by the ravages of time'.⁹¹ In other words, the artist must *think as nature thinks* rather than merely *imitate nature*. Approving of Conti's maxim, the Prince of Guastalla responds with a line that became proverbial: 'The thinking artist has a right to twofold credit'. Within theatre, the thinking artist was the actor who penetrated into the idea of the individuality of the role, omitting clichés and caricatures as well as inessential features extraneous to the revelation of the character. This was probably what a Viennese critic meant when he referred to Bassi's 'artistic portrayals that he learned from nature by listening'.⁹²

That the style of performance in Guardasoni's company differed from German operatic tradition, however, appears from an 1808 review that laments its recent dissolution:

the performances [by the German company] proved that outward splendour, which here far exceeded what the Italians ever attempted, in no way was able to dazzle the audience and compensate for the considerable loss in beautiful singing and characteristic acting. If singers in general, and Italian singers in particular, are otherwise accused of a lack in mimic declamation, then we were mostly so fortunate here as to at least possess a few truly excellent actors among the Italians; most roles were suitably cast, and the ensemble was so good that one does not even dare compare it to the German opera.⁹³

The Italians' command of ensemble acting, gesture and facial expression was important in German-speaking cities like Prague, Leipzig and Dresden, where few spectators had a full grasp of the Italian language. And the visual simplicity of Guardasoni's productions may have been part of an artistic strategy that aimed to focus the spectators' attention on the nuanced acting, though this was not appreciated by everybody. Rochlitz considered the impresario 'niggard' and Niemetschek complained about his 'most exaggerated thrift'.⁹⁴

That the style of acting cultivated in Mozart's *opera buffa* companies represented a form of theatricality that went out of fashion in the Romantic Era is suggested, too, by the Viennese playwright Caroline Pichler who, in 1837, expressed her longing for the 'subtler comedy' that had dominated the repertoire of the Vienna Burgtheater in the 1780s. She remembered 'the quiet pleasure' with which the theatregoer of the past would behold 'these images of a nobler humankind, these sometimes weak but estimable, these capricious or exaggerated yet noble characters act on stage, how he felt pleasantly stimulated, and even took pleasure in the resonances after leaving the theatre'.⁹⁵ Among her examples is Da Ponte's and Vicente Martín y Soler's opera *Il burbero di buon cuore* (1786), in which 'the famous comedian Benucci' had performed the role of the 'kind-hearted curmudgeon' Ferramondo with 'great artistry'. In such comedies, she writes, 'the

ridiculous and the flawed appeared in noble souls, which often made them the more interesting'.⁹⁶ *Il burbero di buon cuore* was Da Ponte's second libretto and the one in which he turned his back both on the stock characters of traditional *opera buffa* and on the satirical tone that dominates most of Goldoni's comic librettos, and especially those of Da Ponte's rival Giovanni Battista Casti. Da Ponte's characters tend to strike a balance between sympathy and laughter that accords not only with Pichler's description but also with Bassi's portrayal of Don Giovanni, as we shall see.⁹⁷ The performer Pichler remembered was the *buffo* Francesco Benucci who had created Mozart's Figaro and Guglielmo and who was the first Viennese Leporello. But the appeal to the spectator's compassion, which she highlighted, and which was so characteristic of late Enlightenment drama and opera, was much less crucial to the Romantics who often preferred characters that were fantastical, grotesque, mad, pure evil, pure good or otherwise larger than life. It was against this same trend that Bassi reacted when he described the Don Giovannis of the 1820s as 'Madrilenian butchers rather than Spanish gentlemen'. This leads us finally to the symbolic level of Bassi's performance.

Grace and gallantry: Bassi's portrayal

Nineteenth-century reviews give us an impression of how Bassi's portrayal of Don Giovanni was experienced in Prague. In 1807, a critic reviewing the portrayal by Friedrich Feddersen (1771–1824) recalled the 'elegant suppleness' of Bassi's 'wonderful and subtly coloured image' of Don Giovanni, which he had represented 'with decorum and action, with gait and bearing'.⁹⁸ In 1814, a review of Josef Wolfgang Kainz (1773–1855) as Don Giovanni recalled 'the natural vivacity and nobleness of behaviour' of 'our eternal model Bassi'; and Tomaschek, who saw the opera in Vienna in the same year, noted that Anton Forti (1790–1859) 'indeed performed elegantly, but not as subtly as once played by Master Bassi for whom Mozart wrote the role'.⁹⁹ A critic writing in 1817 also clearly had Bassi in mind when he complained that Jakob Müller (fl. 1812–27) lacked 'the stately elegance and the charming levity that characterise Don Giovanni', and that he took some things 'too seriously'.¹⁰⁰ Many years later, Börner-Sandrin described Bassi's Don Giovanni as 'the most charming of all rakes'.¹⁰¹

People who had seen Bassi in Leipzig made similar observations. According to Friesen, Tieck declared that Bassi had given Don Giovanni 'a stately bearing, with consummate decorum and the utmost grace'.¹⁰² Bassi was also the ideal against which the Hamburg Critic measured performers of the role. Though criticising Friedrich Woltereck (1797–1866) for neglecting 'the deeper, truly tragic meaning of the character' (explicitly referring to Hoffmann's interpretation) when he saw him as Don Giovanni in 1820, he nonetheless praised him for playing the role 'with lightness'.¹⁰³ The following year he praised him for playing the character more 'dignifiedly'.¹⁰⁴ And in 1824 again for making him 'more serious, more dignified, as befits a Don Giovanni'.¹⁰⁵ In 1821, explicitly evoking Bassi's example, he criticised Joseph August Röckel (1783–1870) for neglecting not only 'the deeper poetic meaning of this extremely attractive character' but even 'the man

of quality', which is 'the principal requirement for a Don Giovanni'.¹⁰⁶ And Forti, too, neglected 'the gentleman and the hero' as well as 'the deeper poetic meaning of this character' in 1826; though he played the role 'lightly and decorously', the critic added that 'this lightness and this decorum are far more evocative of Figaro than of the gentleman whose bearing and lightness must always be on a higher level'.¹⁰⁷

Reinhold also evoked Bassi's portrayal in his scathing review of a guest performance by the twenty-year-old Karl Wolfgang Unzelmann (1786–1843) in Leipzig in 1807:

Here there was not the slightest nobility, neither in his speech nor in his movements, and there was not even a trace of this young man's otherwise ubiquitous elegance. [Herr Unzelmann] was uneasy throughout, his movements angular and forced: in one word, instead of the subtle, refined voluptuary who must lack neither external charm nor beautiful decorum, we saw a crude villain who also lacked a brilliant exterior, so one could not understand how he had succeeded in attracting even a single woman of quality. Instead of a pleasing, mellifluous character, Herr Unzelmann displayed *pathos* throughout. Perhaps he mistook that for dignity!! ... Unfortunately for Herr Unzelmann and for the audience, people have seen Bassi perform this role so excellently here.¹⁰⁸

Fifteen years later, Unzelmann was compared unfavourably to Bassi once more, this time in Kind's review of a Dresden performance. At that point, the German singer's portrayal had no doubt developed, but Kind was coloured more by the literary reception than Reinhold whose review predated Hoffmann's novella. While he praised Unzelmann for portraying Don Giovanni 'with great elegance and fiery vitality', Kind objected that 'we saw more of a reckless and profligate youth in him than of the stately Spaniard, of the bold rake, of the egoist hardened into wickedness'; and he recalled that Bassi had performed the role 'with all the charm of an experienced seducer, but also with a brazen humour, with a certain profligate grandeur and egoistic consistency, with genius in his wickedness'.¹⁰⁹ Lyser later made a distinction between Hoffmann's and Kind's views, however, claiming that Don Giovanni, when performed according to Hoffmann's interpretation, 'will lose his grace and "noble wickedness", as it was called by Kind who was old enough to have seen Bassi as Don Giovanni and who would accept no one else after him'.¹¹⁰ No doubt, it was also due to Kind that Lyser, in his 1838 fairy tale, claimed that Mozart has given Don Giovanni 'the national character of a brave, humorous, hedonistic Spaniard'.¹¹¹ Echoing Kind, he explicitly associated the seducer's '*graceful* wickedness' with his Spanishness in an explanatory note.¹¹²

Lyser was probably more influenced by Rastrelli or Sandrini-Caravoglia than by Kind in his emphasis on the difference between Bassi's and Hoffmann's conceptions. 'A grace and lightness that cannot be described in words characterised every glance, every movement, every tone', says the 'old musical director' in Lyser's fictive memoir of Bassi.¹¹³ In the 1837 novella, Mozart explains that Bassi

qualifies for the role of Don Giovanni due to his ‘handsome stature, his wonderful voice, his dignity and his humour, as well as his unfeigned ardour when paying tribute to beauty’.¹¹⁴ And in Lyser’s fictive interview with Bassi, the singer states that

Mozart has depicted [Don Giovanni] as a fiery, Spanish, young nobleman who adores women to bits and doesn’t, in fact, consider it a sin to seduce as many as will let themselves be seduced. He is favoured by fortune and feels *fortunate*. Why shouldn’t he?¹¹⁵

Philippi, who was apparently influenced by Sandrini-Caravoglia as well, criticised Forti for lacking subtlety and nobility, just like Tomaschek and the Hamburg Critic did. Forti did not show ‘all the chivalrous subtlety, gallantry and gymnastics, let alone the dithyrambic energy, the immense vitality and chaotic exuberance’ of ‘this Spanish mixture of Alcibiadic irresistibility and Faustian super-defiance’.¹¹⁶ As for the ‘handsome figure that one must not remit in a Don Giovanni’, he noted that Forti’s figure was ‘no longer that of a youth’; and his ‘joviality’ suggested ‘the pleasure-loving Viennese rather than the fiery Spaniard’.¹¹⁷

The nobility, stateliness, dignity, bearing and decorum of Bassi’s portrayal, highlighted in these sources, can be associated with the character’s aristocratic background as well as with the ‘Spanishness’ highlighted by Kind, Lyser, Philippi and Bassi himself (according to Hohenthal). His subtlety, humour, lightness, grace, elegance, chivalrousness, charm, ardour and vitality represented a more striking contrast to the standard nineteenth-century portrayals. It is remarkable, in fact, how many of these terms imply a blurring of the boundary between Bassi’s artistic and Don Giovanni’s social skilfulness and persuasiveness. To those familiar with his portrayal, the charm and virtuosity of the actor clearly merged with that of the fictive seducer, the performance itself turning into an act of seduction. This is suggested by Börner-Sandrini’s story about how he, shortly after her mother joined Guardasoni’s company, had an affair with a beautiful young lady whom Caravoglia once eyed in a box in the lower tier, which seats were mostly occupied by the high nobility.¹¹⁸ No doubt, this woman was one of the ‘Prague ladies’ of ‘the highest aristocracy’ Börner-Sandrini mentioned in her memoirs, who were so charmed by Bassi’s Don Giovanni that the singer became their ‘darling’. Here, the symbolic mode merged with the sensory and the artistic.

As we shall see, his portrayal also embodied the tension, or connection, between aesthetics and ethics, which goes to the heart of the opera’s musical-dramatic construction. Describing *Don Giovanni* as Mozart’s ‘greatest masterpiece’, Niemetschek stated that ‘the highest art is matched, in charming concord, with the utmost grace’ here.¹¹⁹ More recently, Scott Burnham has decided to call his study of the beautiful in Mozart’s music *Mozart’s Grace*. But ‘grace’ (*Anmut*) was also a recurring phrase in descriptions of Bassi’s portrayal of the Mozartian seducer, which points to the close connection between the whole and the part, the work and its central character, musical and dramatic expression. In fact, together with ‘lightness’, ‘vitality’, ‘dignity’ and ‘nobility’, ‘grace’ was a keyword in Friedrich Schiller’s influential 1793

essay ‘On Grace and Dignity’, which gives us an idea of what Bassi’s contemporaries meant when they described his Don Giovanni in these terms:

All movements that emanate from [a beautiful soul] become light and gentle, and yet lively. The eye shines bright and clear, and sentiment gleams in it. From the gentle heart, the mouth receives a grace that cannot be produced by dissimulation. No tension is perceptible in the features or constraint in the intentional movements, because the soul knows of none. The voice will be music and move the heart with the stream of its modulations. Architectonic beauty can give rise to pleasure, admiration, or amazement, but only grace will enrapture. Beauty has *worshippers*; only grace has *lovers*, because we pay homage to the Creator and love the people.¹²⁰

There are no rules for grace, just as there are no rules for beauty. It cannot be copied from a model, as an unimaginative actor might imitate the movements of a real person; nor can it be learned, as a dancer might duplicate certain codified patterns or gestures. Grace is expressive of the feelings and personality of an individual, of the unique character:

Now a person could, through artifice and work, be capable of bringing [the] movements [that accompany grace] under the control of his will and, like an accomplished magician, have any form he pleased fall onto the mirror that reflects his soul in mime. But everything about such a person is a lie, his whole nature consumed with art. Grace must always be natural, in other words, instinctive (or it must at least appear to be so) and the subject must not appear to be *conscious of possessing grace*.¹²¹

The urge of sexual desire is incompatible with grace, according to Schiller, especially when grace is combined with dignity, which prevents the expression of love from becoming an expression of lust. And when combined with grace and beauty, dignity approaches the noble. To Schiller, nobility is an aesthetic and moral quality that is partly innate and has nothing to do with the aristocracy as a social class. And in the theatrical aesthetics of the time, grace, dignity and nobility were all closely associated with decorum. ‘By decorum, many actors understand an overly stately behaviour, which they try to approach by keeping the head high, by a measured step, by looking around without respecting or appreciating anything’, we read in a nineteenth-century theatre encyclopaedia, ‘whereas the true decorum of the *cultivated man* of any social class essentially causes the same behaviour, but on the basis of naturalness and grace, without regard for rank’.¹²² With its emphasis on such qualities, there is no doubt that Bassi’s portrayal of Don Giovanni was among those ‘images of a nobler humankind’ that would have appealed to Caroline Pichler, and which she longed for in the 1830s.

Performance traditions: Italians and Germans

Performance traditions are always in a state of change: no pupil performs the same way as his teacher. However, if studied in conjunction with other types

of evidence, early nineteenth-century performance traditions, centring as they did on craftsmanship, apprenticeship and orally transmitted authorial directives, may help throw light on practices prescribed or initiated by Da Ponte, Mozart, Guardasoni and Bassi. This is especially the case with a performance culture that involved a high degree of what Walter Ong describes as ‘residual orality’, in which the printed score had not yet attained the authority it would attain in the twentieth century.¹²³

One performance tradition revolved around Giuseppe Siboni (1780–1839) who, from 1800 to 1805, was the principal tenor of Guardasoni’s company where he sang Don Ottavio to the Don Giovanni of Luigi Bassi and the Leporello of Felice Ponziani, the creators of the roles. In 1822, after becoming director of the singing school of the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Siboni cast the existing Danish-language production of *Don Giovanni* mainly with his students while coaching most or all of the performers. Among them was Giovanni Battista Cetti (1794–1858) who was the Copenhagen Don Giovanni from 1822 to 1837, and who directly informed Kierkegaard’s interpretation of the opera, since the local production was the only point of reference for the young philosopher who did not read music. Cetti’s successor in the role was Jørgen Christian Hansen (1812–80), a pupil of Siboni, who first appeared as Don Giovanni in 1839, two months after his teacher’s death. Hansen also sang Don Giovanni in the first Danish production in which spoken dialogue was replaced with recitatives, from 1845 until 1869.¹²⁴ As a consequence, his performance would have been the point of reference for the local painter and draughtsman Wilhelm Marstrand (1810–73) whose drawings of scenes from *Don Giovanni* were made during this period.¹²⁵ The conception of Don Giovanni that we encounter in reviews of Cetti as well as in Kierkegaard’s writings and in Marstrand’s pictures sometimes show striking similarities with Bassi’s portrayal, indicating that the Copenhagen productions drew on performance traditions that went back to Guardasoni’s production.¹²⁶

Another performance tradition that can be linked to Bassi is the one of the Royal Saxon Opera in Dresden where *Don Giovanni* was performed in Italian between 1814 and 1838. The premiere date was late for a German city, probably owing to an aversion to Mozart’s operas on the part of King Frederick Augustus. It is certainly striking that the Dresden premieres of *Don Giovanni*, *La clemenza di Tito* and *Le nozze di Figaro* all took place during the two years when the king was in Prussian captivity, as did a revival of *Così fan tutte*, which had not been heard in the city since 1791. Very likely, the Court Kapellmeister Francesco Morlacchi (1782–1841) used the opportunity to finally fulfil the wishes of local music lovers who had long waited to hear Mozart’s Italian operas. The libretto printed for the *Don Giovanni* premiere on 28 May 1814 reveals a strong influence from the German performance tradition, which sets the Dresden production apart from the previous century’s more aristocratic or courtly productions in Prague, Vienna and Warsaw. Not only was the German parallel translation of the vocal numbers taken from Rochlitz; errors in the line breaks show that the Italian text was copied from a musical source rather than a printed libretto, most probably from the Breitkopf & Härtel score. This explains why many of Da Ponte’s stage directions, which are

omitted in the printed score, are missing in the Dresden libretto too, where they are often replaced with Italian translations of Rochlitz's. As a consequence, Don Giovanni comes across as more violent than in the original, which may well count as the earliest example of the German Mozart tradition informing Italian stage practice. Another set of changes, which centres on the suppression of sexual allusions, was clearly the result of censorship.

In 1814, Don Giovanni and Leporello were sung by Antonio Benelli (1771–1830), a tenor, and the admired *buffo* Gioacchino Benincasa (1783–1835), while Sandrini-Caravoglia sang Donna Elvira. But the production was no great success. Between Bassi's arrival in Dresden in the fall of 1815 and his death on 13 September 1825, *Don Giovanni* was only performed twice by the Italian department, and both times occasioned by guesting singers: Eugenia von Biedenfeld as Donna Elvira in October 1816 and Therese Grünbaum as Donna Anna in May 1817. That Bassi, as the stage director, left an imprint on the production appears, nevertheless, from a review of the 1816 performance in which the critic complained that 'much had been saved on the costumes, and certainly not to the advantage of the effect'.¹²⁷ The visual simplicity that had characterised Guardasoni's productions was not appreciated in Biedermeier Dresden, clearly.

An anecdote recorded in 1863 by the local singing teacher and music historian Heinrich Ferdinand Mannstein (1806–72) throws more light on Bassi's influence on the production. Mannstein, who had joined the chorus of the Royal Saxon Opera in 1829, was a pupil of Miksch from whom he heard the following story, though he clearly got the names wrong:

A while later, Benelli came to Dresden with the reputation of being one of the greatest tenors, and he also behaved entirely with the pretentiousness of one such. He scoffed at everything, spoke only of Naples, Rome, Milan, Paris and London; and he may have been right about many things too. He made his debut as Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* and found the whole staging provincial and philistine, the performance amiss, all the tempi mistaken. As the chorus comes running to the party in the Act I finale, he burst into a loud laughter and demanded a tempo twice as fast. As Miksch once told the author, some old wigs in the orchestra already held a grudge against Mozart: they had to play twice as much in his operas as in the older operas, and they also found his modulations and harmonisations 'brazen'. When they performed the *Don Giovanni* overture the first time, the chromatic progression had seemed to them as if a stick had been stuck through their bagwigs and turned around. And now they had to play everything twice as fast as earlier! They declared it impossible; Benelli declared he would leave again immediately in that case; the management cast its lot with him, and the orthodox had to relent. Powder flew from their hairpieces, sweat streamed over their faces, but all to no avail: every number had to be played faster, and at the end of their ordeal a better *Don Giovanni* had indeed been prepared. The audience marvelled and applauded, and a personal friend of Mozart who attended the performance expressed his approval.¹²⁸

Some elements in this story do not fit. Benelli sang *Don Giovanni* in the production, not *Don Ottavio*, and he came to Dresden already in 1800, fourteen years before the *Don Giovanni* premiere, which hardly matches Mannstein's depiction of the tenor as a newcomer. Moreover, Bassi's absence from the story is conspicuous, since the creator of the title role was a greater authority on the original tempi, obviously, than some friend of Mozart's who might have attended a performance. Miksch, who told his grandson what Mozart had told Bassi about the tempo of the champagne aria, knew this; and so, it is obvious that Mannstein mixed up the names of Bassi and Benelli and invented the 'personal friend of Mozart'. Miksch had made his role debut as Masetto in the 1816 performance, in fact, at which point Bassi could still be considered a newcomer, and since Masetto's aria was cut in the Dresden production, the Act I finale was the first number in which he sang (apart from the peasant chorus earlier in the Act), which explains why he specifically remembered Bassi's intervention during the rehearsing of the garden scene. Miksch seems to have told the same story to Lyser who claimed to have heard from Bassi that Mozart took the minuet (rather than the Allegro assai that introduces the finale) 'almost twice as rapid as it is taken nowadays'.¹²⁹ Finally, Bassi was indeed known for his haughtiness among people who worked with him. Weber's son – who was only three years old when Bassi died but who must have heard about him from his mother – referred to the 'roaring laughter' of 'old "Don-Giovanni Bassi" who "knows everything"' when describing his father's colleague.¹³⁰ And according to Börner-Sandrini, Bassi's 'behaviour could be considered more introverted than friendly[;] he was very exacting in the exercise of his directorial duties: more strict, really, than encouraging'.¹³¹

The description of the virtuosic tempi agrees with Tomaschek's metronome numbers and with Niemetschek's account of performance practice in Guardasoni's company, in which singers and orchestra were urged to employ 'frantically fast tempi'.¹³² However, Mannstein's description also agrees with contemporary reports of how Morlacchi conducted *Don Giovanni* in the years after Bassi's arrival in Dresden. At the premiere in 1814, the critic of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* had simply noted that the ensembles were given 'excellently' both by the singers and by 'our worthy orchestra'.¹³³ But after the 1816 performance, he reported that 'the entire orchestra' had played *Axur re d'Ormus* (in which Bassi sang the title role) and *Don Giovanni* 'with an exactitude, precision, love and zeal for art, leaving nothing to be desired by the audience'.¹³⁴ And in the 1817 performance of *Don Giovanni* the orchestra 'demonstrated, as usual, zeal, exactitude and indefatigability out of love for this beautiful music'.¹³⁵ But the fast tempi divided people in Dresden, just as they had done in Prague. Albert Schiffner found, at the revival of the opera in 1827, that Morlacchi 'exaggerates the tempo here and there', whereas Lyser enthused in his review of the 1836 revival.¹³⁶ When Morlacchi conducted the Andante of the overture, he wrote, 'every semiquaver, every dot [was] *sharply* accentuated, yet everything *unforced* and seamless; the Allegro fiery, provocative, heightened until the last defiant [descending five-note figure] and then sinking down into itself'.¹³⁷ Hohenthal, who praised Morlacchi's 'fiery and energetic' conducting at the Leipzig guest performances in 1830, added:

I, at least, have formerly heard [*Don Giovanni*] conducted with far less success by Spontini in Berlin and by Weber in Dresden. The latter had a curious opinion on this matter. ‘Since this music is already so old and familiar’, he said, ‘I take the tempi slower than usual in some numbers, so that the fine artistry of the harmonic contexture and the ingenious instrumentation stand out more’. That reason might be valid if we were talking of, say, a rehearsal for the instruction of pupils in a conservatoire; but the theatrical effect is bound to perish in the process. – Weber, incidentally, who came into contact with Bassi in connection with his official duties, just as Morlacchi did, could easily have consulted him as a sort of authentic interpreter if a misconceived national antipathy, which often and easily unsettled the musical conditions in Dresden, had not intervened disruptively.¹³⁸

It is doubtful whether Weber really justified his slower tempi by referring to ‘the fine artistry of the harmonic contexture and the ingenious instrumentation’. More likely, Hohenthal was echoing a scathing remark made by Bassi after one of the performances they attended together. As for the ‘misconceived national antipathy’, he was surely referring to a conflict that arose in connection with the Dresden production of Giacomo Meyerbeer’s *Emma di Resburgo*, which premiered on 26 January 1820, conducted by Weber and directed by Bassi. Four days before the premiere, Weber had published a critique of the opera in the local *Abend-Zeitung*, in which he accused Meyerbeer of imitating Rossini and of finding it necessary ‘not only to put sweet, voluptuously swelling fruits on the table, but even to sugar-coat them with these fashionable forms’. He encouraged the composer to

return to his German fatherland and, along with the few who truly revere art, assist in the ongoing process of building up a German national opera, which willingly learns things from foreigners but moulds them with *truth* and *individuality*, so that we may finally establish our position among the artistic nations, the unshakable foundation of which Mozart laid in his German operas.¹³⁹

This deprecation of Italian opera caused strong reactions, Weber telling Rochlitz that Morlacchi had gone to Count Einsiedel, the secretary of state, where he ‘accuses me in the name of all Italians’.¹⁴⁰ Weber’s self-justification in the press did not improve matters. Insisting that he only wanted to criticise Rossini, not Italians in general, he nevertheless declared that Italian and French artists ‘are mostly bent on the sensual pleasure of individual moments’, whereas the German artist, who ‘grasps everything in a *deeper* way’, desires ‘a self-contained work of art in which all the parts merge and unite into a beautiful whole’.¹⁴¹ Objecting to this display of nationalist arrogance, Philippi published an open letter in which he encouraged Weber to ‘follow the great examples of Haydn, Mozart, Cimarosa, Paesiello etc., who lived among each other in the greatest harmony, respecting and appreciating one another while they were appreciated and revered by the

whole of Europe', rather than 'succumbing to acrimonious diatribes against other nations'.¹⁴²

It clearly appears from Weber's diary that the incident ruined his and Bassi's friendship. The Italian, who had met the Kapellmeister in Prague back in 1814, had been his loyal supporter and even a member of his family circle, but their socialising stopped abruptly in January 1820. It is easy to understand why Bassi took offence. Apart from remaining loyal to the Italian department where he was employed, he embodied, as the original *Don Giovanni*, the union of German and Italian operatic traditions which Weber now belittled with his stress on Mozart's Germanness and his discounting of Italian art. This explains why Weber was unable to consult Bassi when he prepared Dresden's first German-language production of *Don Giovanni*, which premiered on 23 September 1821, with Unzelmann in the title role. It seems, therefore, that Weber's son and biographer engaged in mythmaking when he claimed that the

excellent memory of Bassi, for whom the master had written *Don Giovanni* and who had sung the role under Mozart's eyes more than once, assisted [Weber] vigorously in his endeavour to meet Mozart's intentions, even in the smallest details of conducting and stage practice.

It was the old singer, he continued, who, 'based on his memories of Mozart', had urged his father to leave out the final scene, on which point Bassi 'agreed entirely with Weber who declared the conclusion of the work by these movements lame and undramatic'.¹⁴³ Bassi's endorsement of Weber's interpretation of the opera was essential not only to the establishment of the composer as Mozart's artistic heir, but also to the exaltation of the German performance tradition, which allegedly derived directly from the master himself through a lineage of grand disciples: from Weber to Wagner, Strauss and the German and Austrian conductors of the twentieth century.

Hohenthal's memoir suggests, however, that Bassi did not regard the German production as true to Mozart's intentions: Weber's tempi were too slow, and the vulgar and violent portrayal of the seducer reduced him to a caricature. As for Bassi's response to individual singers, Lyser claimed in 1845 that 'the old gentleman, with the greatest interest and until the day he died, watched every *Don Giovanni*-player who came to Dresden guesting in this part, and he also praised some of them, such as Forti and Genast (in *certain details*)'.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Genast had appeared as *Don Giovanni* in Dresden in May 1824 and Forti in February 1825. It is possible that Lyser reproduced Bassi's actual verdicts on these singers in his 1833 essay, in which the 'old musical director' compares the portrayals by Genast, Forti and the Viennese bass Anton Joseph Fischer (1780–1862) – who sang *Don Giovanni* in Dresden in June 1823 – to Bassi's:

Most of them depicted a German *youngster*, such as Forti and Fischer (of whom the latter is very much a fat and droll little man); others a *German dandy*, such as the otherwise reputable Genast; and others again turned him into a mad ruffian and rapist.¹⁴⁵

Lyser could have heard about Bassi's reservations from several of the people he knew in Dresden, and the assessments do match what Bassi said about the German singers, according to Hohenthal.

It was in the Italian department of the Royal Saxon Opera that Bassi's legacy was revered. On 14 February 1827, one and a half years after his death and ten years after the last Italian performance of *Don Giovanni*, Morlacchi conducted the premiere of a new production, which was more successful than the previous one. The only cast member left from the old production was Benincasa as Leporello, except for three performances in 1828 when Sandrini-Caravoglia stepped in as Donna Elvira, the last time she sang in the opera. Not only do reviews of this production show that the portrayal of Don Giovanni resembled Bassi's; people who either knew him, had seen him as Don Giovanni, or knew people who had, tended to approve of it.

Benelli's successor as Don Giovanni was the young bass Celestino Salvatori (1805–75) who had joined the company in 1826. According to the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, his acting was not 'particularly elegant, but it was decorous'.¹⁴⁶ The *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* observed that 'Salvatori is certainly no Don Giovanni as Hoffmann depicts him, but he amply substitutes what he lacks in bodily elegance with vocal grace and elegance'.¹⁴⁷ Tieck was enthusiastic, however, declaring never to have heard the opera so well performed. Comparing the performance to a 'noble champagne', he wondered whether Salvatori had not been 'so completely permeated with the spirit of his role that, instead of going to meet the Commendatore with the candle, he seized his wineglass, probably recognising the bright glow of the wine and only *therefore* confusing glass and candlestick'.¹⁴⁸ For all Salvatori's shortcomings as an actor, his portrayal was clearly far from the violent German Don Giovanni.

Salvatori left Dresden later in 1827 and was replaced by the Austrian baritone Johann Michael Wächter (1794–1853) who sang Don Giovanni in 1828. He, too, avoided the standard demonic conception. According to one critic, he had realised that Da Ponte has 'sketched out his hero as a profligate rake, but not of the *mean sort*'.¹⁴⁹ And a review of his Viennese guest performance in 1837, which described his portrayal as 'dazzling and seductive due to the grace of his theatrical portrayal', shows how similar his Don Giovanni was to Bassi's:

Wächter's Don Giovanni is an *artistic whole*! I have never before seen the higher poetic characterisation of Don Giovanni indicated as clearly and forcefully in singing and acting as today. The Spanish grandeur of the nobleman, the wanton caprice of the bon viveur, and the humorous Asmodeus nature of this Don Giovanni who stabs someone one moment and dreams of a champagne heaven the next: all this was condensed into a consummate artistic unity, masterly expressed in form and idea. Wächter's Don Giovanni carries the exterior and interior certification stamp on his forehead, and we encounter the entire *chronique scandaleuse* of this character in a *mitigated* form here, but with *vivid truth*. With his handsome body and the comity of his entire being, with his charming frivolity and I'd almost say the dangerous

spiritualism of his musical delivery, we must believe the living mirage of Wächter's Don Giovanni as well as all the fine things Leporello tells us about him in his catalogue aria. Tonight, in particular, Herr Wächter's voice had a crystal-clear *beau jour* and that appealing timbre of mental and physical excitement that is so congenial to the singing of Don Giovanni.¹⁵⁰

Lyser, who heard Wächter sing Don Giovanni in German in 1841, also praised both his singing and his acting.¹⁵¹ But the best-known Italian Don Giovanni of the Royal Saxon Opera was Alfonso Zezi (1799–1861), a pupil of Miksch, who had joined the company already in March 1822, when Bassi was still active as a singer and stage director, and who may have been his acting pupil. He sang the Commendatore in the 1827 production before taking over the role of Don Giovanni in 1830, which he sang until the dissolution of the Italian department in 1832 and again in the new Italian production mounted in 1836. For all its faults, his portrayal of Mozart's seducer was praised by several people familiar with Bassi's portrayal. Hohenthal, who saw him in 1830, considered his acting 'too solid, not frivolous, not elegant and mellifluous enough. On the other hand, this shortcoming is a credit to the young man, as the pretension of the usual arrogant performers of Don Giovanni is more repulsive'.¹⁵² Lyser, who saw Zezi as Don Giovanni in 1832 and in 1836, commemorated his performance as follows in his 1838 fairy tale:

if one has seen a handsome man on stage as Don Giovanni, such as Zezi whom I saw at the Dresden Court Theatre a few years ago, or as Bassi whom older contemporaries saw, then you think of this handsome figure and embellish the interior of the gorgeous appearance as best you can.¹⁵³

Friesen made similar observations:

After often talking to Tieck about [Bassi's Don Giovanni], I found Zezi's portrayal of that role extremely interesting. Zezi was a magnificently handsome man yet anything but a skilful actor. His merit in most of his roles, which normally did not exceed the limits of the so-called dignified parts, was more negative than positive. One always saw his exceedingly noble and stately figure but had to praise his avoidance of anything improper, ignoble or base rather than an artistic achievement of some sort. Indeed, one frequently had to lament his lack of agility. He also played Don Giovanni this way on the said evening and in subsequent performances; and I can assure you that I have never been more pleased with a performance of that role.

What especially pleased Friesen, he goes on to explain, was that Zezi's acting remained 'within the limits of a noble naturalness'.¹⁵⁴ And, finally, Börner-Sandrini:

Zezi was tall and slim and possessed noble, classical features, beautiful eyes and dark hair. It is barely possible to imagine a more gorgeous figure for the

roles of the Count in *Le nozze di Figaro*, for Don Giovanni and [Rossini's Guillaume] Tell than the one that this lavishly endowed singer had at his disposal, even if he left some things to be desired as an actor.¹⁵⁵

That people who knew about Bassi's extraordinarily well-acted portrayal were happy to settle for performers with such limited acting skills as Salvatori and Zezi suggests that we should keep two circumstances in mind. First, Mozart wrote the role for a performer not unlike them. At twenty-one, Bassi was still not fully developed as an actor, but his noble, stately, handsome figure and his natural charm would have allowed him to perform the role adequately before he knew how to nuance his portrayal. Second, Zezi's dazzling appearance, devoid of arrogance and baseness, allowed the spectators to create their own image of Don Giovanni, as both Lyser and Friesen emphasise. It is a basic fact of theatrical communication that the character only exists in the spectator's mind, but it is especially true of Don Giovanni: not because he lacks a character, but because Mozart's opera, to a very large extent, is about seduction; its title hero is – or was, when performed by these Italian singers – something like the embodiment of seduction, and theatre and seduction both depend on the willing suspension of disbelief.

In the following six chapters, I will examine how that seduction manifests itself in the opera, how it was enabled by Bassi's performance, scene by scene, and how later performance traditions have reflected very different conceptions of the opera.

Notes

- 1 Heinse 1825: 5, in Waidelich 2001: 203. The undated sketch was written after Bassi's Viennese debut, which took place in 1807.
- 2 Philippi 1825: 75, in Waidelich 2001: 189. Waidelich identifies Philippi as the author of this review.
- 3 On Mozart's collaboration with singers, see e.g. Rushton 1997; Woodfield 2003; Rice 2009: 113–9.
- 4 Da Ponte 1999: 38.
- 5 For a reconstruction of the cast for the 1787 Prague performances of *Le nozze di Figaro*, see Woodfield 2012a: 55–64.
- 6 Rushton 1997: 407–9. See also Link 2015: ix, and my review in *Notes*, December 2016, 339–45: 344.
- 7 Tyson 1990: 10–1.
- 8 Woodfield 2012a: 106–7.
- 9 Link 2015: xxxiv.
- 10 Castil-Blaze 1852: 318–9.
- 11 Luigi Bassi was born on 4 September 1766. For a transcription of his baptismal record, see Mantovani 1898: 92.
- 12 Bitter 1961: 27.
- 13 Heinse 1825: 7, in Waidelich 2001: 208.
- 14 Heinse 1837: 210, in Schneider 2009: 45n.
- 15 'Da hat nun Mozart gemeint, für seine Idee des Charakters sei der Darsteller zu jung und Bassi werde wohl selbst an sich die Erfahrung machen, dass er erst späterhin zu genügender Darstellung desselben reif geworden sei'; Heinse 1837: 209.
- 16 See Da Ponte 1814.

- 17 ‘Bassi ... wurde allgemein bewundert. Mir kam er etwas hölzern vor; sein Gesang klang mir angenehm’; Lewald 1837: 32.
- 18 Letter to Gottfried von Jacquin of 15 January 1787: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=1592&cat=3> (accessed on 19 March 2021).
- 19 Letter to Gottfried von Jacquin of 25 October 1787: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=1639&cat=3> (accessed on 19 March 2021).
- 20 ‘Bassi ... versicherte mir in späteren Jahren, er habe sich immer bemüht die Rolle ganz so zu singen und zu spielen, wie *Mozart* es gewollt, und der “gran Maestro” sei sehr zufrieden mit ihm gewesen’; Lyser 1847: 95.
- 21 ‘Ich werde mein Möglichstes thun, dass Sie mit mir zufrieden sind’; Lyser 1837: 29.
- 22 ‘Wenn Sie mir den Part selber einstudiren ... so glaub’ ich, dass Sie mit mir zufrieden sein werden’; Lyser 1856: I, 24.
- 23 Štěpánek 2012: 15.
- 24 *AeJ*, December 1794: 565, in Volek 2016: 188; *AmZ*, 30 April 1800: 539, in Angermüller and Geffray 1995: 51; *Prager Theater-Almanach* 1807: 85.
- 25 Woodfield 2012a: 166, 226.
- 26 *Don Giovanni* is known to have been performed by Guardasoni’s company in September 1804 and by Prince Lobkowitz’s private company on 26 October 1808, performance materials having been prepared as early as in May 1800. There is no direct evidence that Bassi sang in these performances, but he is the most likely candidate for the title role, having sung at Eisenberg already in 1803 and serving as a member of the Lobkowitz company from 1806 to 1814; see Libin 2006: 61–2; Jonášová 2015: 21–3. Bassi is reported to have sung *Don Giovanni* at Raudnitz in the fall of 1806; see Börner-Sandrini 1876: 42–3.
- 27 Letter from Weber to Johann Gänsbacher of 1 December 1814: <https://weber-gesamt Ausgabe.de/de/A002068/Korrespondenz/A040731.html> (accessed on 21 August 2020).
- 28 I am indebted to music and dance historian Hanna Walsdorf for this distinction.
- 29 Heinse 1825: 5, in Waidelich 2001: 200.
- 30 For the identification of Friedrich Heinse as Peter Wilhelm von Hohenthal, see Schneider 2009: 43.
- 31 See *AmZ*, 9 October 1816: 704. For Weber’s letters and diaries as well as biographical information about people associated with the Dresden Court Opera, see Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Gesamtausgabe: Digitale Edition.
- 32 Gerber 1814: 674. Thönert’s engraving of Guardasoni dates from the summer of 1793, so the picture of Bassi might date from that time too; see Reichard 1793: 302. On the other hand, as Věra Ptáčková has pointed out, the street on the print clearly resembles one of Norbert Bittner’s 1816 engravings of Josef Platzer’s stage designs for Prague’s National Theatre, which suggests that Thönert based the engraving on a drawing made after a performance in Prague, which could indeed have taken place in 1797; see Ptáčková 1987: 111.
- 33 ‘Tomaschek hörte hier dasselbe von Mozart eingeübte Orchester und dieselben Sänger so oft, dass er die ganze Oper nur vom Hören am Klavier zu spielen im Stande war ... Die Tempi sind alle genau angegeben, wie sie der würdige Mann unzählige Male von dem Orchester ausführen hörte’; Fink 1839: 479–80.
- 34 The metronome numbers were originally published in Fink 1839. For comments on Tomaschek’s tempi, see Gerstenberg 1960–61; Bitter 1961: 96, 104; Gielen 1977; Breidenstein 2011: 352.
- 35 ‘zweyen einsichtsvollen Dramaturgen’; the editor Georg Lotz introduced the two critics, without naming them, in the *Leipziger Literatur-Zeitung*, 18 April 1818: 783.
- 36 ‘Ich erwähnte folglich seiner, wie man ... besser [recte: Bassi] als Prototyp des Don Juan anführt’; *Originalien*, 1819, no. 146: 1188; see also 1822, no. 148: 1183.
- 37 ‘wie wir in sehr früher Zeit Hrn. Bassi als Don Juan gesehen haben’; *Abend-Zeitung*, 1 August 1822: 732.

- 38 The Hamburg Critic, the ‘old actor’ and Rochlitz all mention Teresa Strinasacchi among other Italian singers they admired; a member of Guardasoni’s company from 1793 to 1797, she sang with the company in Leipzig in the summers of 1793 and 1794. The ‘old actor’ had also seen Antonio Baglioni and Francesco Zappi in the company’s production of Pasquale Anfossi’s *Zenobia in Palmira*, which was performed in Leipzig in 1792; see *Originalien*, 1823, no. 87: 696; *Reminiszenzen* 1852: 77–8; Rochlitz 1830: III, 221; Woodfield 2012a: 223–7.
- 39 Heinse 1825: 6, in Waidelich 2001: 207.
- 40 ‘dem sehr unterrichteten, aber auch, nach italienischer Weise, kärglich steuernden Unternehmer einer zwar kleinen, doch vortrefflichen italienischen Operngesellschaft’; Rochlitz 1825: II, 258.
- 41 In a letter to Tieck of 17 November 1792, Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder refers to a performance of *Il matrimonio segreto* he and Tieck had seen when he visited the latter in Leipzig from 14 to 18 August, and the highpoint of which was ‘the young man whose inimitable lightness and nature and grace so delighted us’; see Wackenroder 1991: 83. It appears from the context that the said performer sang Count Robinson, which role Bassi is known to have sung in 1794 and is likely to have sung in 1792 as well; see Woodfield 2012a: 224–5.
- 42 Friesen 1871: 243, in Schneider 2016: 405n.
- 43 See Grenser 2005: 59.
- 44 Börner-Sandrini 1888: 17, in Waidelich 2001: 194.
- 45 ‘Auch Luigi Bassi ... war bei diesen Vorstellungen als Regisseur activ, gab auch auf dringendes Verlangen den Don Juan und war, wie Mutter versicherte, trotz seiner fünfzig Jahre noch immer der eleganteste, liebenswürdigste und unwiderstehlichste Vertreter dieser schwierigen Rolle, welche sie von *keinem* andern Sänger jemals wieder so trefflich gesehen zu haben behauptete. / Sie sang bei dieser Gelegenheit zum ersten Male ... die Zerlina, obschon sie in Prag stets die Donna Anna gesungen hat’; Börner-Sandrini 1876: 42–3.
- 46 See the review in *AmZ*, 18 June 1817: 425.
- 47 Börner-Sandrini 1888: 17, in Waidelich 2001: 185.
- 48 Philippi 1825: 75, in Waidelich 2001: 189.
- 49 For biographical information about Lyser, I rely chiefly on Hirth 1911.
- 50 See Lyser 1845d: 609. For an overview of Bassi’s roles, see Magnus Tessing Schneider and Mark Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi, Mozart’s First Don Giovanni* (forthcoming).
- 51 Winkler 1823: 54; Börner-Sandrini 1876: 234.
- 52 See *AmZ*, 22 June 1831: 408, and 11 July 1832: 464.
- 53 See Lyser 1846: 558.
- 54 ‘*Mozart*, von dessen Don Juan er nicht aufhören konnte, mit Entzücken zu reden’; Lyser 1845d: 614.
- 55 Lyser 1845b: 322, in Waidelich 2001: 192.
- 56 ‘welche von andern Seiten her vielen Widerspruch fand, weil sie nicht auf historischen Thatsachen beruhe. *Miecksch* lachte aber und meinte, was ich denn auch meinte, dass man sich an den Spiritus hätte halten sollen’; Lyser 1845e: 138.
- 57 ‘Zugleich genüge ich der Aufforderung hochgeachteter älterer Musiker, noch dasjenige über *Mozart* mitzutheilen, was ich durch den alten *Bassi* über ihn erfuhr, und womit ich bis jetzt öffentlich zurückhielt, da ich für meine ersten Veröffentlichungen so schlechten Dank erhielt’; Lyser 1847: 95.
- 58 Lyser 1847: 95, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 59 Letter to Kayser of 1 January 1854, in Kayser 1978.
- 60 Reichard 1792: 146, in Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*. See the same volume for modern piano reductions of two arias written for the young singer.
- 61 *AeJ*, December 1794: 565, in Volek 2016: 188.

- 62 *AmZ*, 30 April 1800: 538–9, in Angermüller and Geffray 1995: 51. On the identification of Niemetschek as the author of this review and the one in *AeJ* from December 1794 (cf. footnote 61), see Schneider 2018b: 82–7, 93.
- 63 ‘Bassi hat seine Stimme verlohren; sein animirtes, lustiges, heiteres Spiel aber unterhält sehr und sichert ihm ein Aplauso’; *ZeW*, 5 September 1801: 861.
- 64 Reichard 1792: 147, in Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*.
- 65 ‘Bassi ... ist dabei ein schöner Mann von hohem Anstande’; Reichard 1810: 2.
- 66 ‘Bassi ... war einer der schönsten alten Männer, die ich jemals gesehen. Diese schwarzen grossen Glutaugen, mit den langen Wimpern und feingeschnittenen Brauen, dieses weissgelockte Haar und edelgeformte Gesicht, und dieser ebenmäßige Gliederbau mussten immer noch Bewunderung erwecken, und ich hätte es keinem jungen Mädchen verdenken können, wenn sie sich in diesen weissen Lockenkopf verliebt hätte’; Genast 1862: II, 31.
- 67 Heinse 1825: 6, in Waidelich 2001: 208.
- 68 Börner-Sandrini 1888: 17, in Waidelich 2001: 193.
- 69 *AmZ*, 5 March 1817: 181, in Waidelich 2001: 186n. For other reviews of Bassi’s performances, see Waidelich 2001: 184–6n, 203n, 205–7n; Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*.
- 70 ‘Hrn. Bassi’s Figur aber passt nicht zur Rolle des jungen Masettos’; *AmZ*, 18 June 1817: 425.
- 71 See *AmZ*, 17 September 1817: 649.
- 72 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 85.
- 73 *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, March 1800, quoted from Woodfield 2012a: 218n.
- 74 *Der Sammler*, 10 November 1814: 720, in Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*.
- 75 *Leipziger Kunstblatt*, 25 October 1817: 100, in Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*.
- 76 ‘Was aber unsere Aufmerksamkeit vorzüglich beschäftigt hat, ist ausser der Poesie in den einzelnen Momenten, der schöne Zusammenhang des Ganzen, wo nirgends eine Lücke, nirgends eine Erschlaffung ist. Die Rolle [Max in *Der Freischütz*] hat durchaus den Werth eines abgeschlossenen Kunstwerks, wie der Don Juan des Bassi und Fischers Herzog in der Camilla’; *Originalien*, 1823, no. 72: 576.
- 77 *Originalien*, 1823, no. 87: 688 (recte: 696), in Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*.
- 78 For details on Bassi’s training and early career, see Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*.
- 79 See Joseph von Sonnenfels’s portrait of Laschi from 2 March 1768, in Sonnenfels 1784: 293.
- 80 For an examination of the difference between the *caricato* and the *mezzo carattere*, see Link 2015: xiii–xv.
- 81 *AeJ*, February 1797: 185; Reichard [1799]: 285; Iffland 1807: 350.
- 82 ‘das Porträt eines bestimmten, einzelnen Individuums mit allen seinen Thorheiten, Eigenheit ec., ohne besondere Rücksicht auf eine, dasselbe umfassende Gattung darzustellen’; Thürnagel 1836: 244–5.
- 83 ‘das *Fein- oder Hochkomische* ... stellt die Lächerlichkeiten unter der Form des Sinnreichen u. Witzigen auf eine kunstgemässe Weise dar. ... Das *Niedrigkomische* stellt nur die Ungereimtheiten des gemeinen Haufens ohne sinnreiche Auffassung dar’; ‘Komisch’, in Barthels and Düringer 1841.
- 84 ‘Herr Bassi, ein braver Basssänger, zeichnete sich vorzüglich durch sein meisterhaftes Spiel und als feiner Komiker aus’; *Prager Theater-Almanach* 1807: 85.
- 85 ‘bald sind die N[üancen] eine unmerkliche Abstufung [*sic*] der Bewegungen der Seele, bald ein plötzlicher Übergang von einem Ton zum andern, vom Hurtigen zum Langsamen, von der Freude zur Traurigkeit, von der Wuth zur Gelassenheit;

aber immer richten sie sich nach der Idee des Verfassers und der Lage der Person. / Manchmal sind es Pinselstreiche, die eine Maxime, einen Gedanken, einen witzigen Einfall oder Scherz, herauszuheben und auszuzeichnen dienen, indem er sonst, ohne diesen Beystand der Schattirungen, nur halbe Wirkung gethan haben würde. ... Oft entstehn auch die Nüancen aus dem wohl zusammengepassten Spiele der beyden agirenden Personen, wo der eine zu dem Glanze des andern beyrägt, und sie sich einander wechselseitig in Licht und Schatten setzen. So wird die ausserordentliche Hitze des einen nur die grosse Kaltblütigkeit des andern desto hervorstechender machen, und umgekehrt. ... Kurz, um die Schilderung der Nüancen mit ein paar [*sic*] Worten zu entwerfen, sie sind nichts anders als was das Forte und Piano in der Musik, und Licht und Schatten in der Malerey ist, wenn beyde nach den Vorschriften der Kunst, der Natur und des Geschmacks [*sic*] angebracht worden'; Reichard 1775: unpaginated.

- 86 *AeJ*, December 1794: 565, in Volek 2016: 188.
- 87 'sein Spiel ..., das sich immer in den Gränzen des Schicklichen mit unendlichem Reichthume des Ausdrucks zeigt'; *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, 2 September 1807: 840.
- 88 'Es ist so selten, und verdient daher doppelten Ruhm, in dem Spiele eines italiänischen Komikers *Übertreibung* und *Lazzi* vermieden, und dafür *durchdachte Feinheit*, und *richtiges Aufgreifen des vorgestellten Charakters* herrschen zu sehen'; *Der Sammler*, 5 August 1809: 372.
- 89 'Diese Darstellung war nicht, wie viele glauben, in der Manier der italienischen Buffos, welche nur immer die Conturen eines Charakters anzeigen, und das nüanzirte Spiel durch *Lazzi* und Grimassen ersetzen wollen; Herrn *Bassi's* Spiel war beschreibend und dem Charakter richtig angemessen. ... Herrn *Bassi's* Mimik sprach hier den grossen, denkenden Künstler aus, und bewährte sich trefflich in hundert kleinen Schattirungen'; *Theater-Zeitung*, 7 November 1812: 357–8.
- 90 'Hr. *Bassi* ... beurkundete den selbstständigen, denkenden, von aller Nachahmung freien Schauspieler'; *Leipziger Kunstblatt*, 14 April 1818: 372.
- 91 Quotations are from Lessing 1800. Translation adapted.
- 92 'seine, der Natur abgelauchten, Kunstdarstellungen'; *AmZ*, 10 July 1822: 458.
- 93 'Zugleich bewiesen diese Vorstellungen, dass der äussere Glanz, der hier bey weitem das übertraf, was die Italiener dafür thaten, das Publikum keineswegs zu blenden und für den wesentlichen Verlust an schönem Gesang und charakteristischem Spiel zu entschädigen vermag. Wenn man gleich sonst die Sänger im Allgemeinen, und die italienischen insbesondere, eines Mangels an mimischem Vortrage beschuldigt: so waren wir doch hier meistens so glücklich, wenigstens einzelne, wahrhaft ausgezeichnete Schauspieler unter den Italienern zu besitzen [*sic*]; die meisten Rollen waren zweckmässig besetzt, und das Ensemble so gut, dass man es gar nicht wagen darf, die deutsche Oper damit nur zu vergleichen'; *AmZ*, 23 March 1808: 408.
- 94 *AmZ*, 30 April 1800: 539, in Angermüller and Geffray 1995: 50.
- 95 Pichler 1837: 350, in Schneider 2015: 8n.
- 96 Pichler 1837: 350, in Schneider 2015: 8n.
- 97 See Magnus Tessing Schneider, 'The Enlightened Gender Politics of Lorenzo Da Ponte', *I libretti italiani a Vienna tra Sei e Settecento*, ed. Adriana De Feo, Alfred Noe and Nicola Usula (forthcoming).
- 98 'Für Hr. *Feddersen* ... war es ein ungünstiger Umstand, dass man hier sonst Hr. *Bassi* als italienischen Don Juan zu sehen gewohnt war, der, ... durch Anstand und Handlung, Gang und Manieren, ein herrliches fein ausgemaltes Bild von diesem Don Juan darstellte. Abgerechnet, dass es Hr. *Feddersen* unmöglich ist, diesen vorzüglichen italienischen Schauspieler an eleganter Geschmeidigkeit zu erreichen, hat er diese Rolle zur Zufriedenheit gespielt und gesungen'; *ZeW*, 22 December 1807: 1629.
- 99 'so müssen wir allerdings sagen, dass er an natürlicher Lebhaftigkeit und Noblesse des Benehmens weit hinter unsern ewigen Muster *Bassi* zurückblieb'; *Der Sammler*,

- 5 May 1814: 288. ‘Forti, als Don Juan, zeigte sich in der Durchführung zwar gewandt, aber nicht so fein wie einst der Meister Bassi ihn zu geben verstand, für den Mozart die Rolle schrieb’; Tomaschek 1846: 356.
- 100 ‘Was die mimische Darstellung betrifft, so fehlte es ihm an der vornehmen Gewandtheit, und dem lebenswürdigen Leichtsinn, der den Don Juan charakterisiert, und er nahm Manches gar zu ernsthaft’; *Der Sammler*, 5 May 1817: 232.
- 101 Börner-Sandrini 1888: 17, in Waidelich 2001: 194.
- 102 Friesen 1871: 243, in Schneider 2016: 405n.
- 103 ‘An die tiefere, wahrhaft tragische Bedeutung des Charakters schien er nicht gedacht zu haben. ... Übrigens muss man Hrn. W. die Gerechtigkeit wiederfahren lassen, dass er seinen Don Juan ... mit Leichtigkeit spielte’; *Originalien*, 1820, no. 93: 755.
- 104 ‘In Hrn. *Woltereck’s* Don Juan ist ein merkliches Bestreben, diese wichtige Rolle würdig darzustellen, sichtbar’; *Originalien*, 1821, no. 103: 824.
- 105 ‘Herr *Woltereck* gewinnt seinem Don Juan immer mehr die richtige Seite ab, er nimmt ihn ernster, würdevoller, wie es einem Don Juan zukommt’; *Originalien*, 1824, no. 114: 911–2.
- 106 ‘Gern schweigen wir von der tieferen, poetischen Bedeutung dieses so höchst anziehenden Charakters, aber den Mann vom Stande, ... diese erste Erforderniss des Don Juan, vermissten wir leider gänzlich’; *Originalien*, 1821, no. 70: 560.
- 107 ‘Von der tieferen poetischen Bedeutung dieses Charakters ... wollen wir hier gar nicht reden, ... aber wenn wir auch nur das verlangen, was zunächst in der Rolle ganz offen am Tage liegt, so wollen wir doch wenigstens den Cavalier und den Helden sehen. Beides war aber bei Herrn *Forti*, offenerherzig gesagt, nicht, wenigstens nicht immer, der Fall. Allerdings nimmt er die Rolle leicht und anständig, aber diese Leichtigkeit und dieser Anstand erinnert an den Figaro viel mehr als an den Cavalier, dessen Haltung und Leichtigkeit eine Stufe höher stehen muss’; *Originalien*, 1826, no. 12: 96.
- 108 ‘Da war nicht der geringste Adel, weder in der Sprache noch in der Bewegungen, da war selbst nicht einmal eine Spur von der diesem jungen Manne sonst beywohnenden Gewandtheit anzutreffen. Überall war er genirt, alle seine Bewegungen eckig und gezwungen, mit einem Worte, statt des feinen raffinirenden Wollüstlings, dem äussere Liebenswürdigkeit so wenig als schöner Anstand mangeln darf, erblickte man einen rohen Bösewicht, dem auch jede glänzende Aussenseite mangelte, so dass man sich nicht denken konnte, wie es ihm gelungen sey, auch nur Ein weibliches Wesen besserer Art sich geneigt zu machen. Anstatt des gefälligen, einschmeichelnden Wesens, liess Hr. Unzelmann überall *Pathos* hervorblicken. Ob er diesen etwa mit Anstand verwechselte!! ... Zum Unglück für Hrn. *Unzelmann* und für das Publikum hatte man hier diese Rolle so vortrefflich von *Bassi* gesehen’; Reinhold 1808: 208–9.
- 109 ‘Hr. *Unzelmann* gab den Don Juan allerdings ... mit grosser Gewandtheit und feuriger Lebendigkeit; doch glaubten wir in ihm mehr einen leichtsinnigen, lasterhaften Jüngling, als den vornehmen Spanier, als den kecken Wüstling, als den bis zur Verruchtheit verhärteten Egoisten ... der Freche ... muss zwar mit aller Liebenswürdigkeit eines geübten Verführers, aber auch mit einem frevelndem Humor, mit einer gewissen lasterhaften Grösse und egoistischen Consequenz, mit Genialität in der Verruchtheit, kurz wie wir in sehr früher Zeit Hrn. *Bassi* als Don Juan gesehen haben, dargestellt werden’; *Abend-Zeitung*, 1 August 1822: 732.
- 110 ‘dass man in den Charakter des Don Juan, nichts legen soll, was nicht darin ist; er kann dadurch nicht zerrinnen, verliert aber dadurch an Grazie und “nobler Verruchtheit”, wie Friedrich *Kind* es nannte, der den *Bassi* noch als Don Giovanni gesehen hatte und keinen Andern nach ihm gelten lassen wollte’; Lyser 1847: 97.
- 111 ‘Der Charakter des Don Juan, und wie ihn auch Mozart gegeben hat, ist der Nationalcharakter eines tapfern, lustigen, genussüchtigen Spaniers’; Lyser 1838: 141.

- 112 ‘Das Element der Sage selbst aber ist dem spanischen Nationalcharakter weit angemessener, als dem portugiesischen, in welchem sich nichts von der *graziösen* Verruchtheit des D. J. findet’; Lyser 1838: 256.
- 113 Lyser 1833: 126–7, in Schneider 2009: 47n.
- 114 ‘seine herrliche Gestalt, sein wundervolles Organ, sein Anstand, seine Laune, so wie sein ungeheucheltes Feuer, wo es gilt: der Schönheit seine Huldigung darzubringen, qualificiren ihn durchaus zum Helden meiner Oper’; Lyser 1837: 40.
- 115 Lyser 1847: 95, in Schneider 2016: 409n.
- 116 ‘Was das Spiel betrifft, so veranschaulicht es zwar nicht alle die ritterliche Feinheit, Galanterie und Gymnastik, noch weniger alle die Dithyrambische Schwungkraft, den ungeheuern Lebensdrang, die chaotische Ueberfülle, zu der diese spanische Mischung von alcibiadischer Unwiderstehlichkeit und faustischen Gigantentrotzes die Phantasie berechtigt’; Philippi 1825: 79.
- 117 ‘Im Absicht auf schöne Gestalt, die man einen Don Juan nicht erlassen darf ... Besonders vikarirte die Jovialität auf eine bemerkenswerthe Weise, ... mochte auch diese Jovialität mehr den lebenslustigen Wiener als den feurigen Spanier bezeichnen. ... Die Gestalt ist nicht mehr die eines Jünglings’; Philippi 1825: 75, 79.
- 118 Börner-Sandrini 1888, in Waidelich 2001: 196.
- 119 Niemetschek 2005: 90.
- 120 Schiller 2005: 153.
- 121 Schiller 2005: 137–8.
- 122 ‘Unter Anstand verstehen viele Schauspieler ein überaus vornehmes Wesen, welches sie durch hochgetragenen Kopf, gemessenen Schritt, nichts anerkennendes, nichts achtendes Umherschauen zu erreichen suchen, während der wahre Anstand des *gebildeten Mannes* aus allen Ständen, auf Natürlichkeit und Anmuth begründet, ohne Rücksicht auf Rang, in der Hauptsache immer dasselbe bedingt’; ‘Anstand’ in Barthels and Düringer 1841.
- 123 See Ong 2002.
- 124 Hansen first took private lessons with Siboni and later joined the conservatoire he had founded in Copenhagen; he made his debut at the Royal Danish Theatre in 1832 and became its leading baritone in 1836; see Aumont and Collin 1896–9; Schepeleern 1989: 401–2.
- 125 According to art historians Jesper Svenningsen (the National Gallery of Denmark) and Anna Schram Vejlbj (the Hirschsprung Collection), whom I would like to thank for their assistance and comments, the earliest likely date of the two drawings of the opening scene is the late 1840s. In 1870 Marstrand told the actress Johanne Luise Heiberg that hearing *Don Giovanni* at the Royal Danish Theatre had been one of his ‘regular pleasures’ for ‘many years’, but that August Bournonville’s recent staging ‘spoiled everything’ for him. This suggests that the drawings reflect earlier performance practice; see Heiberg 1974: 110.
- 126 On connections between Bassi, Siboni, Cetti and Kierkegaard, see Schneider 2009: 51–3; Schneider 2018a.
- 127 ‘Am Costume war sehr, und freylich nicht zum Vortheil der Wirkung, gespart’; *AmZ*, 9 October 1816: 705.
- 128 ‘Etwas später kam Benelli mit dem Rufe eines der ersten Tenoristen nach Dresden und trat auch ganz mit der Anmasslichkeit eines solchen auf, über alles höhnte er, sprach nur von Neapel, Rom, Mailand, Paris und London, und in vielen Dingen mag er Recht gehabt haben. Er debutirte als Oktavio in Don Juan und fand die ganze Scenerie kleinstädtisch und philisterhaft, die Ausführung verfehlt, alle Tempi vergriffen; als der Chor zum Feste in Finale des ersten Aktes herbeieilt, brach er in ein lautes Gelächter aus und verlangte den Takt doppelt so schnell. Einige alte Perrücken im Orchester, erzählte Miksch einst dem Verfasser, hatten ohnehin einen Zahn auf den Mozart; sie mussten in seinen Opern zweimal so viel als in den älteren Opern spielen, dabei war er im Moduliren und im Harmonisiren ihnen “frech”; als

- sie die Ouverture des Don Juan zum ersten Male ausführten, war es ihnen bei dem Chromatischen Gange gewesen, wie wenn ihnen ein Stock durch den Haarbeutel gesteckt und umgedreht wurde. Und nun sollten sie alles noch einmal so schnell als seither spielen! Sie erklärten, es ginge nicht, Benelli erklärte, dann reise er sofort wieder ab, die Direction schlug sich auf seine Seite und so mussten die Altgläubigen nachgeben. Der Puder stob aus ihren Toupets, der Schweiss floss über ihre Gesichter, aber es half alles nichts, es musste jedes Stück schneller genommen werden, und als die Qual überstanden, war auch wirklich ein besserer Don Juan fertig. Das Publikum staunte und applaudirte, und als ein persönlicher Freund Mozarts einer Vorstellung beiwohnte, bezeigte er sich einverstanden'; Mannstein 1863: 44–5.
- 129 'Die Menuet nahm *Mozart* fast um noch einmal so rasch als sie jetzt genommen wird'; Lyser 1847: 96.
- 130 'der alte "Don Juan-Bassi", der "Alles weiss", lässt sein dröhnendes Lachen dazwischen fallen'; Weber 1864: 163.
- 131 Börner-Sandrini 1888: 17, in Waidelich 2001: 193.
- 132 *AmZ*, 30 April 1800: 539, in Angermüller and Geffray 1995: 51. The critic maintained, somewhat unconvincingly, that Guardasoni insisted on the fast tempi because he wanted all performances to end at 8.30 p.m.
- 133 'Alle Ensembles wurden, sowol von Seiten der Sänger, als unsers braven Orchesters, trefflich gegeben'; *AmZ*, 24 August 1814: 570.
- 134 'Das ganze Orchester spielte die genannten beyden Opern mit eine Präcision, Liebe und Eifer für die Kunst, so dass dem Publicum darüber nichts zu wünschen übrig blieb'; *AmZ*, 9 October 1816: 705.
- 135 'Das ganze Orchester bewies, wie gewöhnlich, Eifer, Genauigkeit und Unermüdlichkeit aus Liebe zu dieser schönen Musik'; *AmZ*, 18 June 1817: 425.
- 136 'Überhaupt scheint uns Hr. *Morlachi* das Tempo hier und da zu übertreiben'; *Hesperus: Encyclopädische Zeitschrift für gebildete Leser*, 12 March 1827: 244.
- 137 'jede Sechszehnteil-Note, jeder Punct *scharf* markirt, dennoch alles *ungezwungen* und aus einem Gusse; das Allegro feurig, herausfordernd, gesteigert bis zum letzten trotzigen ... und dann in sich zusammensinkend'; Lyser 1836: 112.
- 138 'so muss ich für's Erste dankend und lobend der Direction Morlacchi's erwähnen, welche durchaus feurig und energisch war. Ich wenigstens habe dasselbe Werk früher unter Spontinis Leitung in Berlin, und unter Weber's Direction in Dresden mit weit geringerem Erfolge gehört. Letzterer hatte darüber eine eigenthümliche Ansicht; da, sagte er, diese Musik schon so alt und allgemein bekannt ist, so nehme ich die Tempi mancher Sätze langsamer, als gewöhnlich, damit die feine Kunst der harmonischen Verwebung und der sinnigen Instrumentation mehr hervortrete. Dieser Grund möchte gelten, wenn von einer Probe-Aufführung, etwa in einem Conservatorio zur Belehrung der Schüler, die Rede wäre; der theatralische Effect aber muss dabei zu Grunde gehen. - Übrigens hätte Weber, der mit Bassi in dem nämlichen Amtsverhältnisse sich begegnete, wie Morlacchi, denselben als einen gewissermaassen authentischen Interpreten, füglich zu Rathe ziehen können, wenn hier nicht eine missverständene Nationalantipathie, welche überhaupt die musikalischen Verhältnisse in Dresden oft und leicht verwirrt hat, störend dazwischen getreten wäre'; Heinse 1837: 212–3.
- 139 *Abend-Zeitung*, 22 January 1820: <https://weber-gesamtausgabe.de/de/A002068/Schriften/A030316.html> (accessed on 12 February 2021).
- 140 Letter from Weber to Rochlitz of 12 February 1820: <https://www.weber-gesamtausgabe.de/de/A002068/Korrespondenz/A041590.html> (accessed on 22 September 2020).
- 141 *Abend-Zeitung*, 29 January 1817: <https://weber-gesamtausgabe.de/en/A002068/Writings/A030377.html> (accessed on 12 February 2021).
- 142 *Literarischer Merkur, oder wöchentliches Unterhaltungsblatt für alle Stände*, 14 February 1820: <https://weber-gesamtausgabe.de/de/A007979/Schriften/A030971.html> (accessed on 12 February 2021).

- 143 ‘Das treffliche Gedächtniss Bassi’s, für den der Meister den *Don Juan* geschrieben, der die Rolle unter den Augen Mozart’s öfter gesungen hatte, ging hierbei seinem Bestreben, Mozart’s Intentionen auch im kleinsten Detail der Musikleitung und Bühnenpraxis zu treffen, kräftig zur Hand. / ... Bemerket mag hierbei beiläufig werden, dass Bassi, auf Grund seiner Mozart’schen Erinnerungen, auf Darstellung der Oper *ohne* die Sätze nach Don Juans Höllenfahrt drang. Er traf damit vollständig Weber’s Meinung, der den Abschluss des Werkes durch diese Sätze für matt und undramatisch erklärte’; Weber 1864: 340.
- 144 Lyser 1845b: 322, in Waidelich 2001: 192.
- 145 ‘Die Meisten stellten einen deutschen *Burschen* dar, wie z. B. *Forti* und *Fischer*, (welcher Letztere zum Überfluss noch ein kleiner, dicker, putzlicher Mann ist). Anderen einen *deutschen* Zierbengel, wie z. B. der sonst ehrenwerthe *Genast*. Noch Andere machten einen tollen Schlagetodt und Jungfernräuber daraus’; Lyser 1833: 125.
- 146 ‘Hr. Salvadori ... war zwar in seinem Spiele nicht besonders gewandt, doch war es anständig’; *AmZ*, 4 April 1827: 236.
- 147 ‘Salvatori ist freylich kein Don Juan, wie ihn uns Hofmann schildert, aber durch Anmuth und Gewandtheit der Stimme, ersetzt er das reichlich, was ihm an körperlicher Gewandtheit abgeht’; *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, 28 March 1827: 300.
- 148 ‘Ja war nicht Don Giovanni so ganz vom Geiste seiner Rollen durchdrungen, dass er, statt dem Commendatore mit dem Lichte entgegen zu gehen, das Weinglas erfasste, das hell Leuchtende des Weins wohl erkennend, und nur *darum* Glas und Leuchter verwechselnd’; *Dresdner Morgen-Zeitung, Dramaturgische Blätter*, July 1827, no. 13: 103.
- 149 ‘Der Dichter hat seinen Helden bekanntlich als einen verworfnen Wüstling, aber nicht der *gemeinen* Art, vorgezeichnet’; *Abend-Zeitung*, 15 February 1828, Einheimisches no. 2: 7.
- 150 ‘*Wächter* ist als Don Juan eine *künstlerische Ganzheit!* Ich habe noch nie die höhere poetische Charakteristik dieses Don Juan im Gesange und Spiele so klar und kräftig bezeichnet gefunden, wie heute; die spanische Grandezza des Edelmanns, die muthwillige Laune des Bonvivants, die humoristische Asmodi-Natur dieses Don Juan, der jetzt einen niedersticht, und dann in Champagner sich einen Himmel erträumt, alles war hier zu vollendeten Kunsteinheit zusammengefasst, in Form und Idee meisterhaft ausgeprägt. *Wächters* Don Juan trägt den äussern und innern Beglaubigungstempel an der Stirne, und die ganze chronique scandaleuse dieses Charakters tritt uns hier *gemildert*, aber mit *lebendiger Wahrheit* entgegen. Diesem Don Juan mit der Fülle schöner Körperformen und der Courtoisie seines ganzen Wesens, mit der reizenden Frivolität und dem, ich möchte sagen, gefährlichen Spiritualismus im musikalischen Vortrage, diesem Don Juan *Wächters* müssen wir seine Lebensfata glauben, und all das Schöne, das Leporello in seiner Register-Arie uns von ihm erzählt. Die Stimme des Hrn. *Wächter* hatte gerade am heutigen Abende einen sonnenklaren beau jour, jenen reizvollen Timbre psychischer und physischer Aufgeregtheit, der dem Don Juan-Gesange so sehr zusagt’; *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung und Originalblatt für Kunst, Literatur, Musik, Mode und geselliges Leben*, 25 June 1837: 479.
- 151 See Lyser 1842: 59.
- 152 ‘Im Spiel zu solid, nicht frivol, nicht gewandt und einschmeichelnd genug. Dieser Mangel aber gereicht dem jungen Manne auf der andern Seite zur Ehre, indem die Prätension der gewöhnlichen arroganten Darsteller des Don Juan noch ekeliger ist’; Heinse 1837: 214.
- 153 ‘hat man nun einen schönen Mann auf dem Theater als Don Juan gesehen, wie z. B. ich vor einigen Jahren auf Dresdens Hofbühne in Zezi und ältere Zeitgenossen in Bassi, so denkt man an diese schöne Erscheinung und schmückt sich das Innere dieser herrlichen Gestalt auf das Beste aus’; Lyser 1838: 142.

- 154 ‘Nachdem ich mit Tieck oft darüber gesprochen hatte, war mir die Darstellung dieser Rolle durch Zezi von unendlichem Interesse. Zezi war zwar ein ausgezeichnet schöner Mann; aber nichts weniger, als ein gewandter Schauspieler. Sein Verdienst bei den meisten seiner Rollen, die in der Regel nicht die Grenze der sogenannten Anstandsrollen überschritten, war mehr negativ als positiv. Man sah in ihm stets eine überaus edle und vornehme Erscheinung, hatte aber das Vermeiden von allem Anstössigen, Unedlen oder Gemeinen weit mehr zu loben, als irgend einen künstlerischen Erfolg. Ja man durfte nicht selten den Mangel an Beweglichkeit beklagen. So spielte er auch an dem genannten Abend und bei wiederholten Aufführungen die Rolle des Don Juan; und ich kann versichern, von der Darstellung desselben niemals mehr befriedigt gewesen zu sein. ... eine mangelhafte, aber die Grenzen einer edlen Natürlichkeit innehaltende Kunstfertigkeit’; Friesen 1871: 244.
- 155 ‘Zezi war hoch und schlank gewachsen, besass eine edle, classische Gesichtsbildung, schönes Auge, dunkles Haar; es ist kaum möglich, sich für die Rollen des Grafen in *Figaro's Hochzeit*, für den *Don Juan* und *Tell* eine prachtvollere Persönlichkeit zu denken, als diesem von der Natur so verschwenderisch ausgestattetem Sänger zu Gebote stand, wenn er auch als Darsteller manches zu wünschen übrig liess’; Börner-Sandrini 1876: 241.

2 The opening scene

In the opening scene of the opera, set in a garden at night, we see Donna Anna trying to restrain Don Giovanni as he is making his escape from her house. She calls for help while he struggles to conceal his identity. Her father, the Commendatore, arrives and challenges the unknown man to a duel. At first refusing to fight, Don Giovanni eventually accepts the challenge and kills his opponent. Later in the opera, identifying the nocturnal visitor as Don Giovanni, Donna Anna tells Don Ottavio that he tried to rape her but that she managed to fight him off.

What are we to make of that tumultuous episode in which both the motives and the actions of the characters are shrouded in obscurity? Is Donna Anna telling Don Ottavio the truth, or is she misrepresenting the events? If so, how? Hoffmann famously suggested that Don Giovanni has succeeded in seducing (rather than raping) her, and this remains a contested issue among scholars. Ricarda Schmidt, who provides an overview of the conflicting positions, has recently defended Hoffmann's interpretation on the basis of textual and musical clues.¹ That is exceptional, though. Most of today's commentators do not hesitate to describe Don Giovanni as a rapist, a murderer, often citing the opening scene as proof that he deserves his punishment. But as spectators, we cannot know what has happened offstage, and it seems clear that Da Ponte does not want us to know. Instead, he invites us to consider the various possibilities, directing our attention to the possible motives and modes of conduct of the people involved.

Due to the dramatic centrality of this episode in the traditional *Stone Guest* plays, thoughtful spectators in Prague would have been alert to the librettist's novel take on the scene and hence to the ambiguity that envelops the offstage events in this opera. In Tirso's play, Don Juan Tenorio intercepts a letter from Doña Ana de Ulloa to her secret lover, Marquis de la Mota, in which she invites him to her house at 11 p.m., asking him to wear a red cloak so her maids may recognise him. Don Juan manages to exchange cloaks with the suitor, and thus disguised, he enters Doña Ana's house and almost succeeds in raping her, offstage, before he is surprised by her father, Don Gonzalo.

Goldoni, who objected to what he saw as the disreputable conduct of Tirso's noblewomen, omitted the love letter to the secret suitor and instead made Don Giovanni the supper guest of Donna Anna and the Commendatore.² In this play, when the latter is called away to attend the king, the seducer offers his hand in

marriage to his daughter; when she turns him down, he tries to rape her at knife-point in full view of the audience; and when she tries to flee, he restrains her by clutching her dress, only letting her go when he sees her father returning. We find similar onstage violence in Marinelli's play; here Don Juan 'drags and carries Donna Anna forcibly from the house' while she cries out: 'Worthless traitor! I'll rather lose my life than submit to you!' (II.8).³

In Da Ponte's libretto, Don Ottavio's observation that the seducer entered the house 'under the sacred cloak of friendship' (457), and the fact that Donna Anna initially took him for her fiancé, as she tells Don Ottavio, echo Tirso's play in which Don Juan literally disguises himself with the cloak of Doña Ana's lover. But in the 1787 work, it is unclear whether Donna Anna was expecting a nocturnal visit from Don Ottavio, which might be perceived as a breach of social propriety. More importantly, we do not see Don Giovanni use violence against her. In fact, their first entrance is an exact reversal of the situation in Goldoni and Marinelli: the drawn weapon is gone; it is now Donna Anna who has 'a fast grip in Don Giovanni's arm', while she cries: 'Unless you kill me, do not hope I'll ever let you go' (12–3); and it is she who, nonetheless, lets go of Don Giovanni the moment the Commendatore enters. However, her father's first line is still: 'Let her go, worthless man' (27), as if he were reacting to the Don Juan of the old *Stone Guest* plays. It is by means of subtle manipulations like these that Da Ponte rewrites the well-known narrative from a critical perspective.

That Don Giovanni entered Donna Anna's house at night, cloaked, is often taken as proof that his intentions were violent from the outset. However, the fact that he never behaves violently towards a woman on stage invites us to consider other possibilities. Leporello's later reference to his master's recent actions as 'violating the daughter and killing the father' (54) must be set alongside the fact that the servant's opening solo revolves around his persistent absence from women's homes where such crimes would occur. Like the Commendatore, he is an unreliable witness, in other words, one who knows just as little about the offstage events as the spectators do. As Baker says, the audience is therefore 'well placed to appreciate the rage of Don Giovanni, already very disturbed by the event, on hearing Leporello's fanciful interpretation of it'.⁴ It might be added, as John Rosselli points out, that Donna Anna was not in her bedroom when Don Giovanni entered – as sometimes claimed – but in her 'appartamento' (456), i.e.

the then usual suite of corridorless, multi-purpose rooms, her part of the family palace, and she happened to be alone; there would have been nothing unusual in a gentleman's dropping in late at night, for aristocrats got up late and went to bed late.⁵

Here, it is worth keeping in mind that Don Giovanni had entered Donna Elvira's house in a similar way. 'You enter my house stealthily' (155–6), she says when confronting him later in the Act; and while he made use of vows and flattery to seduce her, he did not use violence. In fact, they spent three blissful days together before he abandoned her. Hence, while the reactions of the two women

apparently differed, Don Giovanni's *modus operandi* might well have been the same in both cases. The fact that Donna Anna's narration is placed so long after the event – in a clear departure from Bertati's libretto, where it follows immediately after her discovery of her father's corpse – also enhances the possibility of her not being entirely sincere.⁶ She might need time to get her story straight. Fittingly, Alessandra Campana describes it as 'an exercise in rhetoric', Donna Anna displaying 'perfect control over the classic figure of *hypotyposis*, or *evidentia*, a rhetorical technique codified since ancient oratory, that allows the speaker to describe an event so that it acquires visual cogency', the purpose of her story being to 'provoke enough of Don Ottavio's anger and "righteous furor" that he will take revenge into his own hands'.⁷ Suspicions that her account of the offstage events are partially fabricated may be further aroused by the fact that her account of the onstage events fail to correspond entirely to what the audience have witnessed with their own eyes, as we shall see. We will consider the much-contested textual and musical ambiguities in her narration in the next chapter.

Many of these ambiguities were suppressed in Rochlitz's translation, which tends to make Donna Anna more passive and vulnerable and Don Giovanni more menacing, in accordance with the moral outlook of the traditional *Stone Guest* plays. In Da Ponte, Don Giovanni's first words are: 'Donna folle! indarno gridi. / Chi son io tu non saprai' ('Madwoman! You cry out in vain. You won't get to know who I am', 14–5). And later, in an aside, he gives expression to his consternation with words that anticipate his infernal death: 'Questa furia disperata / mi vuol far precipitar' ('This frantic fury means to cause my downfall', 22–3). In Rochlitz, however, not only is the reference to Donna Anna's 'fast grip' on Don Giovanni's arm gone; he now calls her 'frail' rather than 'mad': 'Schwachtes Weib! kannst zittern – beben: / Doch mich hält Dein Händchen nicht!' ('Frail woman! You may tremble and shiver, but your little hand won't restrain me!'). In his later lines, furthermore, which are now addressed to Donna Anna, consternation has given way to threats: 'Ehe Dich mein Zorn erreichet, / Rette Dich und flieh hinein!' ('Before my anger hits you, save yourself and flee inside!').

Since Hoffmann suggests that Don Giovanni has managed to seduce Donna Anna, he toned down the seducer's menacing attitude when compared to Rochlitz. However, the changed power balance in the singing translation recurs in his story, and this confronted him with the following problem: 'Why does [Don Giovanni] not push the woman back with his powerful fist and escape? Does the wicked act make him powerless, or is it the internal struggle between hatred and love that deprives him of courage and strength?'⁸ That Don Giovanni might be genuinely afraid of Donna Anna was not an option Hoffmann considered – and nor, we might add, is it often considered by later commentators whose conception of the scene is informed by traditional stage practice. Even an authority like Hermann Abert writes, in his 1920 book on Mozart, that 'Donna Anna tears herself free with three wild outbursts and rushes away', in flagrant denial of the stage direction.⁹ In the Czinner-Graf film, the director has tried to justify the Commendatore's initial command by letting Don Giovanni (Cesare Siepi) fight with Donna Anna (Elisabeth Grümmer), clutching her wrist until her father enters. And in Losey's

film, the fragile Donna Anna (Edda Moser) does not get to restrain Don Giovanni (Ruggero Raimondi) either: she simply runs after him until he slams the entrance gate in her face. Such ‘weakening’ of Donna Anna’s behaviour in the opening scene helps explain why it is so often taken for granted that Don Giovanni assaulted her.

That view is hard to reconcile with what we know about Luigi Bassi’s portrayal of Don Giovanni. The contrast between the dominant German tradition, which we can trace back to Rochlitz, and a performance tradition that can be traced back to Bassi himself, appears from a comparison of two drawings by Marstrand from the mid-nineteenth century to Slevogt’s illustration of the opening scene, prepared for a 1921 edition of the libretto. Even if Marstrand’s pictures do not show concrete performers, his point of reference would have been the 1845 Copenhagen production starring Hansen, a grand-disciple of Bassi. In both pictures, Marstrand showed the first moments after the entrance of Donna Anna and Don Giovanni, the latter depicted almost identically in the two versions. In the first picture, Donna Anna tightly clutches his right arm with both her hands, in accordance with the libretto (see Figure 2.1); in the second one, she tries to summon the servants with her right arm, while her left hand clutches the seducer’s arm (see Figure 2.2). As there is no hint of violence on his part, their struggle has the character of an angry quarrel. The mood is mainly comical, which agrees with Lyser’s statement, in the fictive interview with Bassi, that ‘the introduction begins comically, then becomes tragic’, and also with Rushton’s more recent argument that the entry of the two characters ‘is composed in a tone essentially belonging to *opera buffa*’.¹⁰ In Slevogt’s picture, in contrast, the dark, muscular figure of Don Giovanni, menacing in his faceless anonymity, exudes brutality, and his struggle with Donna Anna clearly has the character of a physical fight (see Figure 2.3). Here we are compelled to believe Donna Anna when she says he tried to rape her. However, by visualising Donna Anna’s narrative, Slevogt turns a mere possibility in Da Ponte’s libretto into a fact, thus anticipating the procedure of multiple twentieth- and twenty-first-century commentators.

The ensuing duel represents a different problem, since we behold this event with our own eyes. In Tirso’s play, Don Gonzalo enters with sword drawn when he hears his daughter crying offstage that a ‘traitor’ has destroyed her honour (II.518–9). Don Juan emerges from the house, likewise with sword drawn, and mortally wounds the old man who blocks his way. The dying man repeats his daughter’s accusation, calling his killer a traitor, to which Don Juan replies: ‘You ended your life yourself’ (II.537). In Goldoni’s play, Donna Anna first tells her father what has happened, and when the Commendatore showers Don Giovanni with abuse, the latter wounds him. He is just as pitiless as Tirso’s villain, leaving the old man to die alone: ‘His blood arouses no pity in my breast. As you make your bed, so you must lie in it’ (IV.3).

The situation in Da Ponte’s libretto is quite different.¹¹ Since Donna Anna returned to the house the moment she heard the Commendatore coming, she describes events she did not actually witness when offering the following account: ‘my father comes



Figure 2.1 Wilhelm Marstrand: Donna Anna tries to restrain Don Giovanni (Act I scene 1). Paper and ink. Mid-nineteenth century. Photo ©: The Henrik Engelbrecht Collection, Copenhagen.



Figure 2.2 Wilhelm Marstrand: Donna Anna summons her servants (Act I scene 1). Paper and ink. Mid-nineteenth century. Photo ©: The Henrik Engelbrecht Collection, Copenhagen.



Figure 2.3 Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Donna Anna tries to restrain Don Giovanni (Act I scene 1). Woodcut. From Da Ponte 1921. Photo ©: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, 4 L.sel.I 1062, p. 11.

rushing, he wants to know who he is, and the villain, who was stronger than the poor old man, completes his misdeed by killing him' (483–6). This is not quite what happened, Donna Anna exaggerating Don Giovanni's guilt and downplaying that of her father in order to motivate Don Ottavio to carry out her blood vengeance. In reality, it was the Commendatore who challenged the unknown man to a duel the moment he entered, without inquiring about his identity, and without waiting for his daughter's account (as he does in Goldoni), thus starting the duel without knowing exactly what transpired between them, while also ignoring the fact that it is Donna Anna who holds on to the seducer and not the other way around. Moreover, as Baker has recently pointed out, Joseph II – for whose niece's wedding the opera was commissioned – had introduced harsh laws against duelling, and the original audience would have known that the Commendatore engaged in criminal activity by instigating a duel.¹² In other words, Donna Anna completely ignores the facts that her father died in an illegal duel he himself initiated, and which Don Giovanni only entered unwillingly. Indeed, the seducer is more reluctant to fight than in any previous *Stone Guest* version, first telling his attacker that he will not deign to fight him, and only entering the duel when the Commendatore calls him a coward: 'Misero, attendi, / se vuoi morir' ('Poor man! Take heed, since you want to die', 35). Mozart has highlighted Don Giovanni's pity for the old man by letting him sing the word 'Misero' three times, first with *mezza voce*, then with *più voce*, and finally *forte*, indicating that he initially mutters the word to himself. But singers (including Siepi in the Czimmer-Graf film) traditionally give the lines an arrogant or aggressive colouring, which is achieved by ignoring Mozart's dynamics and addressing all three statements to the Commendatore – and we find this tendency reflected in the critical literature too. Rushton, for example, considers Don Giovanni's reaction 'a disdainful show of reluctance'.¹³

Don Giovanni's lines in the trio that ends the introduction tend to receive similar treatment:

Ah già cadde il sciagurato.
Affannosa e agonizzante
già dal seno palpitante
veggo l'anima partir.

(‘Ah, the wretch has fallen. I see his soul depart,
panting and dying, from his palpitating breast’, 41–4)

In the words of Wye Jamison Allanbrook, Mozart's setting of these lines shows the title hero 'transfixed and private in awe of the moment', and she describes some of his vocal gestures as 'plangent' and 'pathetic'.¹⁴ That Don Giovanni is 'genuinely shaken' also appears from 'the splitting of his words in the last phrases', Paolo Gallarati observes.¹⁵ And according to Scott Burnham, the fact that 'Giovanni's reaction is the most overtly lyrical of the three, perhaps because he alone observes, while the others are busy communing with their own conditions', turns him into 'the overriding consciousness of the scene'.¹⁶ Even Campana, who follows Donna Anna in describing the killing of the Commendatore as a 'murder', concedes that

Don Giovanni's reaction to his death is 'surprisingly empathetic'.¹⁷ In contrast, Thomas Bauman detects an 'almost clinical detachment' in Don Giovanni's lines, while Nino Pirrotta thinks Mozart 'expresses his own feelings in the presence of the pathos of death more than those of the three characters onstage'.¹⁸ While Bauman could have Losey's film in mind, where Don Giovanni takes leave of the dying Commendatore with a mock-deferential removal of his hat, Pirrotta is clearly influenced by what René Leibowitz has described as most conductors' 'convenient and comfortable performance in four beats', which 'suppresses [the] differences in phrasing and therefore completely neutralises the individuality of the characters'.¹⁹

We can trace the 'pitiless' attitude of Don Giovanni in this scene back to the earliest German singing translations. Already in the version by Neefe and Schmieder, there is no trace of compassion in the seducer's response to the challenge: 'Warte, bald soll Dir / Dein Trotz vergehn' ('Wait, your defiance shall soon vanish').²⁰ Rochlitz went further in that direction, enhancing Don Giovanni's arrogance and threatening attitude. Adapting the earlier translation, he replaced the repeated 'Misero' first with an angry retort, 'Feiger? ich?' ('I a coward?'), and then, at the full statement of the two lines, he replaced Neefe's fairly neutral 'Warte' ('Wait') with 'Zittre!' ('Tremble!'). This tendency continues in Don Giovanni's lines in the closing trio where compassion has given way to cold-blooded condescension:

Ha! nun ruhe, frommer Alter!
Gib es hin, Dein Restchen Leben!
Aus dem längst schon welken Herzen
Fliess es unaufhaltsam hin!

(Ha, rest now, devout old man! Give up what little
life remains! Let it pour relentlessly from your heart,
which withered long ago!)

Rochlitz also expunged Don Giovanni's attempt to justify his conduct from the subsequent dialogue with Leporello. In Da Ponte, when Leporello blames his master for killing Donna Anna's father, Don Giovanni replies with an adequate description of the Commendatore's conduct: 'He wanted to get hurt' (55). Rochlitz, however, gave the line a callous subtext, the seducer telling his servant that the Commendatore's death 'doesn't mean anything', since nobody recognised him as the intruder.²¹

It is hardly surprising that Bassi thought that singers who performed his old creator's role in translations like this one seemed like 'butchers' rather than 'gentlemen'. In fact, according to the Leipzig poster for a 1794 performance by Guardasoni's company, Donna Anna's father 'comes in, and, sword in hand, attacks Don Jean, but is stabbed to death by him' (author's emphasis).²² That Bassi performed the scene this way was explicitly stated by Börner-Sandrini:

my mother highlighted Bassi's peculiar and almost buoyant stateliness in the role in certain, even tragic, moments, e.g. already in the first scene, after the

killing of the old Commendatore, to which he is virtually *half compelled*, however. As Don Giovanni, Bassi exhibited a sort of human affectedness and commiseration at the sad outcome of this adventure, though with a fast transition to the role's easy-going, buoyant mood at the hasty escape with his waiting servant Leporello (splendidly portrayed by Ponziani).²³

Wächter, who sang Don Giovanni in Dresden in 1828, seems to have adhered to this conception of the scene as well. A local critic gave the following account:

many Don Giovannis strike down their Commendatore as brutally as a butcher stabs a calf, without changing their expression or even deigning to look at their victim. Not so Herr Wächter. He runs his opponent through because he must: his safety is at stake. As soon as he has fallen, however, Don Giovanni's respect for the worthy old man appears: he beholds the deceased [*sic*] with a solemnity that proves he knows *whom* he has struck down. The urgency of his situation only allows for this brief reflection, but it appears true and soothing.²⁴

Lyser even used his knowledge of Bassi's acting in this scene to engage in a critical dialogue with Rochlitz and others who represented Don Giovanni as a callous murderer. Thus, in his 1837 novella, he lets Mozart himself characterise the title hero as follows:

As for [Don Giovanni's] *nefariousness*, [Bassi] will have precisely what is necessary in order to count as a seducer of women and to strike down an old foolhardy daddy in self-defence – and that is *enough!* For my hero is neither a crude *butcher*, nor a *mean* deceitful villain, but a passionate, fiery youth.²⁵

That Lyser's conception of the duel was indebted to Sandrini-Caravoglia (possibly by way of Rastrelli) appears more clearly from his later writings. In his 1838 fairy tale, 'The Commander attacked the seducer furiously', he writes, the story continuing as follows:

Don Juan defended himself feebly in the beginning, as he pitied the old man; but since the latter assailed him ever more fiercely, calling him a miserable coward and clamouring so much that Don Juan feared the servants might wake up, he became frenzied, too, and thrust his sword into the Commander's chest after a few rounds.²⁶

Lyser, whose narrative follows the action in Da Ponte's libretto, moves the ensuing dialogue with Leporello to the next morning, Don Juan awaking 'cheerfully and light-hearted as if not the least had happened', which contrast clearly corresponds to Don Giovanni's fast change of mood in Bassi's performance.²⁷ Lyser's dependence on Sandrini-Caravoglia's anecdote also appears from the preface to the singing translation he attributed to Mozart. 'Don Giovanni does not draw his sword until after the words "Misero, attendi"', whereas our Don Giovanni performers

draw as soon as the Governor [*sic*] enters!’²⁸ Explicitly rejecting Rochlitz’s ‘most mediocre translation, which often turns the original meaning upside down’, Lyser drew particular attention to the way ‘Mozart’ translated Don Giovanni’s lines in the concluding trio:

Don Giovanni does not emerge here as a cold, insentient murderer who murders for the brutal pleasure of murdering! He has defended himself, the first two lines betraying compassion and repentance, which benign mood is quickly dissolved in boundless levity, however, as he jokes and jeers.²⁹

The sense of compassion is also suggested by the metronome numbers recorded by Tomaschek, who gives the minim of the opening Allegro molto the number 104, and the crotchet of the concluding Andante the number 60. This indicates a sudden drop from a remarkably fast opening tempo (which would tend to depict Donna Anna’s mood as furious rather than despairing) to a much slower tempo in the concluding trio. Few modern conductors employ such contrasting tempi at this point, but Teodor Currentzis’ recording from 2016 is an exception; here the drop in the tempo effectively enhances the sense of Don Giovanni’s compassionate involvement. Summing up, it seems that Bassi used the theatrical nuance, the shift from the trio to the recitative, to convey the essence of Don Giovanni’s character from the outset, impressing its central features on the imagination of the audience: his stateliness and easy-going buoyancy, the transience of his emotional responses, but also his basic humanity.

We probably get a further glimpse of his performance in this scene from Philippi’s 1825 review. Criticising the seducer’s lack of dignity and nobility in the German translation, Philippi encouraged performers to play against the text in order to achieve a ‘judicious conception’ worthy of the Italian original, and he mentions the relationship between master and servant as an example. ‘In the conversation in the first moments, Don Giovanni may only grant [Leporello] the vaguest share of his attention’, Philippi insists; ‘the words must often have much of the quality of a soliloquy: a requirement more strongly evident in an opera than in a drama, and especially in this one’.³⁰ In practice, this type of semi-soliloquising delivery might help bring out the easy-going quality in Don Giovanni’s nature, while closer attention to the servant’s insulting remarks will tend to enhance his annoyance and make him appear more threatening when he silences Leporello before their escape.

At this point, it seems appropriate with a discussion of Don Giovanni’s costume. Philippi and Lyser both insisted on its simplicity, which could suggest that Sandrini-Caravoglia had told them about this aspect of Guardasoni’s production. Philippi criticised Forti’s outfit for being ‘too splendid’ in the second finale, adding that ‘a well-calculated negligée usually has a stronger effect on the spectators, as a Don Giovanni or two have learned’.³¹ And Lyser wrote that ‘splendour of scenery and costumes was out of the question’ in the original production, adding in a footnote that Leporello, at the beginning of Act II, appeared in ‘an ordinary, long servant’s *roquelaure*, which Don Giovanni later donned’.³² Da Ponte

probably intended Leporello to wear the same ‘ferraiolo’ that he wears at the beginning of the opera; but this stage direction is missing in the Dresden libretto, which was Lyser’s point of reference, so he may have relied on an oral tradition.³³

As Philippi’s comment implies, it was not uncommon for actors and opera singers around 1800 to be responsible for their own costumes. Incidentally, we possess one first-hand account of Bassi’s Don Giovanni costume, which fits Philippi’s and Lyser’s observations. In 1852, the ‘old actor’ mentions it as an example of how performers in the late eighteenth century cared little about visual splendour or historical appropriateness in their choice of costumes:

Bassi – one of the best Don Giovannis I have seen – wore one and the same costume throughout the entire opera, and one that would seem ridiculous today: a coat and short trousers in yellow nankeen, frilled with red fabric, a short red cloak of cloth, white silk stockings, low laced boots and a steel small-sword; while even today’s most mediocre Don Giovanni would be greatly offended if he were not presented with three different outfits.³⁴

Thönert’s 1797 print indeed shows Bassi in knee-breeches, white stockings and low boots, while the small-sword can be seen emerging from the back of his coat. The contemporaneity of this costume is striking. The combination of skin-tight, yellow nankeen breeches and white silk stockings was a typical summer attire for fashionable gentlemen at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, as were the tightfitting redingote and the low top hat we see on the print. The small-sword was a short, light weapon of French origin that belonged to the courtly gala dress of eighteenth-century noblemen. Usually 50 to 80 cm long, it was designed for thrusting rather than striking and was sometimes used for duelling, though its primary function was ornamental.³⁵ This also fits the ‘clock’ that Don Giovanni consults in the graveyard scene (1108). In the Czinner-Graf film, which sets the story around 1600, the clock has been turned into a church bell, but it was common for gentlemen, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, to carry a watch in the waistcoat pocket.

Other elements are evocative of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, however. That goes for the ‘white plumes’ (933) and for the red frilling mentioned in the memoir, both of which seem to have been borrowed from Molière’s Dom Juan who wears a feathered hat and ‘fire-coloured ribbons’ (I.2).³⁶ The same seems to be the case with the low boots and the paned sleeves added to the coat, and the line on Bassi’s thigh perhaps indicates that he wore short trunk hoses like the ones in Johann Friedrich Bolt’s frontispiece print for the Breitkopf & Härtel score (see Figure 2.4) – based on a picture by the Viennese artist Vinzenz Georg Kinninger (1767–1851) – though there is no mention of this in the anonymous description.³⁷ Along with tights and a baggy-sleeved doublet, the short trunk hoses soon became part of Don Giovanni’s standard costume. He wears this attire in Lyser’s drawings from the 1830s and 1850s, in Slevogt’s pictures, and even in the Czinner-Graf film. But the composite, semi-contemporary style of Bassi’s costume indicates that neither the geographical nor the historical context was meant to be taken quite literally. Early modern Spain was rather an iconic *topos* that helped convey the



Figure 2.4 Johann Friedrich Bolt after a drawing by Vinzenz Georg Kinninger: Don Giovanni and the stone guest (Act II scene 15). Engraving. Frontispiece for Mozart 1801. Photo ©: The Music and Theatre Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

ideal content of the drama. This is especially striking in the case of the red cloak that is missing in Thönert's picture, but which is mentioned in the anonymous account. It corresponds to the 'mantello' (463) in which Don Giovanni is wrapped in the opening scenes, and which Leporello then dons in Act II. No doubt, this cloak was meant to evoke the Spanish seventeenth-century genre of *comedia de capa y espada* (cloak-and-sword drama). But its colour was a borrowing from Tirso's play where the red cloak is associated with sexual passion and can be linked to 'other distinctive metaphors of passion in the play, notably fire'.³⁸ We find that metaphor in Da Ponte's libretto, too. Don Giovanni 'catches fire' (134) when he senses Donna Elvira approaching, and he addresses Donna Anna 'with much ardour [*foco*]' (387) when he meets her in the street. Here the passionate ardour informs the seducer's vocal, facial and gestural expression – but it would have informed his costume as well.

Notes

1 For a brief overview of the different theories, see Schmidt 2009: 65n.

2 For Goldoni's objections to the traditional *Stone Guest* plays, see his preface to the comedy, in Goldoni 1960: 215–8. All references are to this edition.

- 3 The play is reproduced in Rommel 1936. All references are to this edition.
- 4 Baker 2005: 99.
- 5 Rosselli 1998: 161n.
- 6 Bertati's libretto is reproduced in Russell 1993. All references are to this edition.
- 7 Campana 2009: 149, 151.
- 8 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 85.
- 9 Abert 2007: 1059.
- 10 Lyser 1847: 95, in Schneider 2016: 410n; Rushton 1981: 112.
- 11 For an insightful analysis of the duel scene, see also Baker 2005: 98–100.
- 12 See the chapter 'Don Giovanni and the Pre-Revolutionary Moment' in Baker 2021.
- 13 Rushton 1981: 104.
- 14 Allanbrook 1983: 213–4.
- 15 Gallarati 1994: 26. A text variant in the 1789 Warsaw libretto suggests that the performance of the scene in Guardasoni's company two years after the premiere did not adhere strictly to Da Ponte's original staging concept. In Warsaw, Don Giovanni's last line in the introduction, 'veggo l'anima partir' ('I see his soul depart'), has become 'gli vàl'anima partir' ('his soul is departing'), indicating that Bassi as Don Giovanni faced the audience instead of looking at the dying Commendatore. I am grateful to Ian Woodfield for sharing with me his notes on the differences between the Prague and the Warsaw librettos.
- 16 Burnham 2013: 38.
- 17 Campana 2009: 146, 148.
- 18 Bauman 1993: 138; Pirrotta 1994: 159.
- 19 Leibowitz 1969: 628.
- 20 The libretto is reproduced in Dieckmann 1993. All references are to this edition.
- 21 'Das hat nichts zu bedeuten. Kein Mensch hat mich erkannt'; Rochlitz 1801: 3.
- 22 Quoted from Woodfield 2012a: 182.
- 23 Börner-Sandrini 1888: 18, in Waidelich 2001: 195 (author's emphasis). Ponziani left Guardasoni's company in early 1792 but was back in Prague from 1800 to 1803; see *Prager Theater-Almanach* 1807: 92; 'Ponciani', in Dlabacž 1815; Sartori 1990, no. 2348. The surviving 1801 playbill for *Don Giovanni* confirms that he resumed his old creator's role on his return; see Pešková and Volek 1987: 119.
- 24 'So z. B. stossen viele D. Giovanni [*sic*] ihren Commandeur so brutal nieder, wie ein Metzger ein Kalb ersticht, ohne eine Miene zu verändern und das Opfer nur eines Blickes zu würdigen. Nicht so Herr Wächter. Er durchbohrt seinen Gegner, weil er muss, seine Rettung steht auf dem Spiele, allein, sobald er gefallen ist, tritt die Achtung für den würdigen Greis ein, er betrachtet den Todten mit einem Ernst, der beweist, er wisse, *wen* er niedergestreckt habe. Seine Lage drängt und verstatet nicht mehr als diese kurze Besinnung, aber sie erscheint wahr und wohlthuend'; *Abend-Zeitung*, 15 February 1828, Einheimisches no. 2: 7.
- 25 'Von der *Ruchlosigkeit* wird er wohl eben so viel besitzen, als vonnöthen, um für einen Weiberverführer zu gelten und in der Selbstvertheidigung einen alten tollkühnen Papa niederstossen – das ist *genug!* denn mein Held ist kein roher *Schlächter* noch ein *gemeiner* tückischer Bösewicht, sondern ein leidenschaftlicher feuriger Jüngling'; Lyser 1837: 40.
- 26 'der Comthur aber fiel wüthend den Verführer an. / Don Juan wehrte sich anfangs nur schwach, denn es dauerte ihn der Alte, als dieser aber immer heftiger auf ihn eindrang, ihn einen elenden Feigling nannte und also tobte, dass Don Juan befürchten musste, die Dienerschaft könne erwachen, – da ward er auch wild, und nach einigen Gängen stieß er seinen Degen dem Comthur in die Brust'; Lyser 1838: 119.
- 27 'Am andern Morgen stand Don Juan ... fröhlich und wohlgemuth auf, als sey nicht das mindeste geschehen'; Lyser 1838: 120.
- 28 Lyser 1845a: 134, in Schneider 2016: 407n.
- 29 Lyser 1845a: 133–4, in Schneider 2016: 407n.

- 30 'In den erstern Momenten darf ihm Don Juan im Gespräch nur den schwächsten Theil seiner Gegenwart schenken; die Worte müssen häufig viel von der Natur eines Monologs an sich tragen; ein Erforderniss, das in der Oper, zumal in dieser, stärker einleuchtet, als in einem Drama'; Philippi 1825: 80.
- 31 'Sie war vielleicht im zweiten Akte bei der Tafelszene zu brillant; ein wohlberechnetes Negligee pflegt auf die Zuschauer stärker zu wirken, wie diess ein und der andere Don Juan erlebt hat'; Philippi 1825: 79.
- 32 'Von Dekorazions- und Kostümeprunk war keine Rede'; and in the footnote: 'Zu Anfang des zweiten Aktes zum Beispiel, erschien Leporello in einer gewöhnlichen, langen Bedienten-*Requallor*, welche Don Giovanni später anzog'; Lyser 1847: 96.
- 33 While the ferraiolo was an ankle-length cloak tied with a band in front, the roquelaure was a knee-length cloak buttoned in front.
- 34 'in dem in Prag zuerst aufgeführten, von Mozart besonders für diese Bühne geschriebenen Don Juan trug Bassi, einer der besten Don Juans, die ich gesehen, die ganze Oper hindurch ein und dasselbe Costüme, welches jetzt lächerlich erscheinen würde, nämlich Jacke und kurze Beinkleider von gelbem Nanking, mit rothem Zeuge ausgeputzt, einen kurzen rothen Mantel von Zeug, weisseidene Strümpfe, kurze Schnürstiefeln und dazu einen Galanteriedegen von Stahl, während gegenwärtig der mittelmässigste Don Juan sich sehr verletzt fühlend würde, wenn ihm nicht drei verschiedene Anzüge zu Gebote ständen'; *Reminiscenzen* 1852: 78–9.
- 35 See Heinrich Müller, 'Galanteriedegen': <http://www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=92318> (accessed on 13 August 2019). On the shape and function of Don Giovanni's sword, see also Baker 2005: 103.
- 36 All references are to Molière 1880.
- 37 I would like to thank costume designer and researcher Anna Kjellsdotter for her suggestions regarding Bassi's Don Giovanni costume, including the mixing of historical and contemporary elements. The eighteenth-century reforms of the theatrical costume put increasing emphasis on geographical and historical specificity and on the individual character at the expense of the requirements of contemporary fashion; see Dotlačilová 2020.
- 38 See the editor's note to II.297 in Tirso de Molina 1986. All references are to this edition.

3 Don Giovanni and the three women

Donna Elvira's entrance aria

The Act I street scene, set on the morning after the nocturnal scene in Donna Anna's garden, contains the exposition of the drama, which consists of Don Giovanni's successive encounters with the three women. He first meets Donna Elvira who has come to town in order to track down and marry her runaway lover and who continues to pursue him through the remainder of the Act, jealously disturbing his conversations with other women. Then he meets Zerlina who is about to marry Masetto, but whom Don Giovanni tries to seduce, initially with some success as he manages to send the bridegroom and the wedding guests away. Finally, he runs into Donna Anna and Don Ottavio, who want his help to avenge the killing of the Commendatore. The complication of the plot ensues when Donna Anna recognises Don Giovanni's voice as that of the nocturnal visitor. Each of the three encounters culminates with an ensemble where Don Giovanni communicates with the woman in question, the music and the vocal delivery conveying the nuances in the seducer's social interactions.

The street scene opens with a dialogue between Don Giovanni and Leporello that precedes Donna Elvira's first entrance. It is hard to imagine a starker dramatic contrast than that between Donna Anna's and Don Ottavio's revenge duet in the nocturnal garden and the light-hearted, rambunctious conversation between master and servant in the fully lit street. Da Ponte hints at the deeper significance of that contrast by juxtaposing the oaths of the two noblemen. When compelled by Donna Anna to take an oath that he will avenge her father's death, Don Ottavio swears by her eyes and by their love ('Lo giuro agli occhi tuoi / lo giuro al nostro amor', 98–9). When compelled by Leporello to take an oath that he will not be angered by his servant's reproaches, Don Giovanni swears by his honour ('Lo giuro sul mio onore', 109). The parallelism exposes the basic meaninglessness of both vows. Don Ottavio's oath of vengeance perversely conflates the language of love with the language of death, which is ultimately destructive of the lovers' relationship, as they both seem to briefly realise: 'Che giuramento, o dei! / che barbaro momento!' ('O gods, what an oath! What a barbarous moment', 100–1). In contrast, Don Giovanni's oath of non-vengeance is immediately broken, as the contractual agreements associated with the aristocratic code of honour mean little

to him: 'Non so di giuramento ... taci ... o ch'io ...' ('I know of no oath ... be silent ... Or I'll ...', 118). He never concludes the sentence, forgetting the vengeance as quickly as he forgot his oath: Don Giovanni's and Leporello's friendship is restored two lines later, whereas Don Ottavio's and Donna Anna's love remains tarnished till the end.¹

This is not the only contrast. Lyser mentions the contrast between the revenge duet and the 'comic trio' – i.e. Donna Elvira's entrance aria – as one of several examples of how the tragic moments in this essentially comic opera 'should never prevail over the hero's unruly zest'.² Don Ottavio's fruitless attempt to console his beloved Donna Anna ('Anima mia, consolati ... fa' core ...' 81) is contrasted to Don Giovanni's equally fruitless attempt to console the unknown beauty he meets in the street ('Cerchiam di consolare il suo tormento', 145). This is the first of five chiaroscuro effects, or musical-theatrical reversals, which constitute an important structuring principle of the opera. In fact, as Friedrich Dieckmann reminds us, the principle of symmetry and repetition was a characteristic of early seventeenth-century drama, like that of the Spanish Golden Age, and it is therefore a feature of the 'Baroque' world that Da Ponte and Mozart conjure up in their late Enlightenment opera.³ Each reversal involves an exit of Donna Anna and/or Don Ottavio after they have expressed their desire for revenge, followed immediately by an entrance of Don Giovanni and Leporello about to invent some new diversion. The second reversal juxtaposes Donna Anna's account of Don Giovanni's unwanted entry into her house, leading to her ordering of his death in a passionate revenge aria, and Leporello's account of Donna Elvira's unwanted entry into Don Giovanni's house, leading to the latter's ordering of a party in the equally passionate champagne aria. The third reversal, which occurs in the Act I finale, juxtaposes the three maskers planning their revenge, Donna Elvira stressing the necessity of taking courage ('Bisogna aver coraggio', 660), and Don Giovanni and Leporello planning the seduction of Zerlina, stressing the necessity of using their brains ('qui bisogna cervello adoprar', 706). The fourth reversal juxtaposes the tears of the absent Donna Anna, evoked in Don Ottavio's aria in which he asks Donna Elvira and Zerlina to go and tell her that she'll soon be avenged ('Ditele che i suoi torti / a vendicar io vado', 1100–1), and Don Giovanni ridiculing the statue of the Commendatore, leading to the mischievous duet in which he asks Leporello to go and tell him that he's invited to supper tonight ('Digli che questa sera / l'attendo a cena meco', 1164–5). The fifth reversal juxtaposes Donna Anna's postponement of her marriage to the yearning Don Ottavio, culminating in her desperate, world-forsaking aria, and the insatiable Don Giovanni's refusal to marry the no less yearning Donna Elvira, culminating in his exuberant tribute to women and wine.

Four of the five reversals coincide with a scene change, from a shallow to a deep stage set. Already Bitter pointed out that the libretto calls for an alternation of shallow and deep sets: the two garden scenes and the two scenes set in Donna Anna's house call for shallow sets, with backdrops relatively close to the proscenium, whereas the scenes set in the street, in Don Giovanni's house and in the graveyard, call for deep sets that make use of the entire depth of the stage.⁴

However, the scenes set in or around Donna Anna's house also require a darkened stage: the nocturnal garden of the opening scenes (setting of the revenge duet), the 'dark ground-floor atrium' (setting of Don Ottavio's aria) and the 'dark room' (setting of Donna Anna's last aria). In contrast, it is 'bright dawn' at the beginning of the Act I street scene; the ball in Don Giovanni's house is set in an 'illuminated hall'; the night he visits the graveyard is 'brighter than day' (1106); and his supper, which also takes place in a 'hall', may have called for festive luminosity like the ball in the first finale.⁵ The differences in the depth of the stage set coupled with the differences in the intensity of the light would add a literal chiaroscuro effect to the metaphorical chiaroscuro effect of the dramatic reversals, accentuating the contrast between the avengers' and the seducer's domains. Throughout the opera, these become associated, respectively, with the restrictive and the spacious, with darkness and brightness, and, by implication, with restraint and liberty, hostility and hospitality, grief and joy, hatred and seduction, the tragic and the comic, benightedness and enlightenment. The swift *changements à vue* so essential to the eighteenth-century stage would have made these contrasts much clearer than they tend to be in today's productions, with their time-consuming scene changes and long silences. But the contrast must have been histrionic no less than scenographic: the brightness and buoyant frivolity of Bassi's Don Giovanni set off against Donna Anna's mournfulness and Don Ottavio's austerity.⁶

Da Ponte also uses the dialogue between master and servant to capture the sensuous character of the seducer who with his 'perfect nose' can feel 'the scent of a woman' from afar. This detail suggests the liberal atmosphere that reigned in the upper circles of Prague society in the late eighteenth century. In none of the early translations is there any suggestion that Don Giovanni is able to smell the approaching woman, and the lines were censored in the 1814 Dresden libretto. Here the seducer tells his servant before his encounter with Donna Elvira: 'respiro mi par / sentir di qualche fem[m]ina' ('I think I hear some woman breathing'), Leporello admiring his master's 'perfect hearing' ('udito sì perfetto') rather than his nose. This shift in Donna Elvira's sensory impact reflects the emphasis on cleanliness and natural delicacy cultivated by the bourgeois class. 'Good taste forbade the young girl to use perfume; this indiscreet solicitation might reveal her ambitions for marriage too crudely', writes Alain Corbin in his cultural history of smell.⁷ Among the bourgeoisie, the use of perfume was considered appropriate only for sexually experienced women, the 'perfumed invitation' being 'more delicate, less obvious, and less coarse, perhaps more disturbing, than the charms of nudity; it was more in tune with the ambiguous wish to seduce'.⁸ While Da Ponte's unconventional Donna Elvira might emit a perfumed scent that seduces her ex-lover from afar, the innocent German Donna Elvira would have morally compromised herself had she done the same.

Apart from this exchange, the first two scenes in the street follow Act I of Molière's play. Here, Donna Elvira is described as Don Juan's 'wife' in the list of characters, his abandonment of her representing a clear violation of society's basic contractual fabric. Adding insult to injury, he meets her reproaches with obvious lies, saying he left her because he was assailed by religious scruples after

abducting her from a convent. Dom Juan then tells his servant to provide her with a full explanation, which prompts her to leave in anger.

Da Ponte fundamentally altered the dynamic between the seducer and the accusing woman. His Donna Elvira may be able to persuade herself – and many commentators – that she really loves Don Giovanni; but her expression of ‘love’ takes the form of an explicitly stated murderous intent. If the seducer’s death is the precondition for Don Ottavio’s union with Donna Anna, Donna Elvira sees it as the only alternative to his union with her:⁹

Ah se ritrovo l’empio
e a me non torna ancor,
vo’ farne orrendo scempio,
gli vo’ cavar il cor.

(‘Ah, if I find the evil man again and he won’t return
to me, I’ll kill him horribly, I’ll tear his heart out’,
139–42)

This is no mere hyperbole: as gradually becomes clear in the course of the drama, Donna Elvira is only willing to save Don Giovanni’s life as long as she thinks he might return to her. Therefore, she also attacks Don Giovanni much more vigorously in the subsequent dialogue than she does in earlier *Stone Guest* plays – and yet, he does not insult her the way Molière’s Dom Juan does. When he tells Leporello to explain his reasons for abandoning her, it is simply a means to escape the furious woman behind her back.

Moreover, this Donna Elvira is not his wife. In the list of characters, she is described as ‘a lady from Burgos abandoned by Don Giovanni’; and even though he promised to marry her after seducing her ‘a forza d’arte, / di giuramenti e di lusinghe’ (‘by means of art, oaths and flatteries’, 156–7), we might wonder why she trusted so blindly in the promises of a man who had entered her house ‘stealthily’. Once more, the keyword is ‘giuramenti’, with which the poet invites us to draw comparisons to the oaths in the two preceding scenes. Like Donna Anna and Don Ottavio, Donna Elvira is committed to the unconditionality of the vow: any oath is an oath before God, and love and revenge are indissolubly linked, death being the measure of both. It is a crucial, though often overlooked, fact, however, that her affair with Don Giovanni remains secret until she, against his insistent advice, eventually makes good of her threat ‘to reveal your crimes and my state to everybody’ (437–8), shocking the two betrothed couples by describing the seducer as her ‘husband’ (1027). Since their affair remains secret until then, her relationship with aristocratic society remains undamaged, and it would be possible for her to marry someone else if she so desired. Elaine Sisman has argued that Don Giovanni and Donna Elvira may have entered a ‘clandestine marriage’, which means that she would be able to pursue ‘a legal case against him under the strictures of canon law’.¹⁰ While this might be, Joseph II had challenged this practice, as Sisman also points out, with his marriage law of 16 January 1783, which put more emphasis on publicity in the creation of legitimate marriage contracts.¹¹

When insisting that Don Giovanni is her husband, in other words, Donna Elvira defies the emperor's recent legislation on the subject of matrimony.

These circumstances were soon forgotten since the early German translations returned to Molière's conception. Already the Neefe-Schmieder translation toned down the violence of Donna Elvira's language, concealing her murderous intent in euphemistic ambiguities:

Seh ich den Ungetreuen
Nicht seine Tat bereuen,
Dann soll vor ihm verschwinden
Durch mich das Tageslicht.

(‘If I don’t see the faithless man repent his deed,
then let him be deprived of the light of day, through me’.)

Rochlitz went on to remove the deadly purpose from the aria text entirely (although his Elvira now threatens Don Giovanni with a drawn dagger in the subsequent dialogue instead). While borrowing the first two lines of her second quatrain from the earlier translation, he translated the last two lines as follows: ‘Dann folge Schmach und Schande / Dem Frevler überall!’ (‘then let shame and disgrace follow the sinner everywhere!’). Intent on depicting Elvira as a tragic victim, Rochlitz also departed from Da Ponte in significant ways in the following. Not only does his Don Giovanni still pretend to love Donna Elvira, assuring her that time will clarify the reasons for his sudden departure ‘for the benefit of my honour and our mutual happiness’; we even learn that he had presented her in public as his fiancée and that the date of their wedding had been announced.¹² Obviously, the official nature of this promise makes his abandonment of her a much graver matter than it is in Da Ponte. By turning Don Giovanni's declarations into a public betrothal, Rochlitz reverted to the traditional image of the seducer as a cynical destroyer of women's reputations. This conception – which has been uncritically reproduced by later commentators – not only lacks support in the Italian libretto; to judge by Börner-Sandrini's account, such callousness was also absent from Bassi's acting in this scene:

My mother always spoke with the greatest gratification of [Bassi's] representation of that most charming [*liebenswertigsten*] of rakes, especially highlighting the contrast in Don Giovanni's behaviour towards the three female characters. With Donna Anna, Bassi's Don Giovanni thus always sported a certain kind of suppressed tenderness [*Zärtlichkeit*] coupled with veneration; towards Donna Elvira, on the other hand, he always behaved as a perfect gentleman who still treats his erstwhile mistress with chivalrous [*ritterlicher*] charm, but who at appropriate moments clearly exhibits a certain impatience, which is always suppressed, to be sure, as quickly and prudently as possible. Towards the coquettish and rather bigoted Zerlina he behaved with that overwhelming gallantry that shows itself in all sorts of exaggerated flatteries whose meagre worth a more prudent girl

soon recognises, but which this one takes at face value [*für baare Münze nimmt*].¹³

That Sandrini-Caravoglia's anecdotes circulated in Dresden several decades before her daughter committed them to paper appears from the strong similarity between this account from 1888 and Lyser's and Philippi's much earlier descriptions of the seducer's treatment of Donna Elvira and Zerlina. Thus, in Lyser's fairy tale, Don Juan makes the 'tenderest declarations' to Zerlina, 'which she in her innocence took at face value'.¹⁴ Clearly, it can be no coincidence that Lyser and Börner-Sandrini both use the expression *für bare Münze nehmen* (literally, 'take for valid currency') to describe Zerlina's response to Don Giovanni's flattery. This must have been the phrase Sandrini-Caravoglia used when telling the story. The wording of Philippi's review of Forti's *Don Giovanni* is also strikingly similar to Börner-Sandrini's account, the words *ritterlich*, *liebenswert* and *Zärtlichkeit* occurring in both texts:

[Forti's] voice has a too rich and hasty sound for the expression of adulatory tenderness: when Don Giovanni speaks, garlands of roses must bloom forth from every syllable, audibly explaining the defeat of so many ladies by the music of his lips. His behaviour must be gradated appropriately according to the rank and even the mentality of the beauties: this is indeed the surest way for a perfect Don Giovanni to prove his omnipotence over female hearts, as well as his deep knowledge of their weaknesses. For example, Donna Elvira must always be treated with chivalrous attentiveness; the sex claims its established tribute, and even the cruellest infidelity must try to rescue the semblance of decency.

Only this graceful appearance makes us understand why the unhappy woman cannot let go of the charming monster: if the Don Giovanni acts as he should, we feel compassion for the deceived woman; otherwise, she provokes laughter. The seducer's talent may be displayed at its most glorious in the scenes with Zerlina and during the dancing. The naïve country girls want to be treated with a certain trustworthy yet modest moderation; the sophisticated city ladies normally take pleasure in masculine boldness coupled with cheerful self-assurance: the higher up the wittier the relation becomes, but also the more enticing; and here the dangerous lovers are perhaps those who know how to blend the contrasts in a masterly fashion. A Don Giovanni has to know all these nuances in their finest degrees and to suggest them in all his actions.¹⁵

Such variations, or nuances, in a character's behaviour towards the other characters were typical of the acting ideal of the Enlightenment. They should never disrupt the unity of the character; on the contrary, the character's singularity should be revealed to the audience through its social interactions. Accordingly, Börner-Sandrini makes clear that each of the attitudes of Bassi's Don Giovanni allowed for internal nuances. As an example, she mentions the 'impatience' he occasionally

exhibited when talking to Donna Elvira, and which, in this scene, probably just found expression in the aside ‘She’s putting me to the test’ (174–5). Kristi Brown-Montesano, who claims Donna Elvira ‘sees only indifference and irritation’ in her seducer’s face, rather seems to be projecting Siepi’s or Raimondi’s portrayals onto the libretto.¹⁶

No doubt, the three basic behaviours of Bassi’s Don Giovanni involved distinct vocal colours suggested by Mozart’s setting. One switch would have occurred between his sung lines at the end of Donna Elvira’s entrance aria and his subsequent dialogue with her. In fact, the possibility of this switch helps explain why Mozart chose to include five of Don Giovanni’s and Leporello’s lines, which Da Ponte clearly intended for a recitative setting, into the aria itself:

DON GIOVANNI

Udisti: qualche bella
dal vago abbandonata? Poverina!
cerchiam di consolare il suo tormento.

LEPORELLO

Così ne consolò mille e ottocento.

DON GIOVANNI

Signorina!

(‘DON GIOVANNI: Did you hear? Some beauty
abandoned by her gallant. Poor girl! Let’s try to
console her in her torment.

LEPORELLO: He consoled a thousand and eight
hundred this way.

DON GIOVANNI: My young lady!’ 143–7)

For ‘Signorina!’ – his address to the unknown woman – Bassi is likely to have adopted the tone in which Don Giovanni tends to seduce women, i.e. his ‘Zerlina voice’, which means that the audience only heard his ‘Donna Elvira voice’ in the subsequent recitative. It is in the aria that we, for the first time, hear Don Giovanni’s voice of seduction, which Leporello will parody in the catalogue aria: the poetic fantasy he improvises for the benefit of the belletristic Donna Elvira.¹⁷ Don Giovanni later uses a slightly higher tessitura and a more melismatic vocal line when addressing Zerlina than when he talks to the others, which suggests that gallantry calls for a lighter voice quality, for the falsetto and mixed colours of the baritone’s upper register. Similarly, Mozart placed the concluding fermata of Donna Elvira’s aria on the repeat of the word ‘Signorina’, which calls for a flirtatious cadenza. The Hamburg Critic, who had heard Bassi and other original Mozart singers in Leipzig in the 1790s, observed that ‘one goes too far, on the whole, when demanding that all embellishments must be omitted in the performance of Mozart’s music’. The composer would have been delighted by tastefully placed ‘flowers’, he added, since he partly ‘provided each of his roles with such-like himself’, and partly ‘permitted them with frequent fermatas’.¹⁸ That today’s Don Giovannis rarely make use of this opportunity for vocal display may not

only be due to the influence of the literalism of twentieth-century *Werktreue*.¹⁹ Modern producers and performers also tend to mistake Don Giovanni's ardour for mockery. While Wolfgang Willaschek thinks Don Giovanni's 'Poverina' sounds 'compassionate' and his 'Signorina' 'respectful', Sabine Henze-Döhring perceives a 'mocking undertone'.²⁰ Apparently, she projects what she heard in performance (possibly on the 1967 Karl Böhm recording with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau) onto the score. This tradition goes back to Rochlitz who gave his translation of these lines an arrogantly detached tone lacking in the original: 'Da gibt es was zu trösten; / Nu nu, wir wollen sehen! Armes Mädchen! / Sieh, sieh; nun kommen Tränen: jetzt muss ich näher gehen' ('There's someone to be consoled. Come now, let's have a look! See, now her tears are coming... I'll have to get closer now'). Inevitably, singers accustomed to this translation would have coloured the vocal line accordingly, and eventually, that colouring was transferred to the Italian original.

The duettino

Don Juan's seduction of a betrothed peasant woman, often on her wedding day itself, was a popular recurring episode in adaptations of Tirso's play; it went back to the Spanish original, but the peasant couple were named differently in each version. In Tirso, Don Juan interrupts the wedding of Aminta and Batricio, persuading the father of the bride to give his daughter to him instead, and threatening to kill the bridegroom if he objects. After Don Juan has sworn by heaven that he will marry her, the terrified Aminta sees no alternative but to submit to his will. The seducer's solemn oath, which is marked by a symbolic handshake – but which he breaks immediately afterwards – remains a constant feature of the episode in later adaptations.

Later treatments painted the episode in brighter colours by omitting the element of coercion, however. Molière invites the audience to laugh at the simplicity of the betrothed couple, Charlotte and Pierrot, as well as at Don Juan's exaggerated falsehoods as he tempts the peasant woman with a life of aristocratic privilege. While declaring his unconditional love for her, he inspects her figure, eyes, face, mouth and hands as if she were a domestic animal on sale. A farcical routine ensues when he pushes and then slaps the jealous Pierrot who tries to thwart his plans, Charlotte refusing to intervene on behalf of her boyfriend.

Goldoni, however, turned the peasants into a pair of Arcadian shepherds, Elisa and Carino, and avoided the antics we find in Molière. In Goldoni's pastoral version, the young woman is a coquette who counts on the constancy of her shepherd sweetheart in case the match with the handsome Don Giovanni comes to nothing. But Carino discovers her ploy and rejects her, leaving his fickle mistress without lovers.

Though Da Ponte borrowed from all these versions, his Don Giovanni does not act like any of the earlier seducers. As in the case of Donna Elvira, he refrains from courting Zerlina publicly, which would put her in a socially precarious situation: he sends the others away before making his move, inviting everyone to his house and offering to pay for the wedding party. He does not use violence, or

even rude language, when Masetto starts bickering with Zerlina; his use of force is limited to ‘showing [Masetto] his sword’ (293) and warning him, which behavioural constraint is set against Masetto’s crudeness. ‘Vile hussy, cheater! You were always the cause of my ruin’ (304–5), the peasant yells at his bride during his aria, which is rarely performed in the notated rapid tempo (*Allegro di molto*), as Leibowitz points out, whereby his ‘irritation and irony’ are softened.²¹ The sentimentalising of Masetto’s character goes back to the early German adaptations, while his aggressiveness in the Italian libretto explains why Don Giovanni later tells Zerlina that he cannot suffer her to be ‘mistreated’ by such ‘a coarse brute’ (318). Unlike his namesakes, this Don Giovanni seduces the peasant bride less by promising her a life in luxury than by treating her respectfully.

In the earlier versions of the story, the seducer’s promises are always deliberately deceptive. Tirso’s Don Juan plans his escape from the town before his marriage to Aminta has been consummated; Molière’s Dom Juan offers marriage to another peasant woman a few moments before he proposes to Charlotte; Goldoni’s Don Giovanni describes Elisa as ‘a fair prey’ (II.3) and comments cynically on his progress with her in asides to the audience. In the Mozart-Da Ponte opera, however, everything suggests that the seducer is genuinely captivated by Zerlina, making it quite possible that he momentarily believes himself that he is going to marry her. Hence, while Da Ponte borrowed the wording of his proposal from Tirso, he made some significant changes. In Tirso, the contractually binding handshake occurs in full view of the audience, as Don Juan’s lines indicate: ‘dame esa mano, / y esta voluntad confirma / con ella’ (‘shake my hand, and so give confirmation to your will’, III.267–9). The *contrapasso* for this deceptive action occurs in the first supper scene when the stone guest tells Don Juan, echoing his own words: ‘Dame esa mano, no temas’ (‘Shake my hand, don’t be afraid’, III.644). In the opera, however, Don Giovanni and Zerlina never shake hands, which action is postponed until the moment they are alone in his house: ‘Là ci darem la mano, / là mi dirai di sì’ (‘There we’ll shake hands; there you’ll tell me yes’, 337–8). As spectators, we are left wondering whether the handshake would have taken place if they had ever made it alone to Don Giovanni’s palace, or whether the carnal union would have replaced the formal one, as their sexual impatience lets us suspect. But since Don Giovanni never actually performs the vow, the operatic stone guest’s deceptive invitation to perform another vow, ‘Dammi la mano in pegno’ (‘Shake my hand as a pledge’, 1355), is *not* a repetition of the matrimonial handclasp. Nor is the stone guest’s terrifying ‘Si’ (1364), with which it urges Don Giovanni to repent, an appropriate *contrapasso* for a deceptive matrimonial ‘si’, for the simple reason that Don Giovanni and Zerlina never pronounce it. In Da Ponte’s rewriting of Tirso’s play – which adopts and subverts its verbal and visual imagery – the stone guest’s fatal (and deceptive) pledge lacks moral justification altogether, as Baker points out.²²

Commentators who insist on Don Giovanni’s deliberate deceitfulness in this scene inevitably project a form of passive, wide-eyed femininity onto Zerlina, moreover, that does not fit her very active behaviour later in the opera. Is it really plausible that this independent peasant woman truly believes in the marriage offer

from a man far above her station whom she has met a few minutes ago? Or is she more likely carried away by the sexual excitement of the moment, trusting (like Goldoni's Elisa) that relations with Masetto can be restored at some later point?²³ As Baker reminds us, Zerlina first describes Masetto as her 'husband' (313) when she is alone with Don Giovanni, but a few moments later she qualifies that statement when she says: 'I gave him my word I'd marry him' (319–20). This 'semantic instability', as Baker calls it, 'undermines the moral reflex of commentators who would consider Don Giovanni simply a liar when *he* then says to *her*: "ci sposeremo" [(336)]'.²⁴

Here we are reminded of the famous real-life seducer Giacomo Casanova, Da Ponte's friend from Venice, according to whom 'reciprocal deceit cancels itself out' in such matters, 'for when love enters in, both parties are usually dupes'.²⁵ It has long been known that the sixty-two-year-old Casanova was in Prague when *Don Giovanni* was first performed, and he even drafted two alternative versions of the scene that follows the Act II sextet, which suggests that he may have had a hand in the genesis of the opera.²⁶ This allows us to consider the possibility of Bassi's portrayal of Don Giovanni having been based, to some extent, on Casanova. Theatrical imitations of public or semi-public figures who might be present in the auditorium were not at all uncommon in the 1780s, Da Ponte himself complaining that his rival at court, the poet Giovanni Battista Casti (probably aided by the *buffo* Benucci), had been less polite towards him 'than Apelles was towards Antigonus' when Da Ponte was caricatured in Salieri's satirical opera *Prima la musica e poi le parole* (1786).²⁷ Da Ponte's and Bassi's portrait of Casanova is not likely to have been such a caricature. The poet refers to Quintilian's story about the ancient Greek painter Apelles who showed the general Antigonus Monophthalmus in profile in order to conceal that he lacked one eye, from which the Roman rhetorician derives the following precept: 'So, too, in speaking, there are certain things which have to be concealed, either because they ought not to be disclosed or because they cannot be expressed as they deserve'.²⁸ If Don Giovanni was a portrait of Casanova, it is likely to have been more in the style of Apelles. Forty years younger than the famous adventurer, Bassi could not have produced a realistic imitation, in any case; but he might have striven to convey the *idea* of Casanova, or what Da Ponte describes as 'the vivacity, the eloquence, the fluency and all the mannerisms of that extraordinary old man'.²⁹ To Da Ponte, Casanova was a 'most rare mixture of good and bad', and he emphasises that he 'loved neither his principles nor his conduct'.³⁰ But their common protectors 'loved all that was good in him, and they forgave the bad. They taught me to do the same, and after having examined the matter, not even now [i.e. in 1823] could I say what way the scales turned'.³¹ Very likely, the poet meant to present the Prague spectators with the same moral problem that Casanova posed to him: inviting them to love what is good in the wily, charming libertine while forgiving the bad.

What Casanova, in the eyes of the eighteenth century, embodied more than any other was the concept of gallantry, or *galanterie*, which also happens to be a term the Hamburg Critic, Philippi and Börner-Sandrini used to describe Don Giovanni's behaviour towards the women in the opera, especially in Bassi's

portrayal. ‘Gallantry’ as a social behaviour is essential to understanding not only the connection between Don Giovanni and Casanova but also, more generally, the connection between the opera and its original social context. The meaning of the word had changed considerably between the late seventeenth and the late eighteenth centuries: originally associated with courtly values, with the rules of etiquette and with the polite interaction of men and women in high society, gallantry had come to connote sexual promiscuity and libertinism by the middle of the eighteenth century. This change coincided with a radical change of attitudes towards love and sex, which affected all social classes, as young people began to insist on their right to choose their own partners. As Allan Pasco has shown, the Enlightenment’s rejection of traditional marriage took two opposing forms, which emerged concurrently: on the one hand, romantic, passionate love (*amour-passion*) as the basis of marriage; on the other hand, sexual libertinism (*galanterie*) as either a substitute for marriage or a reduction of marriage to a mere technicality.³² The increasingly negative view of gallantry and libertinism at the end of the eighteenth century reflected a dissociation on the part of the bourgeois class from the ethical values of the court aristocracy where extra-marital sexual relations increased dramatically during the period, among both men and women. This meant, according to Lawrence Stone, that a new wave of sexual repression within the upper classes set in between 1770 and 1810, after which romantic marriage had replaced traditional marriage as the generally accepted ideal, in effect making promiscuity and adultery morally unacceptable.³³ In other words, Da Ponte and Mozart wrote *Don Giovanni* at a point in time when gallantry was subject to increasing criticism, and their opera reflects all the period’s conflicting attitudes towards it. While Don Ottavio and Masetto are staunch supporters of traditional marriage, Donna Anna betrays a troubled attitude towards the institution, even if she eventually submits to it. Donna Elvira represents *amour-passion* and Don Giovanni and Zerlina *galanterie* (as does Leporello, to some extent). In Bassi’s performance, moreover, the seductive ways of the libertine *galantuomo* (who incarnates dissimulation, from the point of view of bourgeois *amour-passion*) were rendered with all the grace and dignity of Schiller’s ‘beautiful soul’ who eschews dissimulation. This seems to have been the irreducible, and profoundly provocative, paradox of his portrayal.

Within the action of the opera, it is especially the ‘gallant’ adventure of Don Giovanni and Zerlina that reminds us of Casanova; as Marshall Stoneham once pointed out, it specifically brings Casanova’s affair with the Milanese seamstress Zenobia to mind, which could have been known to Da Ponte.³⁴ From *L’Histoire de ma vie*, we know that Casanova met Zenobia in a house where he was lodging in Milan in 1763: telling him she was about to marry a tailor out of convenience in order to become mistress of her own house, she responded positively to Casanova’s sexual advances. He then offered to sponsor the wedding party on the condition that it take place the following day, which arrangement was later accepted by the bridegroom. Confident about the latter’s lack of jealousy, Casanova then persuaded Zenobia to go to bed with him before the wedding. ‘In the extremity of pleasure’, he writes,

I said again and again that she was made for me and not for her fiancé, who could not possibly appreciate her charms. I told her frankly to send him to the devil and take me in his place, but I had the good luck that she did not believe me.³⁵

The similarity of this discourse to the dialogue between Don Giovanni and Zerlina is noteworthy. As for Börner-Sandrini's claim that Zerlina takes Don Giovanni's flattery 'at face value', we should keep in mind that seduction tends to involve not only a two-way deception but also a degree of self-deception, which may be what Casanova hints at: we momentarily choose to believe what we would not believe in a more level-headed state. It is also worth pointing out that Zerlina is not necessarily as young and inexperienced as she is often made out to be. Zenobia was twenty-two, and there is no reason to imagine Zerlina younger than that: unlike the two noblewomen, she is about to marry, and whereas Donna Elvira is described as a 'ragazza' (403, 926) and a 'fanciulla' (1069), which identifies her as a prototype of the 'young beginner' (220) of the catalogue aria, there is no reference to Zerlina's age.³⁶

The conception of the peasant bride changed as soon as the opera was mounted in German. The Zerlina of the Neefe-Schmieder translation is based entirely on Molière's farcical Charlotte, and Dom Juan's merchantly inspection of Charlotte's physical attributes has been incorporated into the dialogue. In his attempt to make the opera conform to bourgeois standards of idealised womanhood, however, Rochlitz turned Zerlina into an anxious ingenue instead, though he retained the crudeness of the Neefe-Schmieder Don Giovanni. Even before the bridegroom has left, this Don Giovanni 'pulls [Zerlina] closer and flirts with her',³⁷ and he loses his temper when her betrothed balks: 'What don't you like, roughneck? Now this is exactly the way it's going to be! She stays and you leave!'³⁸ Naturally, this irritable behaviour gives an unconvincing ring to his later description of Masetto as a coarse brute; and the bride indeed protests against this characterisation, which she doesn't do in the Italian original: 'Oh, my Masetto isn't always rude; he really has some delicate sides too; and he's not the least insensitive'.³⁹ As chivalrousness is no longer among the seducer's attractions, the peasant woman's motivations inevitably change: on the one hand, she fears him; on the other hand, she seems mesmerised by his description of her future upper-class existence, Rochlitz providing Don Giovanni with a new speech in which he claims to be tired of aristocratic women. In Da Ponte's libretto, when Zerlina objects that noblemen are known to behave dishonestly towards women of the people, Don Giovanni jokingly conflates nobility of blood with nobility of sentiment: 'The honesty of the noble is painted in their eyes' (331–2). But Rochlitz's Don Giovanni virtually spellbinds her, fixating her gaze like a rattlesnake:

DON GIOVANNI

Oh yes, there are such nefarious frauds among us! You are quite right, my child! But look me in the eye just once! Well – do I look like one of those?

(*more urgently*) My dear sweet child – speak! Say something! Do I look like one of those?

ZERLINA (*anxiously*)

Oh no – I suppose not...⁴⁰

In Da Ponte, Don Giovanni initiates his and Zerlina's departure from the stage with the proposal 'Andiam' ('Let's go', 349), which she repeats before their voices are joined, clearly suggesting that Zerlina freely consents before they go towards his house 'embracing each other'. In Rochlitz, however, Don Giovanni 'pulls her towards him' while saying 'So komm!' ('Come then!'), to which imperative Zerlina, 'yielding anxiously', replies with a somewhat less emphatic 'Wohlan!' ('Alright!'). Then he 'embraces her tightly, she leaning more willingly towards him', before their voices join in the line: 'So Dein zu sein auf ewig!' ('Then let me be yours forever!'). There is no mention of eternal constancy in the Italian text where the exact extent of both characters' awareness and determination remains an open question.

As Ricarda Schmidt observes, Hoffmann reacted against Rochlitz's purging of Zerlina's character, instead describing her as the 'little, wanton, amorous Zerlina'.⁴¹ However, Rochlitz's refashioning of the scene still informed Hoffmann's view of the seducer as a predator. 'It is as if [Don Giovanni] mastered the magical art of the rattlesnake', he writes elsewhere; 'it is as if the women, after he looked at them, were no longer able to leave him and had to complete their ruin themselves, seized by the uncanny force'.⁴² This evocative conception was echoed by the Hamburg Critic who praised Forti for his 'rattlesnake-play' with Zerlina, but we also encounter it in the Losey film where Zerlina (Teresa Berganza) responds to Don Giovanni with a mixture of fascination and fear.⁴³ The predatorial imagery has even slipped into criticism, Brown-Montesano characterising Don Giovanni's use of the pastoral style in the closing section of the duettino as 'an artful con job', one chromatic string interlude allegedly illustrating 'a fleeting slip of [his] ingenious mask, revealing the practiced predator beneath'.⁴⁴

While we lack descriptions of Bassi's performance in the duettino, it appears from nineteenth-century reviews that operagoers who had either seen him as Don Giovanni, or had heard about his portrayal, attached special significance to this number. The critic who compared Feddersen's portrayal in Prague to that of his famous predecessor wished that the German singer, 'especially in the duet with Zerlina, would melt his tones together instead of pushing them out'.⁴⁵ We find a similar emphasis on the melting quality of Don Giovanni's delivery in responses to Bassi's successors in Dresden. Wächter was praised for his 'tender, imperative, persuasive' acting in the duettino.⁴⁶ And though Hohenthal generally subscribed to Hoffmann's interpretation, he thought the German poet put too little emphasis on 'the charming, subtle, mellifluous seducer who especially comes to the fore in the well-known duet and in the serenade', and he praised Zezi for 'the grace with which he made his beautiful voice move freely and delightfully' in those two numbers.⁴⁷ In such a performance, clearly, it is impossible to resist Don Giovanni without resisting the seductive power of Mozart's music.

Da Ponte and Mozart may have tried to emulate the success of another seduction duet, 'Pace caro mio sposo', the hit number of Da Ponte's and Martín y Soler's *Una cosa rara* (1786), which 'almost drove the city wild' after its premiere in Vienna, one contemporary describing how 'mandoletti-sellers and bus-boys' could be heard singing the refrain of the 'lascivious' duet in the streets.⁴⁸ The opera received its Prague premiere around the same time as *Don Giovanni*, and the two duets were probably sung by the same singers here: Caterina Bondini and Luigi Bassi.⁴⁹ In *Una cosa rara*, the rustic lovers Lilla and Lubino are reconciled when he, at the end of the duet, places her hand on his chest so she can feel his beating heart. The sexual implication of this gesture, in combination with the music and the text, was perceived as so powerful that the morality of both male and female audience members became a matter of concern. Count Zinzendorf described the 'pretty duet' in *Una cosa rara* as 'very voluptuous' in his diary after hearing it in Vienna on 4 December 1786; and after a performance on 17 January 1787 he wrote that 'this duet, which is so tender, so expressive', is 'very dangerous for young spectators [*spectateurs et spectatrices*]; one needs to have some experience to keep a cool head when seeing it played [*le voir jouer*]'.⁵⁰ It was the stage action, in other words, no less than the music and the text, that imperilled the composure of the seasoned statesman. The scandal of the sexually suggestive touch appears from the fact that when *Una cosa rara* was performed in German at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt in 1789, the lines referring to the concluding gesture were suppressed. And similarly, in the 1814 Dresden production of *Don Giovanni*, the stage direction referring to the embrace at the end of the duettino is missing, as is Don Giovanni's promise that he and Zerlina will be 'alone' in his house.⁵¹ Zinzendorf's reaction and the censorial interventions indicate that spectators in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not always adopt the moralistic stance on these seductive numbers that we find in some modern commentaries. More likely, such suggestive operatic moments fascinated audiences because they musicalised and theatricalised a new sexual sensibility.

Da Ponte often invites the audience to reflect on gender relations, especially with regard to sexual seduction, by repeating the same basic dramatic situation with reversed genders.⁵² And in *Don Giovanni*, the parallelism between Don Giovanni's and Zerlina's duettino and Zerlina's Act I aria is also reflected in Mozart's setting. Both numbers constitute an act of seduction that culminates with a more or less explicit anticipation of sexual pleasure in the three concluding lines, which in both cases start with a repeated appeal and an affectionate address ('Andiam andiam, mio bene' and 'pace pace, o vita mia'). Mozart set both the duettino and the aria in 2/4, which he marked Andante and Andante grazioso, respectively, while he set both concluding sections in 6/8, although the change of metre, rather exceptionally, does not coincide with a new tempo marking, at least not in the autograph score.

These poetic and musical connections between the numbers invite us to reflect critically on our automatic reaction to the figure of the seducer. 'In contrast to the earlier great Don Juan works', Baker writes, '*Don Giovanni* looks ahead and represents women who have attained a certain degree of autonomy, and thence

a society in which seduction between adults implies the active participation of the seduced'.⁵³ Pointing to the significance of Da Ponte's use of the verb *sedurre* (seduce) in the libretto, she reminds us that Zerlina is 'an accomplished seductress' herself, which Masetto recognises after listening to her aria: 'Just look how that witch was able to seduce me' (596–7).⁵⁴ The parallel drawn by Da Ponte and Mozart between Don Giovanni's seduction of Zerlina and Zerlina's seduction of Masetto does not present a contrast between fraudulent and truehearted seduction. She lies, after all, when she tells Masetto that Don Giovanni 'didn't touch the tip of my fingers' (579), as Don Giovanni specifically praised her 'fragrant little white fingers' that reminded him of 'touching junket and scenting roses' (325–6). The parallelism rather offers a playful utopian vision of equality in matters of love and sex, which undercuts attempts to designate Don Giovanni as simply 'the seducer' and Zerlina as simply 'the seduced'. The contrast between the two sections of the duettino gives particular prominence, furthermore, to Zerlina's fermata on the word 'Andiam', which introduces the concluding section. That it is she who finally proposes that they go off 'to relieve the pains of an innocent love' (350–1) is a point easily lost, though, if the soprano does not place a cadenza here, as Christina Gansch does on the Currentzis recording, but which hardly any Zerlinas do on recordings from the twentieth century.

The parallel between the duettino and Zerlina's aria seems to have been emphasised in the original production in Prague, for Tomaschek recorded identical metronome numbers for them. He gives the quaver of the Andante in both numbers the metronome number 88, while he gives the dotted crotchet of the concluding 6/8 sections – both of which he marks 'Allegro' – the metronome number 92. This creates a stark contrast between a dreamily slow opening section (which justifies Lyser's description of the duettino as 'half-sentimental') and a remarkably fast closing section.⁵⁵ Tomaschek took the 'Allegro' markings from the 1801 Breitkopf & Härtel score, which was not based on Mozart's autograph but on a commercial copy bought in Prague.⁵⁶ However, the markings were also found in the copy of the score that once belonged to Bassi personally, and similar tempo markings are found in other early copies related to the original production.⁵⁷ It may be due to the influence of the 1801 print edition on later performance practice that recordings of both numbers from the early twentieth century tend to include very fast closing sections. This seems to have been common practice until the 1920s, when Richard Strauss insisted on using the same tempo for the 2/4 and the 6/8 sections of the duettino, pointing out that Mozart's autograph includes no new tempo marking for the final section.⁵⁸ Strauss' interpretation became the new norm; it is adopted on all studio recordings of the opera, Michael Gielen later rejecting Tomaschek's tempi for the duettino since they reduce the concluding section to 'a both jaunty and vulgar dance tune: sex rather than eroticism'.⁵⁹ Gielen receives support from Willaschek who compares the seducer to 'a hunter observing how his prey walks into the trap', objecting that the Andante, if performed slowly, loses what he sees as 'its insincere impulse, which almost gives the procedure a technical quality'.⁶⁰ Willaschek owes both the predatorial metaphor and the interpretation of the tempi to Abert who owes the former to Rochlitz and

Hoffmann. Zerlina's 'restless melody' in the opening section 'suggests nothing so much as a bird fluttering helplessly in a net', and those who demand 'more fire and passion' in the concluding section fail to understand that 'this new conquest is nothing special' to Don Giovanni; it is 'merely an amusing game that involves no effort on his part'.⁶¹ Perhaps it is no coincidence that it was an Italian scholar, Massimo Mila, who insisted that the last section 'must be an Allegro', and that it marks 'the victory over the difficulties and obstacles that hamper our path toward happiness'; it is, he continues, 'the breaking of the dams erected by a mendacious propriety and the beginning of the irresistible stream towards pleasure, which is a boon due to us of which some obscure injustice has deprived us'.⁶² Certainly, Mila's reading is more helpful in explaining why Don Giovanni and Zerlina were not allowed to embrace each other at the end of the duettino in the 1814 Dresden production, and also why Zerlina was not allowed to refer to her 'nocturnal fun' with Masetto in the concluding section of her aria.⁶³

Incidentally, we encounter the same change in moral attitudes in the nineteenth century's view of the 'gallant' Casanova, which was much less accepting than that of the previous century. Hohenthal, for example, regarded it as 'a true stigma' on the otherwise respectable Brockhaus publishing house that they had decided to print the 'frivolous' memoirs of the 'notorious' Casanova.⁶⁴ Tieck, on the other hand, who had been asked by Brockhaus to review *L'Histoire de ma vie* before publication, admitted to taking 'an almost too great liking' to the 'strange' manuscript, finding the author 'quite dissolute, but his life and his way of depicting it extremely attractive'.⁶⁵ Tieck belonged to the older generation, and he was also more sympathetically disposed towards the character of Don Giovanni than Hohenthal. Unlike him, he had seen Bassi play the role. But it was the younger generation's view of eighteenth-century libertinism that prevailed, which explains why the attitude towards Don Giovanni, even when portrayed by Bassi, became increasingly negative. Whereas Tieck, Reinhold and the early Prague reviews were morally neutral, or even positive, in their view of the seducer, there tends to be a note of censure in the accounts written from the 1820s onwards, even though the authors always highlight the charm of Bassi's portrayal. The social critique implicit in *Don Giovanni* was simply not appreciated by Biedermeier Germany.

The quartet and Donna Anna's narration

Many *Stone Guest* plays and operas include a comic scene in which the seducer simultaneously runs into two women he has promised to marry, which compels him to employ his expertise in duplicity. The *locus classicus* of this situation is Act II scene 4 of Molière's comedy where Mathurine enters immediately after Dom Juan has promised to marry Charlotte. Alternately addressing each of the young peasant women so the other one can't hear him, he repeats his promise to marry each of them while convincing her not to trust the assertions of her rival.

In Da Ponte's libretto, Donna Elvira intervenes just as Don Giovanni and Zerlina are heading towards his house. After she has left with Zerlina, preventing the consummation of their 'innocent love', Donna Anna and Don Ottavio enter;

then Donna Elvira returns, again intent on preventing what she thinks is Don Giovanni's attempt to seduce another woman. While Da Ponte took the structure with the successive encounters from Bertati, it was Goldoni who provided him with the models for the two scenes. The first of these features the shepherdess Elisa and the Neapolitan duchess Donna Isabella who has travelled to Spain in male disguise to find the man who seduced her and force him to make good on his promise to marry her. In the second scene of Goldoni's Act V, set in the graveyard with the Commendatore's statue, Donna Isabella chances upon Don Giovanni in the process of seducing Elisa. She introduces herself to the latter as a woman he betrayed, while Don Giovanni, in an aside to Elisa, describes the cross-dressed duchess as a lunatic whose dreamt-up fairy tales 'now cause laughter and now scorn'. In the end, she succeeds, though, in saving the shepherdess from his clutches.

But in Da Ponte's libretto, the seducer is sincerer than his former mistress. Unlike Goldoni's Don Giovanni, he does not call her 'mad' when talking to the peasant woman; and his response to her accusations is candid: 'My darling, can't you see I want to amuse myself?' (357–8). This is congruent with the chivalrous familiarity with which Bassi's Don Giovanni treated Donna Elvira. She, on the other hand, pretends that her obstruction of his attempted seductions of Zerlina and Donna Anna is motivated by a desire to save the 'misera' (354, 395) from the faithless 'traditore' (367, 428), and many commentators have been persuaded by this heroic fiction, even though it becomes clear in Act II that she still hopes to win Don Giovanni back, and hence that her interventions are not as altruistic as she alleges. He is right when he tells Zerlina that 'the poor unhappy woman is in love with me' (364–5). Rochlitz suppressed all traces of Don Giovanni's sympathy for Donna Elvira at this point, however: 'That's one of those city ladies', he sniggers to Zerlina in the German translation; 'She's telling you bad things about me because *she* wants to marry me; but I don't like her'.⁶⁶

Don Giovanni's following encounter with Donna Anna takes its cue from a scene towards the end of Goldoni's play. Shortly after Donna Isabella and Elisa have left, Don Giovanni happens upon the Castilian prime minister Don Alfonso; and soon they are joined by Donna Anna who has come to visit the mausoleum of the Commendatore, dressed in mourning. Unlike Da Ponte's Donna Anna, Goldoni's is aware from the outset that Don Giovanni killed her father, and she immediately implores Don Alfonso to seize and execute the culprit, which he refuses to do. Don Giovanni then launches into a virtuosic exercise in manipulation, almost seducing Donna Anna into forgetting about the rape attempt and the killing of her father. She only comes to her senses in the following scene when she learns from a letter addressed to Don Alfonso that Don Giovanni seduced and abandoned Donna Isabella.

In Da Ponte's libretto, the sudden reappearance of Donna Elvira serves the same dramatic function as the letter to Don Alfonso in Goldoni's play: when Donna Anna hears that Don Giovanni betrayed her, she becomes increasingly suspicious of him, the revelation contributing to her ensuing recognition of him as the nocturnal visitor. Don Giovanni fears this development, of course, and

when talking to Donna Anna and Don Ottavio he does describe Donna Elvira as 'mad' (404), which he didn't when talking to Zerlina. More is at stake this time. Nonetheless, the text shows that he is also genuinely concerned about Donna Elvira who is about to jeopardise her reputation. When speaking to himself, he refers to his fear 'che mi dice per quella infelice / cento cose che intender non sa' ('that tell me many things about this unhappy woman that my soul cannot comprehend', 414). So, this is clearly how he sees her: an unhappy woman who has lost control of herself. In his concluding advice to her, he then tells her that 'vi farete criticar' ('you'll draw criticism', 434), reminding her that her name may be tarnished if it becomes known that she engaged in premarital sex.⁶⁷

Mozart responded to Don Giovanni's contrasting behaviours in the quartet by setting his address to the noble couple in his first quatrain as a broad-phrased melody of studied nonchalance, which makes use of the baritone's full-toned middle register, while the whispered address to Donna Elvira in his last quatrain is set as short-breathed patter. This fits the contrast between what might be described as the 'Donna Anna voice' and the 'Donna Elvira voice' of Bassi's Don Giovanni, both of which would have differed from the 'Zerlina voice' that the audience must have heard in the duettino. In Guardasoni's company, which was admired for its ensemble performances, the musical-theatrical effect would have depended on the singers' ability to bring out the contrast between the vocal lines, moreover. Indeed, there is a close connection between the development of ensemble acting and the development of the operatic ensemble in the second half of the century, which is rarely acknowledged, though the classic definition of ensemble acting made use of a musical metaphor. 'One can compare [the actors] to musicians who sing a piece in several parts', Antoine-François Riccoboni wrote in 1750; 'everyone utters different sounds, but together they form a single harmony'.⁶⁸

The scenic harmony of the *Don Giovanni* quartet was considerably altered in the German versions. Already in the Neefe-Schmieder translation, the aside in which Don Giovanni expresses sympathy for the 'unhappy' Donna Elvira is addressed instead, 'with pretence', to Donna Anna and Don Gusmann (i.e. Don Ottavio). In other words, it is used to portray the seducer as cynical, as in Molière and Goldoni. And Rochlitz then proceeded to portray him as brutal and arrogant. When Donna Elvira speaks to Donna Anna, Don Giovanni 'pulls her away from her', while there is no indication of violence in Da Ponte.⁶⁹ Nor do we find any trace of sympathy for Donna Elvira in Don Giovanni's aside, even though it is now treated as an aside: 'Welches Feuer das Weib noch entzündet! / Nein, ich dulde sie länger hier nicht!' ('What ardour still enflames that woman! No, I can't suffer her presence here anymore!'). And the last line of his admonishment spells out that he is at least as worried about himself as about her: 'Du verderbest Dich und mich' ('You're ruining both yourself and me').

While Dimitris Tiliakos' delivery on the Currentzis recording shows that it is entirely possible for a Don Giovanni to maintain a respectful tone throughout the quartet, singers traditionally deliver his lines with a rudeness that explains why Pirrotta thinks Don Giovanni 'comes particularly close to being a *buffo caricato*' in this number.⁷⁰ In fact, we can observe a direct line from the Rochlitz

translation to the Losey film where Don Giovanni adopts an intensely spiteful expression when addressing Donna Elvira, pulling her away from the others and sneering his concluding quatrain to her while holding her wrist in an iron grip. This conception has also found its way into critical commentaries. Gallarati hears an ‘ironic though restrained sarcasm’ in Don Giovanni’s first lines to the noble couple, which suggests ‘embarrassment, annoyance, contemptuous indifference to Elvira’s pain’; Nicholas Till describes his warning to her at the end of the quartet as ‘veiled threats’; and Willaschek claims, without any basis in the libretto, that Don Giovanni is ‘paying [Donna Elvira] back in her own coin’, i.e. attacking her publicly, and he even paraphrases the Rochlitz translation when stating that he warns her against ‘compromising herself and him’.⁷¹

The German translators’ distortion of the scene helps explain why critics familiar with Bassi’s portrayal reacted against some performances of the quartet, however. Philippi made the following comment in his review of Forti’s guest performance in Dresden:

One of the most difficult tasks [for the performer] is Don Giovanni’s encounter with Donna Elvira, Donna Anna and Don Ottavio. So many collisions occur here that only a very skilful discretion may allow one to perceive let alone tackle them. Don Giovanni’s character is equipped with a strong fund of humour; but what great care must be taken to assure that this humour does not degenerate into the tone of a buffoon and that it always retains a certain nobility. The German text makes this very difficult when not impossible, but a sense for poetry can merge many things, mitigate some things and eliminate other things.⁷²

A year later, the Hamburg Critic also complained of Forti’s acting in the quartet, ‘which seemed too trivial to us and not sufficiently characteristic of this extremely interesting situation’, for which reason he was unable to take the pleasure in the scene ‘that we felt with other performers, and particularly with the most incomparable Bassi’.⁷³ In 1820, the same critic had complained that Woltereck sang a translation of Don Giovanni’s last quatrain in which the first two lines were addressed to Donna Anna and Don Ottavio and only the last two lines to Donna Elvira (i.e. probably the Neefe-Schmieder translation). ‘These words are obviously whispered to Donna Elvira, and they succeed in coaxing her to leave’, he pointed out; ‘moreover, she answers Don Giovanni with the same tune and the same division of the bar, which differs from the singing of Donna Anna and Don Ottavio’.⁷⁴ This observation provides a plausible answer to the question: why does Donna Elvira leave at the end of the quartet, just as she is winning the confidence of Donna Anna and Don Ottavio? The Hamburg Critic implied that Don Giovanni really persuades her, temporarily, to act prudently and not reveal her compromising secret to strangers. This could explain Philippi’s emphasis on the seducer’s ‘discretion’ and ‘nobility’ in the quartet, which was consistent with Bassi’s chivalrous treatment of Donna Elvira. Indeed, Donna Anna and Don Ottavio do not become suspicious of him due to any rudeness on his part – which it would be

hard to conceal in a performance of the German version – but only due to his ‘subdued words’ and his ‘changing of colour’ (439–40).

However, the quartet ultimately depicts Don Giovanni’s failure to control the situation, which explains why Lyser described the number as the ‘transition to Donna Anna’s grand scene’.⁷⁵ It is during the quartet that her suspicion is aroused, though the actual recognition is caused by his speech immediately afterwards. It is ‘the last words uttered by the evil man’ (453–4) that eventually enable her to identify him. But what exactly are the memories that the sound of his voice awakens in her? As Baker points out, Donna Anna herself denies that Don Giovanni succeeded in raping her; her experience at his hands ‘might possibly have warranted the name of attempted rape, but we will never know, and the term jars alongside what we do know of Don Giovanni’s modes of approach to women’.⁷⁶ While some contemporary commentators compare her to a woman of today filing a police report or giving evidence before a judge, the historically informed critic must keep in mind that her narration is embedded in a dramatic context that depicts eighteenth-century social codes. Hence her motives for exaggerating Don Giovanni’s use of violence and deny any consent on her own part include the need to rouse Don Ottavio to avenge her father’s death, as discussed in Chapter 2. And as Richard Kramer has recently argued, her account of the event *is* ambiguous:

Those expressive sixths in the first violins [at ‘svincolarmi, torcermi e piegarmi’ (‘disengaging myself, twisting and bending’, 478)], now ascending, the A ... on top, ... in duo with the second violins as the bass moves into chromatic territory, seem to touch some deeper sensibility in Anna’s composure. In the much-discussed deceptive cadence [at ‘da lui mi sciolsi’ (‘I broke away from him’, 479)] and the nimbus-like triad on F major – *piano*, suddenly – is captured a moment of sheer exhaustion, of stasis, even of submission, or the imagining of it, before Anna can collect herself to continue that piece of the story that accords with what we witnessed at her distraught entrance in the *Introduzione*, clinging to the arm of a Don Giovanni in flight. But it is that momentary pause on the F-major triad that is suggestive. ... [M]ore than one recent performance takes the music to depict a deeper ambivalence in the struggle – *piegarsi*, after all, means to yield, to submit: Anna struggles with herself against submitting, but the cadence, more release than deception, suggests that she does not quite succeed.⁷⁷

Börner-Sandrini tells the following story about Bassi’s delivery of the lines that prompts the narration, and about her mother’s performance of the recitative:

In the scene in Act I, ... when Don Giovanni encounters Ottavio and Anna and offers his services to the latter, [Bassi] displayed a gallantry that an ardent farewell kiss on Donna Anna’s hand intensified into a fervour, which made the rake defeat the wise man of the world and lent his words ‘bellissima Donn’Anna’ (‘fairest Donna Anna’ [446]) an almost painfully reproachful expression of injured love.

This brilliant twist now offered Caravoglia's dramatic talent all the more opportunity to lend Donna Anna's words 'Don Ottavio, son morta!' ('Don Ottavio, I am dead!' [449]), when she recognises the criminal, an expression of loathing that intensified continuously during the following narration of the assault and reached its point of culmination at the end with 'compie il misfatto suo col dargli morte' ('completes his misdeed by killing him' [486]), thus provoking an endless storm of applause.⁷⁸

It may have been this moment Börner-Sandrini had in mind when she later pointed out that Bassi 'always sported a certain kind of suppressed tenderness coupled with veneration' when talking to Donna Anna. The elegant vocal line Don Giovanni adopts when addressing her during the quartet is indeed characteristic of a 'man of the world', while his 'tenderness' might have echoed the 'gallantry' with which he had recently treated Zerlina. Since the change in Don Giovanni's voice suddenly fills Donna Anna with loathing and allows her to recognise him, this must have been the voice he used when trying to seduce her the night before. Da Ponte clearly had such an effect in mind, moreover, for before the quartet Don Giovanni addresses her as 'bella Donn'Anna' (390), and after the quartet as 'bellissima Donn'Anna', the intensification of the adjective corresponding to an intensification of the expressed emotion: as a result of the tactical challenges posed during the quartet, Don Giovanni has lost his emotional composure, and we suddenly hear the voice of the seducer.

According to a Prague review, the young Luigia Caravoglia sang Donna Anna 'with much feeling' between 1802 and 1806.⁷⁹ Tomaschek, who heard her (and her predecessors) in the role, later gave the minim of the Allegro assai that recurs throughout the narration the metronome number 92, the fast pace suggesting anxiety, in contrast to the more subdued Andante passages, which might suggest her sense of shame. As for the aria itself, he gave the minim of the Andante the metronome number 69, the speediness implying an expression of vengeful rage rather than plaintiveness, in agreement with Börner-Sandrini's account.⁸⁰

Sandrini-Caravoglia's interpretation differed from that of the famous Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient who made her Dresden debut as Donna Anna in 1823, under Weber's baton, and soon rose to become the century's most celebrated interpreter of the role.⁸¹ When she sang the role in Frankfurt the following year, a critic wrote that she

inspires something higher than an intoxicating sensual enjoyment. As Donna Anna she lets us suspect what Mozart intended with this enigmatic creation, and she need not shy away from a comparison with Hoffmann's enthusiastic interpretation.⁸²

Indeed, many later commentators have pointed out how similar her conception of the role was to Hoffmann's, including the feminist writer Fanny Lewald who described her acting in the opening scenes:

as Donna Anna, [she was] entirely the woman who voluptuously succumbs to the power of the man, and her pain was nothing but the wailing of unrequited ardour. Already her attempt to hold on to Don Giovanni was full of passionate love. She clung to him, despairing above all at the idea that he should escape her. I do not doubt that she knew Hoffmann's interpretation of *Don Giovanni*, but I think she would have been obliged to play Donna Anna in his spirit even if this were not the case, for this conception was natural to her, and in no other role was she so entirely herself as in Donna Anna. In the lament over the dead father, she simultaneously lamented her fugitive beloved who, with the murder of her father, had erected a wall between them. And when she awoke from her faint in Ottavio's arms, her words and her pale, exhausted countenance gave the impression that Donna Anna only had in mind, and only desired, one thing: to find the fugitive again. Nobody was led to believe, however, that she wanted to find him in order to avenge herself upon him.⁸³

The Mozart scholar Alfred von Wolzogen, who disapproved of Schröder-Devrient's take on the role, described her performance of Donna Anna's narration as follows:

Her distorted interpretation of the part was particularly conspicuous ... in the way she coloured her declamation in the second recitative, before the revenge aria. She did not tell [Don Ottavio] of Don Giovanni's nocturnal assault with the expression of profound moral outrage, which has the power to quell even the delicacy of virgin modesty, but with a mixture of sweet abandonment in voluptuous memories and of that shame which betrays the committed transgression in the concealment, and which completely ruins Anna's character.⁸⁴

In other words, the 'loathing' that filled Caravoglia's Donna Anna during the narration was absent from Schröder-Devrient's. Genast states in his memoirs that it was he who suggested to the young Wilhelmine Schröder that she interpret the role this way when he heard her rehearse the narration and revenge aria in Leipzig in 1822, the year before her Dresden debut. It was his brother-in-law, Unzelmann, he explains, who had told him that his mother, Friederike Bethmann-Unzelmann (the Donna Anna of the 1790 Berlin premiere), 'by means of facial expressions and pantomime' had indicated that Donna Anna 'is kindled with a secret love for Don Giovanni'.⁸⁵ Genast goes on to describe in detail how she performed the role, noting that Schröder-Devrient later played it the same way. If we can trust his account, her Donna Anna adhered to a performance tradition that went back to the earliest German-language productions, in other words. However, 1822 – the year Genast met Wilhelmine Schröder – was also the year Hoffmann died; and with the emerging cult of the Romantic poet, his interpretation of *Don Giovanni* soon achieved canonical status. In the following years, Schröder-Devrient became the standard against which other performers of the role were measured.

Börner-Sandrini, whose mother sang Donna Elvira to Schröder-Devrient's Donna Anna in German in 1823 and in Italian in 1828, did not subscribe wholeheartedly to her conception.⁸⁶ The German singer's portrayal, 'with its perfect external beauty, contained magnificent moments in acting and singing', she found, claiming never again to have 'seen the first duet, by her father's corpse, performed to such perfection'.⁸⁷ But while she found her Act I aria and the preceding narration 'quite excellent', she added that some singers and connoisseurs of singing found that Schröder-Devrient performed it 'with a too exalted, pathos-laden expression (after all, Mozart himself calls *Don Giovanni* an *opera buffa*)'.⁸⁸ This verdict, which most likely reflects that of her mother, is interesting partly because it implies that the Sandrinis, if they admired Schröder-Devrient in the opening scenes, approved of a portrayal that involved ambiguous feelings towards Don Giovanni. And partly because they, nevertheless, seem to have rejected Schröder-Devrient's 'sweet abandonment in voluptuous memories' in the narration as being both too passionate and too serious in style. But how did Sandrini-Caravoglia, then, see the subtext of the character?

Notably, Lyser's conception of Donna Anna seems to have been inspired by her stories. In his 1838 fairy tale, he presents Donna Anna as a young and beautiful noblewoman characterised by her intelligence, innocence and devotion to her father.⁸⁹ His description of her nocturnal encounter with Don Juan is clearly based on the censored Dresden libretto, in which all references to sexual violence in Donna Anna's narration have been suppressed.⁹⁰ However, he is likely to have received the indication that Donna Anna has succumbed to her sexual desire from Sandrini-Caravoglia (or Rastrelli), especially since the story is framed explicitly as a refutation of Hoffmann's reading. Lyser presents the scene as follows:

The frightened maiden first took [Don Juan] for her bridegroom Don Gusmann and was angered by his boldness. When she became aware of her mistake, she was even more frightened and wanted to flee. – But Don Juan held her, threw himself at her feet, begged, coaxed and wept, and the poor girl was unable to resist his infernal magic.

Gathering her wits, however, she was seized with wild despair. – Don Juan wanted to calm her down, but she pushed him away and cried out loudly! – He wanted to flee, but she, like a Fury, clutched him and did not let go of him.⁹¹

The rest in the narrative, indicated by the end of the first paragraph, not only mimics what Kramer calls the 'stasis' in the music at the corresponding point in Donna Anna's narration; it also indicates, with subtle irony, that the narration has been 'redacted', that Donna Anna has indeed succumbed to her own desire, fully aware that the visitor is not her fiancé. That Lyser owed this conception to Sandrini-Caravoglia is suggested in his next critique of Hoffmann's interpretation, which appeared in the context of his fictive interview with Bassi. Here his reference to Donna Anna's narration and revenge aria is remarkably similar, down to the wording, to Börner-Sandrini's criticism of Schröder-Devrient's

rendition of that scene. 'Don Giovanni is a *comical* opera', Bassi insists, later pointing out that Donna Anna's 'grand scene' is 'magnificent [*grossartig*], glorious, but no longer as tragic as her recitative by her father's corpse [*der Leiche des Vaters*]'.⁹² Like Börner-Sandrini, in other words, he finds an excessively pathos-laden performance of the narration too tragic for this opera. But Lyser also offers a dramatic justification of this view, which we are missing in Börner-Sandrini. 'Mozart declined to make [the opera] farcical rather than comical', Bassi says in the interview:

he always plays around and shocks in the proper place, observing the nobleness and dignity of his characters who represent noble *Spaniards*, and *therefore* his opera was misunderstood so very often, and the Viennese refused to regard it as a good comic opera.⁹³

The confusion of comic Spanishness with tragic pathos is essential for understanding the opera's early performance and reception history, and it helps us understand why Caravoglia's Donna Anna would have reacted with loathing when she recognises the visitor after the quartet even though she had proven 'unable to resist his infernal magic' – and also, why that loathing would have come across as comical.

As a dramatic *topos*, Spanishness was associated, on the European stages from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, with rigid notions of sexual propriety, as well as with patriarchal values, aristocratic pride, family honour, religious bigotry, superstition and 'Baroque' tastes. As a consequence, Spain was used as a setting for such 'revenge tragedies' as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy, or Hieronimo is Mad Again* (ca. 1590) and Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* (1636), both of which depict the devastating effects of blood vengeance. At the end of the eighteenth century, the association of Spain with 'pre-Enlightenment values' explains, as Brigid Brophy has pointed out, why Pierre Beaumarchais, aiming to show 'the *ancien régime* at its most ridiculous', set the first two plays of his Figaro trilogy (written in 1773 and 1778) in old Spain.⁹⁴ In Da Ponte's *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786) and *Una cosa rara*, Spanishness is associated not only with the injustices of feudal society, but also with sexual jealousy as a source of violent vengefulness, and in Friedrich Schiller's *Don Karlos, Infant von Spanien*, which premiered in Hamburg two months before *Don Giovanni* premiered in Prague, the Spanish setting is associated with political despotism and religious hypocrisy. Donna Anna is a young woman who has internalised that patriarchal worldview, simultaneously a victim and a defender of the 'Spanish' gender role imposed on her by her father and her fiancé. Michael P. Steinberg has reached a similar conclusion when he associates Donna Anna's public persona with the Spanish Baroque, which stands for 'the culture of Catholic power, both sacred and secular, of cosmic control through the authority of its static and totalizing representation'.⁹⁵ I do not agree, though, that the opera associates her Spanishness with the Habsburgs, as he goes on to suggest.⁹⁶ The current Habsburg emperor, Joseph II, rather stood for a liberation from that conservative culture, as I will argue in the following chapter.

Notes

- 1 My discussion of the essential non-violence in Don Giovanni's breaking of oaths is indebted to Baker 2005: 104.
- 2 Lyser 1847: 95, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 3 Dieckmann 1991: 337.
- 4 See Bitter 1961: 28, 34. For reproductions of Norbert Bittner's prints of Josef Platzer's 1783 stage designs for Prague's National Theatre, see Ptáčková 1987.
- 5 The use of atmospheric lighting began to emerge in European theatres in the 1760s; see Bergman 1977: 175–95.
- 6 The symmetry and the clear juxtaposition of vengeful and cheerful moods are features of the Prague version of the opera; these effects got lost in the Vienna version where Don Ottavio's aria 'Dalla sua pace' was inserted between Donna Anna's and Don Giovanni's arias in Act I, and where his own revenge aria, 'Il mio tesoro intanto', was replaced with Zerlina's and Leporello's razor duet and Donna Elvira's solo scene. Chiaroscuro effects like the ones in the Prague *Don Giovanni* were also a feature of the Dresden production of *Così fan tutte* which Bassi directed and in which he sang Guglielmo; see Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*.
- 7 Corbin 1986: 182.
- 8 Corbin 1986: 186.
- 9 For Donna Elvira's aria, Tomaschek gives the minim of the Allegro the metronome number 84, indicating that it was performed much faster in Guardasoni's company than in modern performances, which would give the music an expression of comic fury rather than righteous anger; see Fink 1839: 480.
- 10 Sisman 2006: 179.
- 11 Sisman 2006: 172–3.
- 12 'ihre Liebe, ihre Treue [...] wird mir vertrauen, dass die Zeit alles, alles aufklären wird zu meiner Ehre und uns beider Glück'; Rochlitz 1801: 7.
- 13 Börner-Sandrini 1888: 17–8, in Waidelich 2001: 194–5.
- 14 'machte Don Juan seiner Schönen die zärtlichsten Erklärungen, welche diese in aller Unschuld für baare Münze nahm'; Lyser 1838: 124.
- 15 'Das Organ hat für den Ausdruck schmeichlerischer Zärtlichkeit einen zu vollen, sich überstürzenden Ton; wenn Don Juan redet, müssen aus jeder Sylbe Rosenketten emporblühen, welche die Besiegung so vieler Damen durch die Musik der Lippen vernehmlich erklären. Das Betragen soll sich billig nach dem Range und selbst der Sinnesart der Schönen abstufen; ein vollendeter Don Juan kann eben dadurch am sichersten seine Allmacht über die weiblichen Herzen beweisen, so wie die tiefe Kenntniss ihrer Schwächen. So ist z. B. Donna Elvira, immer noch mit ritterlicher Aufmerksamkeit zu behandeln, das Geschlecht verlangt seinen bestimmten Tribut; auch die grausamste Treulosigkeit muss noch der Schein der guten Sitte zu retten suchen. / Diese anmuthige Aussenseite macht es erst begreiflich, warum die Unglückliche nicht von dem lebenswürdigen Ungeheuer lassen kann; spielt Don Juan wie er soll, so fühlt man Mitleiden mit der Betrogenen, im umgekehrten Falle erregt sie Lachen. Im höchsten Glanze kann sich das Talent des Verführers in den Scenen mit Zerline und während des Tanzes zeigen. Die naiven Landmädchen wollen mit einem gewissen zutraulichen und doch bescheidenen Moderantismus behandelt seyn, die gebildeten Städterinnen erfreuen sich in der Regel an männlicher Wagemuth, gepaart mit munterer Sicherheit; je höher hinauf, je geistreicher, aber auch, je lockender wird dieses Verhältniss, und die gefährlichen Liebhaber sind wohl hier diejenigen, welche die entgegengesetzten Kontraste meisterlich zu mischen wissen. Ein Don Juan soll alle diese Nüancen bis in ihre feinsten Grade kennen und in seinem ganzen Thun und Lassen darauf hinweisen'; Philipp 1825: 79–80.
- 16 Brown-Montesano 2007: 36.
- 17 Dismissing the notion that a young man could have managed to seduce 2065 women as implausible, Felicity Baker argues that the catalogue is Leporello's invention, the

servant having observed that Donna Elvira has a weakness for literary fiction as well; see the chapter 'Donna Elvira' in Baker 2021.

- 18 'Aber noch eine grosse Herrschaft bewiess [Therese Grünbaum] über sich, indem sie bei dem Reichthum bei der hohen Poesie ihrer Verzierungen sich bei der D. Anna fast ganz an die Noten hielt, und nur hie und da einige Blumen einstreute, die Mozart selbst entzückt haben würden. Überhaupt geht man im Ganzen viel zu weit, wenn man von dem Vortrage einer Mozartischen Musik verlangt, dass alle Ausschmückungen wegfallen sollen. Der Tonkünstler hat im Gegentheile in jede seiner Rollen dergleichen theils selbst vorgeschrieben theils durch häufige Fermaten Gelegenheit dazu gegeben. Nur seine Melodien vertragen der fortschreitenden Begleitung wegen keine so freie Behandlung wie die Italienischen Compositionen, oder erfordern, wenn doch etwas geschehen soll, eine genaue Kenntniss der Harmonie und ein gänzlich Verzetzen in den Sinn des grossen Meisters'; *Originalien*, 1821, no. 103: 824.
- 19 See the chapter 'The Modern Sound of Early Music' in Taruskin 1995.
- 20 Willaschek 1996: 202; Henze-Döhning 1986: 155.
- 21 Leibowitz 1969: 630.
- 22 Baker 2005: 91.
- 23 Joseph Kerman, too, is sceptical of the image of Zerlina as 'some kind of Arcadian shepherdess who believes Giovanni when he says he will marry her'; but rather than acknowledging that she might be attracted to him nonetheless, he suggests that she simply 'tells him what he wants to hear ... Despite her show of tremulousness, she is fully in control'; Kerman 1990: 111. This interpretation is based on a basic misreading of the libretto, which implies that Zerlina's first quatrain is addressed to Don Giovanni. It is addressed to herself, in fact, and so her 'tremulousness' is not affected: 'I want to and I don't want to, my heart trembles a little; it's true that I'd be happy, but he might deceive me' (341–4).
- 24 Baker 1986: 125.
- 25 Casanova 1997: I, 27.
- 26 On Casanova's possible involvement in the genesis of *Don Giovanni*, see Weidinger 2006; Woodfield 2012a: 109–11.
- 27 Da Ponte 1976: 107.
- 28 Quintilian 1933: xiii.12.
- 29 Da Ponte 1976: 170.
- 30 Da Ponte 1976: 173, 174.
- 31 Da Ponte 1976: 172–3.
- 32 See Pasco 2009.
- 33 Stone 1977: 545.
- 34 Stoneham 1988: 531.
- 35 Casanova 1997: VIII, 168.
- 36 This may also reflect the fact that Caterina Bondini, the *prima buffa* of Guardasoni's company, was at least in her mid-thirties when she created Zerlina, even if the age of eighteenth-century performers was not always expected to correspond to the age of the characters. Her stage career can be traced back to 1768, whereas the earliest recorded performance by Caterina Micelli (Donna Elvira) was in 1784, and Teresa Saporiti (Donna Anna) was described as 'a complete beginner' in 1782; see Woodfield 2012a: 43, 102–3. I might also use this occasion to dispel the old rumour that Saporiti died as a centenarian in Milan in 1869 as 'Teresa Codecasa'. This relies on a confusion with Giovanna Châtillon Codecasa (1770–1869) who died in Milan, and who had been Guardasoni's *prima donna buffa* in the years 1797–9; see Reichard 1799: 283; Verti 1996: II, 1285–6, 1335. Codecasa's obituaries wrongly claimed that she had created the role of Zerlina (e.g. *L'Euterpe*, 11 November 1869: 3), which role she is likely to have sung as the company's *prima buffa*. Her erroneous identification with Saporiti apparently goes back to a notice in *Signale für die musikalische Welt*, 13 April 1870: 376.
- 37 'Zieht sie näher zu sich und tändelt mit ihr'; Rochlitz 1801: 12.

- 38 'JUAN (auffahrend): Was magst du nicht, Ungeschliffner? *Nun* soll's durchaus so seyn! Sie bleibt und du gehst'; Rochlitz 1801: 12.
- 39 'Ach mein Masetto ist nicht immer grob – er hat wirklich auch sein Feines; und unempfindlich ist er vollends gar nicht'; Rochlitz 1801: 13.
- 40 'JUAN: O ja, es giebt unter uns solche schändliche Betrüger! Du hast ganz recht, liebes Kind! Aber sieh mir nur einmal ins Auge! Nun – seh' ich wohl darnach aus? (dringender) Liebes, süßes Kind – sprich! ein Wörtchen! Seh' ich darnach aus? ZERL.: (ängstlich) Ach nein – das wohl nicht'; Rochlitz 1801: 14.
- 41 Schmidt 2009: 75; Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 86.
- 42 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 85.
- 43 'ferner war in seiner Darstellung vieles zu loben, z. B. das Klapperschlangenspiel mit der Zerline'; *Originalien*, 1826, no. 12: 96.
- 44 Brown-Montesano 2007: 68–9.
- 45 'nur wäre zu wünschen, dass er, besonders in dem Duett mit der Zerlina, seine Töne mehr verschmelze als herausstosse'; *ZeW*, 22 December 1807: 1629.
- 46 'Wächter's Spiel im Duett mit Zerlina ... ist zärtlich, dringend, persuasiv'; *Abend-Zeitung* 15 February 1828, *Einheimisches* no. 2: 7.
- 47 'es scheint mir nur zu wenig auf das andere Moment gesehen, welches dem musikalisch-karakterisirten Don Juan offenbar eben so gut zum Grunde liegt, nämlich des reizenden feinen einschmeichelnden Verführers, welches in dem bekannten Duette und in dem Ständchen vorzugsweise hervortritt. ... Ausgezeichnet im Gesange, besonders durch Anmuth, mit welcher er seine schöne Stimme in dem Duette mit Zerlinen und in dem Ständchen frei und herrlich sich bewegen liess'; Heinse 1837: 208, 213.
- 48 'Diese war es aber welche die Stadt beinahe in Raserei gebracht hätte ... Selbst die Mandolettikrämer und Kellnerpursche trillern auf Gassen und Strassen ... das wol-lüstige / Vienni [sic] tra i lacci miei'; Pezzl 1787: III, 423–4.
- 49 While we have no casting information for the 1787 Prague premiere Bassi sang Lubino in Leipzig in 1792. As the *prima buffa*, Bondini would have been the obvious choice for Lilla. Notably, in the story told by Castil-Blaze about the composition of 'Là ci darem la mano', Bassi reminds Mozart of the effect he always produces with the duet 'Pace, caro mio sposo' from *Una cosa rara*; see Castil-Blaze 1852: 318.
- 50 Excerpts from Zinzendorf's diaries are reproduced in Link 1998.
- 51 See Eberl 1789: Act II scene 17. On other censorship issues in Eberl's translation of the duet in *Una cosa rara*, see Nedbal 2017b: 106–8. In the 1814 Dresden libretto for *Don Giovanni*, Don Giovanni's 'soli saremo' ('we'll be alone', 335) has been replaced with 'ben ci saremo' ('we'll be fine there').
- 52 See Schneider, 'The Enlightened Gender Politics'.
- 53 Baker 2005: 98.
- 54 Baker 2005: 97–8. Sexual seduction was a dangerous topic towards the end of the century: the words *Veführer* (seducer) and *verführen* (seduce) were suppressed by the censor in the 1798 German-language production of the opera at the Burgtheater in Vienna; see Nedbal 2017a: 181.
- 55 Lyser 1847: 95, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 56 Woodfield 2010: 139.
- 57 Manfred Hermann Schmid argues that the lost 'Bassi' score, examined by Julius Rietz in preparation for the 1871 Breitkopf & Härtel edition, might be identical with the so-called 'Rosenthal' score currently held by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Among other similarities, he notes that the Allegro markings are found in the Rosenthal score, too; see Schmid 2011: 242. According to Jonášová, the 6/8 section of Zerlina's Act I aria is marked *Più moto* in a copy of the aria that once belonged to Johann Baptist Kucharz, the harpsichordist in the premiere production; and it is marked the same way in the so-called 'Lobkowitz' score, used in the production in which Bassi presumably sang. In the so-called 'Donebauer' score, from which Mozart conducted the premiere in 1787, a later hand has marked the 6/8 section of Zerlina's aria *Allegretto*; see Jonášová

- 2006: 303. Perhaps the variety of tempo markings (Allegro, Più moto, Allegretto) in copies related to the opera's early performances suggests that Mozart set a faster tempo but without indicating a specific tempo marking.
- 58 Wurmser 1964: 6. Joseph Wallnig mentions early recordings of the duettino that employ tempi similar to Tomaschek's; see Wallnig 1990: 232. Adelina Patti employs similar tempi on her 1905 recording of Zerlina's aria.
- 59 Gielen 1977: 17.
- 60 Willaschek 1996: 208–9.
- 61 Abert 2007: 1070.
- 62 Mila 1988: 108, 111.
- 63 In Dresden, Zerlina's last lines, 'in contenti ed allegria / notte e di vogliam passar' ('we'll spend night and day in happiness and fun', 594–5), were turned into 'in contenti ed allegria / sempre, sì, vogliam passar' ('we'll always go along, yes, in happiness and fun').
- 64 'In *Dux* durchflogen wir in Eile die ... Naturalien- und Kunstsammlung, welche einst unter des berühmigten Casanova's Aufsicht stand ... Auf der Rückfahrt sprachen wir viel über Casanova und bezeichneten die bei Brockhaus begonnene deutsche Übersetzung seiner Memoiren als ein wahres Brandmal dieser sonst so ehrenfesten Firma. Denn dass man bei einer solchen frivolen Lectüre in Deutschland auf einen bedeutenden Absatz rechnen kann, ist leider! wahr'; Heinse 1837: 148–9.
- 65 Letter from Tieck to Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus of 26 March 1821, in Lüdeke von Möllendorff 1928: 15.
- 66 'Das ist auch so eine Stadtdame! Sie will mich bei dir anschwärzen, weil *sie* mich gern heirathen will: aber ich mag sie nicht'; Rochlitz 1801: 15.
- 67 According to Goehring, who also points out that Da Ponte drew on Molière, Goldoni and Bertati when designing the quartet, the earlier versions 'do not usually direct a spotlight of condemnation on Don Juan's perfidy; more commonly, they illuminate, sometimes audaciously, the libertine's inventiveness and guile in extricating himself from the consequences of his own deceits'. Mozart, in contrast, 'discovers more gravity in the old farce, where murder will out'; Goehring 2006: 142, 144. I would like to call his equating of 'condemnation' and 'gravity' into question, however: though the earlier treatments of the *topos* are certainly more farcical than Da Ponte's, they also depict the seducer's behaviour as unequivocally villainous.
- 68 Riccoboni 1971: 79–80.
- 69 'Juan zieht sie von ihr'; Rochlitz 1801: 17.
- 70 Pirrotta 1994: 116.
- 71 Gallarati 1994: 71; Till 1992: 209; Willaschek 1996: 211–2.
- 72 'Eine der schwierigsten Aufgaben ist das Zusammentreffen Don Juan's mit Donna Elvira, Donna Anna und Don Oktavio. Hier giebt es so viele Collisionen, dass nur ein sehr geübter Takt sie zu erkennen, geschweige zu lösen weiss. Don Juan hat in der Anlage seines Charakters einen starken Fond von Humor; aber wie sehr ist darüber zu wachen, dass derselbe nicht in den Ton eines Possenreissers ausartet und immer einen gewissen Adel behält. Der deutsche Text macht diese Haltung sehr schwer, wo nicht unmöglich, doch kann poetischer Sinn hier Vieles verbinden, Manches mildern und Anderes beseitigen'; Philippi 1825: 80.
- 73 'Der Heldenscene im ersten Final konnten wir ebenfalls nicht abgewinnen, was wir bei anderen Darstellern, und namentlich bei dem unvergleichlichen *Bassi*, empfunden. So ging es uns auch mit dem Spiel während des Quartetts im ersten Act, welches uns nicht bezeichnend genug für die so höchst interessante Situation, zu unerheblich erschien'; *Originalien*, 1826, no. 12: 96.
- 74 'Diese Worte werden offenbar der D. Elvira zugeflüstert und haben den Erfolg, dass sie sich zum Weggehen bereden lässt, auch antwortet sie dem D. Juan mit derselben Melodie, nach derselben, vom dem Gesange der D. Anna und des D. Ottavio verschiedenen Eintheilung des Tactes'; *Originalien*, 1820, no. 93: 755.

- 75 Lyser 1847: 96, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 76 Baker 2005: 98.
- 77 Kramer 2016: 176–7.
- 78 ‘Beispielsweise die Scene des ersten Actes, wo Don Juan bei der Begegnung mit Octavio und Anna dieser seine Dienste anbietet, wobei er eine Galanterie entwickelte, die sich beim Abschied durch einen feurigen Handkuss bei Donna Anna zu einer Leidenschaftlichkeit steigerte, welche den Wüstling über den klugen Weltmann siegen machte und seinen Worten: “bellissima Donn’ Anna” (schönste Donna Anna) einen fast schmerzlich vorwurfsvollen Ausdruck gekränkter Liebe verlieh. / Diese geniale Wendung bot nun der dramatischen Begabung der Caravoglia als Donna Anna um so mehr Gelegenheit, bei dem Erkennen des Verbrechens ihren Abscheu mit den Worten: “Don Ottavio, son morta!” (Don Octavio, ich sterbe!) jenen Ausdruck zu verleihen, welcher sich, während der darauf folgenden Erzählung des Attentates fortwährend steigend, bis zu deren Abschluss: “Compia [sic] il misfatto suo, con dargli morte!” (häuft seine Missethaten, raubt ihm das Leben) den Culminationspunkt erreichte, um einen endlosen Beifallssturm hervorzurufen’; Börner-Sandrini 1876: 213–14.
- 79 ‘Mad. Caravoglia-Sandrini ... hatte diese Rolle schon im Italienischen nicht bloss schon gesungen, sondern auch mit vieler Empfindung gespielt’; *ZeW*, 22 December 1807: 1629.
- 80 Fink 1839: 480.
- 81 See *AmZ*, 13 August 1823: 527.
- 82 ‘Sie erweckt ein Höheres, als berausenden Sinnengenuss. Sie lässt uns als *Donna Anna* ahnen, was Mozart mit diesem räthselhaften Wesen gemeint hat und eine Vergleichung mit der begeistertsten Auslegung Hoffmanns hat die Künstlerin nicht zu scheuen’; *Iris, Unterhaltungsblatt für Kunst, Literatur und Poesie*, 27 June 1824: 218.
- 83 Lewald 2008: 361.
- 84 ‘Am deutlichsten markirte sie ihre schiefe Auffassung der Partie ... in der Färbung, die sie dem Vortrag des zweiten Recitativs vor der Rachearie gab. Nicht mit dem Ausdruck tiefinnerster sittlicher Empörung, welche selbst die Zartheit jungfräulicher Schamhaftigkeit zu überwinden Kraft verleiht, erzählte sie Don Juan’s nächtlichen Ueberfall, sondern in einer Anna’s ganzen Charakter geradezu ruinirenden Mischung von süßem Verlorensein in wollüstige Erinnerungen und von derjenigen Scham, welche den begangenen Fehltritt erst recht verräth, indem sie ihn verleugnet’; Wolzogen 1863: 171.
- 85 ‘Ganz gegen die hergebrachte Form hätte sie durch Mienen und Geberdenspiel dem Publikum zur Anschauung gebracht, dass Anna in heimlicher Liebe zu Don Juan entbrannt sei’; Genast 1865: III, 172. See also Deutsch 1990: 379.
- 86 See *AmZ*, 13 August 1823: 527; *Abend-Zeitung*, 15 February 1828, Einheimisches no. 2: 8.
- 87 ‘ihre ... “Donna Anna” bei vollendeter äusserer Schönheit grossartige Momente im Spiel und Gesang darbot; beispielsweise habe ich das erste Duett an der Leiche des Vaters niemals wieder in solcher Vollendung darstellen sehen’; Börner-Sandrini 1879: 12–3.
- 88 ‘Die erste Arie der Donna Anna nebst Recitativ ganz vortrefflich, vielleicht im Pathos etwas zu hoch gehalten (Mozart selbst nennt ja den Don Juan “Opera Buffa”); Börner-Sandrini 1879: 16.
- 89 Lyser 1838: 115.
- 90 In the 1814 Dresden libretto, Leporello no longer accuses Don Giovanni of ‘sforzar la figlia’ (‘violating the daughter’) but of ‘amar la figlia’ (‘loving the daughter’), and Donna Anna’s narration has been heavily revised. Her lines ‘e mi vuole abbracciar; sciogliermi cerco, / ei più mi stringe’ (‘and he wants to embrace me; I try to get free; he holds me tighter’, 469–70) have become ‘e mi vuole rapir; fuggirmi cerco, / ei più m’insegue’ (‘and he wants to abduct me; I try to flee; he continues to pursue me’). Her description of how, with one hand, ‘m’afferra / stretta così, che già mi credo vinta’ (‘he

grabs me tightly like this, so I already think myself vanquished', 473–4), becomes a description of how 'credea stringermi così, / ch'io vittima ne fossi' ('he imagines holding me like this, making me his victim'). Don Giovanni's 'infame attentato' ('disgraceful assault', 477) has become 'indegne sue brame' ('his repulsive desires'), and the conclusion of the struggle, where 'a forza / di svincolarmi, torcermi e piegarmi / da lui mi sciolsi', is now described as follows: 'a forza / di svincolarmi, correre, ingiuriarlo / mi vidde in salvo' ('by disengaging myself, running away and reviling him, I saved myself').

- 91 'Die erschrockene Jungfrau hielt ihn erst für ihren Bräutigam Don Gusmann und zürnte ob seiner Kühnheit; als sie ihres Irrthums inne ward, erschreckte sie noch mehr und wollte fliehen. – Aber Don Juan hielt sie, sank ihr zu Füßen, flehte, schmeichelte und weinte, und das arme Mädchen vermochte nicht, dem höllischen Zauber zu widerstehen. / Als sie aber wieder zur Besinnung kam, erfasste wilde Verzweiflung sie. – Don Juan wollte sie beruhigen, sie stieß ihn zurück und schrie laut! Er wollte fliehen, wie eine Rasende fasste sie ihn und liess ihn nicht'; Lyser 1838: 119–20.
- 92 Lyser 1847: 95–6, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 93 Lyser 1847: 96, in Schneider 2016: 410–1n.
- 94 Brophy 2013: 103–4. On 'Spanishness' and the 'Baroque' in Da Ponte's librettos, see also Schneider 2016: 416–8; the chapter 'Don Giovanni's Bizarre Scene', in Baker 2021; Schneider, 'The Enlightened Gender Politics'.
- 95 Steinberg 2004: 27.
- 96 Steinberg 2004: 30.

4 The party episode

The champagne aria

When Da Ponte used the structure of Bertati's one-act libretto as a model for his two-act *dramma giocoso*, he added two new episodes, which he placed between Don Ottavio's brief soliloquy in Act I and the graveyard scene in Act II (both of which have equivalents in Bertati). The first episode, which takes up the last six scenes of Act I, centres on the party at Don Giovanni's house; the second episode, which takes up the first ten scenes of Act II, centres on his and Leporello's exchange of dress and identities. Dramatically, the party episode is motivated by Don Giovanni's continued attempt to seduce Zerlina, and it ends with the opera's dramatic climax as Donna Anna, Don Ottavio and Donna Elvira come to threaten him with revenge. From that moment on, Don Giovanni is subject to persecution. Theatrically and musically, however, the episode constitutes a different sort of climax: the seducer inviting the other characters to join his party is a theatricalisation of Mozart inviting the audience to submit to the festive pleasure of his opera, the attempted sexual seduction of Zerlina serving as a theatrical parallel of the attempted musical seduction of the listeners in the auditorium.

The party episode is launched with Don Giovanni's champagne aria, in which he orders Leporello to get the peasants drunk with wine, also to invite girls he finds in the square, and to organise the dancing.¹ He reveals his plan for the evening in the fourth stanza:

Ed io fra tanto
dall'altro canto
con questa e quella
vo' amoreggiar.

(‘Yet in the meantime, I’ll flirt with this and that girl’, 556–9)

Connotatively related to the sphere of ‘gallantry’, *amoreggiare* does not imply violence. But Rochlitz gave a very sinister subtext to the aria in his translation:

Unter dem Toben
Fisch’ ich im Trüben;

Führe mein Liebchen,
Trotz Weh und Ach, ins Schlafgemach.

(‘During this romp, I’ll fish in troubled waters and,
for all her whingeing, steer my sweetheart to the bedchamber’.)

The violent intent will inevitably affect the musical expression, which helps explain the extremely influential comment made by Hoffmann’s narrator:

In the frantic aria ‘Fin ch’han dal vino’ Don Giovanni gave quite blatant expression to his torn internal nature and his scorn for the little humans around him who are only there for the sake of his desire to corrupt their dull lives. Here his frontalis muscle twitched more mightily than before.²

Only Rochlitz’s translation of the fourth stanza could justify such an interpretation of the seducer’s intent.³ Hoffmann’s emphasis on Don Giovanni’s facial expression refers back to his description of the seducer’s first appearance in the opera where ‘the peculiar play of a frontalis muscle above his eyebrows brought something of Mephistopheles into his physiognomy for some seconds, causing an involuntary shudder without depriving the face of its beauty’.⁴ In other words, it is in this aria that Don Giovanni truly reveals his Mephistophelian nature.

The ‘demonic’ interpretation of the aria has been of surprising endurance. In Slevogt’s famous visualisations, the demonic energy takes the form of a super-human vitality that has an entrancing effect on the listener-spectator. In 1902 he made d’Andrade’s performance of the aria the subject of two oil paintings, which show the singer in the same posture: facing the audience, one leg placed defiantly in front of the other, his left hand resting on the hilt of his sword and his right hand raised above the head in a triumphant gesture, clutching one of his gloves. The lustrous white costume, with its opulent puffed sleeves and golden embroideries, has given one of the paintings the title ‘The White d’Andrade’, the whiteness suggesting both the sparkling of champagne and the incandescence of intense heat.⁵ Here Don Giovanni is seen standing in front of a painted set of balustrades and shrubbery, but in the other painting the sets have faded out of focus, all attention centring on the performer, while Leporello lingers far behind him on the stage (see Figure 4.1). The orchestral pit, which opens in front of the singer, has been transformed into an infernal cauldron, the individual outlines of the musicians blurred into a boiling, fiery mass.

Underlying Slevogt’s vision, as well as Hoffmann’s characterisation of the aria as ‘frantic’, we recognise a crucial aspect of its traditional performance practice: the extreme speed at which it is usually performed. This is confirmed by d’Andrade’s recording from 1908, which reveals an attempt to sing it as fast as humanly possible, verbal meaning yielding entirely to musical expression. The ferocity with which the singer hurls through the phrases corresponds to the theatrical impact of his Don Giovanni as captured by the painter. Though d’Andrade’s rendition may strike us as mannered today, few performers in the century after his death have adopted an approach that differs fundamentally from his. Thus,



Figure 4.1 Max Slevogt: 'Scene from *Don Giovanni* (Francisco d'Andrade on the Forestage)' (Act I scene 15). Oil painting. 1902. Photo ©: Landesmuseum Hannover – ARTOTHEK.

Leibowitz complained in 1969 that the 'absolutely frenetic pace' at which the aria tends to be sung gives it an expression of 'hysteria' unwarranted by the dramatic situation.⁶ Moreover, commentators have projected their impressions of the recordings and live performances they heard onto the score. Even such a connoisseur of eighteenth-century musical *topoi* as Allanbrook interprets the fact that Mozart set Don Giovanni's aria as a contredanse as a sign of his 'anarchic' nature, not as a sign of his light-hearted and democratic nature (though she elsewhere associates this joyful dance with the 'new democratization of social life').⁷ She suggests that the contredanse, which broke down choreographic and hence social hierarchies in pre-Revolutionary Europe, is used here to depict the seducer as a 'repugnant' and 'harmful' 'No-Man' who has 'the power to destroy the world of the other characters'.⁸ While this interpretation clearly echoes Hoffmann's, Joseph Kerman's analysis of the aria is more obviously indebted to musical performance practice, though this debt remains unacknowledged as well. The aria 'clocks in at just about eighty seconds', he declares; 'Don Giovanni sings at full tilt continuously, save for one two-bar rest which allows him a big gulp of air (or champagne) but which he manages to cede to the orchestra almost derisively, eight bars after it was their due'.⁹ A single motif, furthermore, 'very heavily accented, is barked

out ten times near the top of the baritone's tessitura', which Kerman describes as 'a musical procedure of unusual violence'.¹⁰

While this is an accurate description of, say, Fischer-Dieskau's performance on the Böhm recording, which indeed lasts about eighty seconds, Johannes Weisser's performance on René Jacobs' recording from 2007 makes a very different impression, since the conductor has decided to do away with the furious tempo and allow the aria to last ninety seconds (in comparison, d'Andrade's version lasts just sixty-five). Although the title of Kerman's essay is 'Reading *Don Giovanni*', it was surely recordings that inspired his idea that the aria is expressive of an 'anger that has been brought under temporary control', but which then breaks down into 'explosions of uncontained fury'.¹¹ That a different kind of performance might inspire a different reading of the score appears from Manfred Hermann Schmid's analysis:

At the end of the 'champagne aria', the static *da capo* form and continuous text delivery intersect, so that music and text drive each other forward. Mozart opted for an 'effervescent' coda that seeks to evade all conclusion. Instead of the expected single cadential bar (bar 93) at the *da capo*, Mozart slots in a four-bar segment on the dominant (bars 93–96). The musical refrain, which can no longer be suppressed, sparks an infectious and increasing enthusiasm, until at last the orchestra steals the theme from the singer. The captivating quality of a personality could not be more convincingly portrayed.¹²

That late-twentieth-century commentators like Allanbrook and Kerman are so heavily influenced by the opera's early German reception not only reflects the continued impact of the nineteenth century's scenic-musical performance traditions. It also reflects the conviction – which we can trace back to Hoffmann – that the essence of Don Giovanni's character finds expression in the champagne aria; even though Pirrotta has objected, very reasonably, that 'it is unclear why a character's psychology should be expressed synthetically in a single aria and not also in the recitatives, duets and ensembles, which in fact have already shown various aspects'.¹³ As a consequence, interpretations of this aria have traditionally mirrored critics' attempts to force the seducer into a demonic or moralistic framework.

Yet Bassi's performance of the champagne aria was nothing like that. Hohenthal contrasted Hoffmann's characterisation of the aria to that of Wendt who knew about Bassi's portrayal, and who had asked rhetorically what could be 'more frivolously cheerful than Don Giovanni's outcry', his aria in Act I.¹⁴ Hohenthal approved of the fact that Hoffmann 'puts emphasis on the evildoer's eminent natural gifts and his torn nature, justly recognising these in the composer's intention, beyond the platitudinous base provided by the Italian libretto'; yet in some cases, the German poet's enthusiasm got the better of his calm objectivity, he added, paraphrasing Wendt's description of the champagne aria:

When Hoffmann recognises the evildoer's scorn for humanity's vile, despised lives in the Presto of 'Fin ch'han dal vino', then he probably sees beyond what was intended by Mozart who only had a frivolously-cheerful outcry [*leichtsinig-fröhlichen Ausruf*] in mind here.¹⁵

He supports this verdict with a story about Bassi's conception, which exemplifies the failure of German singers to behave like 'Spanish gentlemen [*spanische Cavaliere*]':

At this point I must add that Bassi always laughed when he heard and saw a Don Giovanni performer render this cheerful song (and they all do that, unfortunately) with all the pretension one can think of, complete with mimic imitation of the dances mentioned en passant. After all – according to its original [i.e. Italian] text, and also according to the composer's setting – it is a frivolous [*leichtsinnige*] instruction to the Mephistophelian servant Leporello whom he addresses throughout the aria. Therefore, Bassi always sang it calmly standing while he leaned lightly on Leporello's shoulder. The singer who leaps and hops [*hüpf*] normally loses his breath, too, of which he is in great need.¹⁶

A different version of this anecdote was found in Karl Näke's 1855 journal entry describing a conversation with Miksch's grandson. When Bassi complained to Mozart that he was unable to do much with Don Giovanni's Act I aria, the composer had replied as follows: 'You sing it too fast; when I wrote Presto, then it's not Prestissimo; one must understand the words, after all. You have to talk to Leporello while you're giving him an order'. Näke then added on his own account: 'This is what Bassi told Miksch. I add that one must simply read the text with judgement, and the original [i.e. the Italian text] as well; then it indeed shows that this is no drinking song, but a roguish song'.¹⁷

While Hohenthal's version of the story was addressed to lovers of Mozart's music, Miksch's version was narrated in a closed professional context and aimed at transmitting what was regarded as authoritative performance practice. But the gist of the story is the same: the aria is an order to Leporello and should be performed as such, and its mood is frivolous-roguish rather than scornful or drunken. Both Hohenthal and Näke advocated the study of the Italian text, reacting against the distorting German translation. In this case, this was not the Rochlitz translation, however, where Don Giovanni does in fact address the aria to Leporello, but the translation Friedrich Karl Lippert had prepared for the 1790 Berlin premiere. In Lippert's rendering, which opens with the following proverbial lines from which the aria derived its traditional name, the order to Leporello has been turned into a soliloquy:

Treibt der Champagner
Alles im Kreise
Dann gibt's ein Leben
Herrlich und schön.

(‘When champagne makes everything whirl, life becomes delightful and beautiful’.)

Although today's commentators are of course familiar with Da Ponte's and not with Lippert's text, it is noteworthy how frequently the dialogic context of the

aria is ignored. Again, this indicates the power of the performance tradition: the conception of ‘Fin ch’han dal vino’ as a drunken (or angry) soliloquy is barely separable from the customary extreme tempo. That Mozart specifically asked Bassi to perform it as a ‘Presto’ rather than a ‘Prestissimo’ is quite plausible, furthermore, since such comments were typical of him. Thus, he complained that when Georg Joseph Vogler played his Piano Concerto No. 8 in a private recital, ‘the first movement [marked Allegro] went *prestissimo*, the Andante *allegro* and the Rondo positively *prestississimo*’.¹⁸

The grandson was not the only person whom Miksch told the story about the champagne aria. Though Lyser never refers to Miksch as one of his sources of Mozart anecdotes, one of his stories is too similar to the entry in Närke’s journal for this to be a coincidence. In the fictive memoir of Bassi’s portrayal, we find the following description of the singer’s performance of the aria: ‘Without hopping [*hüpfen*] back and forth like a wagtail in the famous champagne aria, everything was scent and champagne’. The ‘old musical director’ then elaborates in a footnote:

Bassi only changed his position a little during the aria; in accordance with the original [i.e. Italian] text, his words were mostly addressed to Leporello; only at ‘Ah la mia lista’ etc. did he exult by himself [*jubelte er für sich auf*].¹⁹

That Don Giovanni should rejoice by himself in the last stanza was a point Lyser developed in the 1837 novella. The observation may have derived from Miksch, though the use of the second person singular (‘devi’) in the aria does indicate that Don Giovanni is still talking to his servant. Lyser’s story includes a rehearsal scene in which Bassi sings the aria ‘hurriedly and with a not too tender delivery’, provoking the following reaction from the composer:

‘Gently, gently’, Mozart exclaimed with a laugh, interrupting his playing already after the first bars; ‘not *con furia* over rough and smooth like that! Can’t you wait for my music to be over? – Where I have written Presto, must you sing *prestissimo* and not give a damn about *forte* and *piano*? Hey, who is singing here? An already drunken *porter* or a lascivious Spanish *gentleman* [*spanischer Cavalier*] who thinks more of his delicate *sweetheart* than of the *wine*, which should only help him win his sweetheart? And who *pictures* his enjoyment to himself in advance in a voluptuous daydream in order to *redouble* it? – Drink a glass of champagne, I beg you! Think of your sweetheart, and then notice how it begins to hum in your ears in the lightest, gayest tempo: *piano-piano*! – *Crescendo-forte-piano*! Until everything finally sounds together in the wildest, loudest exultation [*Jubel*] – *that’s* what I meant’.²⁰

The fact that Lyser, in the 1833 story, had used the verb *hüpfen* when criticising the dancing of the German singers, and that he, in the 1837 novella, uses the phrase ‘spanischer *Cavalier*’ when referring to Bassi’s superior rendition, suggests that he took inspiration from Hohenthal’s published memoir. Yet the

mention of the tempo markings ‘Presto’ and ‘*prestissimo*’ indicates that he also drew on the anecdote as narrated by Miksch. Moreover, Mozart’s suggestion that the singer should drink a (metaphorical) glass of champagne before the aria, in which Don Giovanni anticipates the (actual) intoxication of the party, marks a reaction against traditional German stage practice where Don Giovanni, in the words of Edward Dent, had to ‘wave a champagne glass’ while singing.²¹ (The fact that Kerman, writing in 1990, still presupposes this scenic tradition, may be due to the Czinner-Graf film where Don Giovanni empties two glasses of champagne, one before and one after singing the aria.) And finally, the interpretation of the aria as a musical-emotional crescendo, which Lyser had already hinted at in the earlier essay, fits Mozart’s orchestration where the first stanza is accompanied only by strings and a single flute, the second stanza adding the clarinets and bassoons, and the third stanza the oboes and horns, while the fifth stanza (which Bassi allegedly delivered as a semi-soliloquy) returns to the softer orchestration of the opening. The full woodwind group plus the horns are only heard in the ‘exultant’ reprise of the second, third and fifth stanzas towards the end of the aria. Of course, these variations in the density of the accompaniment have little impact on the singer’s use of dynamics when the aria is performed *con furia*. Like Nāke, Lyser also used the composer’s specification of the tempo to reject the interpretation of the aria as a drinking song, though he used ‘champagne’ as a metaphor for its bubbly mood and desired effect on the audience. This metaphor also provided the cue for the frontispiece of the volume, a drawing by Lyser which he called ‘Arabesque on Don Giovanni’s Champagne Aria’ (see Figure 4.2). In contrast to the defiant d’Andrade on Slevogt’s depictions of the same situation, Lyser’s Don Giovanni leans nonchalantly on his left leg, while his arms are stretched out in a grand welcoming gesture. He addresses Leporello who stands one step behind him while a group of peasants are carousing in the background, the accompaniment provided by an orchestra of imps. Here we are far removed from the ‘scorn’ or ‘torn internal nature’ that Hoffmann heard in the music.²²

The garden scene

The next time Don Giovanni enters, the scene has changed to his garden where the peasants are sleeping after having been entertained by Leporello, and where Zerlina has just tried to mend things with Masetto. Don Giovanni tells the peasants to wake up and orders his servants to take everybody to the ballroom and serve refreshments. Lyser, who selected this moment as the subject for one of his two illustrations of the 1833 essay, showed him in the same pose (albeit inverted) as the one in which he sings the champagne aria in his 1837 drawing. Here, too, Don Giovanni’s arms are extended in a gesture of welcome, Leporello standing behind him with a raised wineglass.²³

Don Giovanni’s ensuing attempt to seduce Zerlina while the suspicious Masetto is watching from a niche is one of the scenes commentators sometimes adduce as proof of his violent nature. In Da Ponte, Zerlina ‘wants to hide’ when the



Figure 4.2 Johann Peter Lyser: 'Arabesque on the Champagne Aria' (Act I scene 15). Drawing. Frontispiece for Lyser 1837. Photo ©: University and City Library of Cologne, Institute of Musicology, Collegium Musicum, Semi Mg 449/17.

peasant chorus follows the servants into the ballroom, but Don Giovanni ‘takes hold of her’ as he sings: ‘Zerlinetta mia garbata, / t’ho già visto, non scappar’ (‘I’ve already seen you, my gentle Zerlinetta; don’t run away’, 638–9). Later, she begs him to let her go, ‘Se pietade avete in core...’ (‘If your heart knows pity...’ 642), to which he replies, archly twisting the sense of her words: ‘Si ben mio, son tutto amore’ (‘Yes, my darling, I’m all love’, 643). Finally, he urges her to join him in the niche with a thinly veiled sexual invitation: ‘Vieni un poco in questo loco / fortunata io ti vo’ far’ (‘Come in here for a moment; I’ll make you happy’, 644–5). But Zerlina, who fears the moment he finds Masetto there, sings to herself: ‘Ah, s’ei vede il sposo mio, / so ben io quel che può far’ (‘Ah, I know well what he might do if he sees my bridegroom’, 646–7).

What is happening in this moment? While it is possible that Donna Elvira really has convinced Zerlina that Don Giovanni is a traitor and a liar, it is no less likely that she resists his second attempt to seduce her simply because she knows Masetto overhears every word they speak. However, Rochlitz removed the textual ambiguities, first by letting Don Giovanni chase Zerlina around the stage before their dialogue begins. He ‘retains’ her as the chorus move into the ballroom, and ‘she escapes but returns immediately’. Don Giovanni ‘follows, having lost her in the crowd’, and ‘since he misses her, he returns as well’. As he starts speaking to her, ‘she wants to escape, but he stops her’; and in her first response to him, she ‘tries to disengage herself’.²⁴ This implies a great deal more unwillingness on Zerlina’s part than we can read out of the Italian libretto, and also a far more pressing attitude on Don Giovanni’s part. Any hint of coquetry in Zerlina’s appeal to his compassion is also gone. ‘Ich beschwöre Sie mit Tränen’ (‘I implore you in tears’), she pleads, Don Giovanni dismissing her protest with the grossest insensitivity: ‘O ich kenne diese Tränen!’ (‘Oh, I know those tears!’). And her last lines, sung as he ‘pulls her closer to the bower’ (i.e. the niche), no longer refer to Masetto but to her own qualms:²⁵ ‘Nein, ich fliehe diese Laube; / Fliehe jede schlechte Tat!’ (‘No, I’ll avoid this bower; I’ll avoid any misconduct’). Changes of this kind not only ‘purify’ Zerlina, making the scene conform to nineteenth-century bourgeois standards for scenic decency; they also turn Don Giovanni into the stereotypical predatorial Don Juan figure.²⁶

Some commentators tend to read Mozart’s setting of the dialogue in a way that agrees more with the nineteenth-century adaptation and the performance tradition deriving from it than with Da Ponte’s libretto. Mila reverts, for example, to Hoffmann’s predatorial metaphor: ‘Don Giovanni is like a serpent and Zerlina like a little bird, anxious and frightened’.²⁷ This has also affected readings of the score. ‘Don Giovanni does not so much cajole Zerlina as push her’, Kerman thinks, ‘a new plangency in the music’ indicating that she ‘now wants nothing to do with her seducer’. As proof he points to her chromatic appoggiaturas on ‘Se pietade avete in core’, which ‘no longer sound pert, but painful’, and her semiquavers on ‘Ah, s’ei vede il sposo mio’, which, ‘if not quite frantic, are rushed and squeezed by comparison with “Là ci darem”’.²⁸ Once more, Kerman clearly has a specific performance in mind, possibly the Böhm recording with Fischer-Dieskau and Reri Grist. Nothing prevents the soprano from giving the appoggiaturas a coquettish

expression, however, as Berganza does in the Losey film; and it is noteworthy that Gallarati hears ‘voluptuous abandon’ in the chromaticism of Zerlina’s lines.²⁹ Some later commentators go even further than Kerman, visualising the scene in ways that strikingly echo Rochlitz. Don Giovanni ‘rushes forward’ to ‘detain’ Zerlina, writes Brown-Montesano; and though she finds the music ‘lovely’, she quotes Kerman’s interpretation to demonstrate how ‘the language of seduction has been precariously altered, moving a step closer to rape’.³⁰ Similarly, Charles Ford feels that the ‘ascending dotted semiquavers’ endow Don Giovanni’s line ‘t’ho già visto, non scappar’ with ‘a sense of urgency, even violence’.³¹ This again seems to presuppose a specific performance (such as Johannes Weisser’s on the Jacobs recording), since the phrase can just as well be sung with a flirtatious expression, as Ezio Pinza does on the 1944 live recording conducted by George Szell. Even more revealing is Ford’s observation that Don Giovanni ‘tries to drag [Zerlina] back into the place in which she was hiding from him’, which echoes a stage direction we find in Rochlitz but not in Da Ponte.³²

In reality, if we discount the performance traditions inherited from the nineteenth century, the only suggestion of violence on Don Giovanni’s part is the initial stage direction that has him ‘take hold of’ Zerlina when she tries to hide – and this can be interpreted in various ways. That it allows for a non-violent interpretation, too, is suggested by a drawing by Marstrand, no doubt inspired by Hansen’s portrayal of Don Giovanni in Copenhagen (see Figure 4.3). The fact that the stage directions for the scene in the Danish singing translation were borrowed directly from Rochlitz makes it even more noteworthy that Don Giovanni does not seem to use force in Marstrand’s picture, possibly owing to the influence of Hansen’s teacher Siboni.³³ Don Giovanni’s right arm is placed around Zerlina’s waist, and he holds her left hand in his, his face bowed down towards her, insinuatingly. Zerlina leans gently towards him, her right arm hanging down limply and her posture and the placement of her feet indicating that she is in harmony with him and has no desire to run away. While her face is turned away, coyly, she exposes her neck, which is dangerously close to his lips. Marstrand’s drawing exactly captures the ambiguity of seduction, which is somewhere between charming and urging, obliging and resisting. Though reluctant, this Zerlina clearly feels attracted to the handsome nobleman, while Don Giovanni has simply taken up where they left off earlier in the Act, not expecting her to have changed her mind about him, which, indeed, she may not have.

The moment when Don Giovanni discovers Masetto in the niche, interrupts his seduction of Zerlina and invites the couple into the ballroom, has also undergone some transformations. While Zerlina’s claim that she knows what Don Giovanni ‘might do if he sees my bridegroom’ implies that she knows him to be violent, ‘the ensuing episode proves her wrong’, Baker points out. When he sees Masetto, Don Giovanni simply ‘makes an astonished gesture’ and becomes ‘a little confused’ before ‘regaining his courage’ (648–50).³⁴ These stage directions were omitted by Rochlitz, and they have been consistently ignored by performers and producers since then. In Losey’s film, the seducer immediately adopts a threatening attitude when he sees Masetto, and later grabs him angrily. According to



Figure 4.3 Wilhelm Marstrand: 'Don Giovanni' (Act I scene 18). Paper and ink. No date (1860s). Photo ©: The Hirschsprung Collection, Copenhagen.

Brown-Montesano, who clearly has this or similar performances in mind, Masetto ‘stays on guard, fully aware of the arrogance and potential violence behind the nobleman’s courtesies’.³⁵ Yet this violence is purely imagined, by Zerlina as well as by the commentator.

The ballroom scene

In Tirso’s play, when Don Juan and his servant Catalinón chance upon Aminta’s and Batricio’s wedding, Gaseno, the father of the bride, invites the newcomers to the party. ‘A todo el mundo ha de ser / este contento notorio’ (‘All the world should be invited to take part in this happiness’, II.666–7), he exclaims, describing the party with an array of carnivalesque hyperboles. The Colossus of Rhodes, the Pope, Prester John and King Alfonso XI of Castile with all his court are invited, Gaseno promising that his guests will be fed with mountains of bread, rivers of wine, towers of ham and armies of chickens and squabs. Don Juan accepts the invitation and takes his seat between the bridal couple, captivating the rustic company with his courtly airs. Repeatedly accusing the groom of gluttony, however, he prevents him from eating just as he prevents him from communicating with his bride. The alimentary deprivation serves as a metaphor for the matrimonial deprivation, the episode culminating with the disruption of the wedding as Don Juan replaces Batricio in the bridal bed. According to the dramatic logic of the play, the punishment for this sin is the statue’s disruption of Don Juan’s supper.

One of Da Ponte’s many departures from Tirso’s play, and from its later adaptations, consists in transferring the wedding party to Don Giovanni’s house and making him host the peasants rather than the other way around. Instead of the father of the bride, it is Don Giovanni who invites all the world to his party, his offer of ‘chocolate, coffee, wine and ham’ (278) and his insistence that Masetto should be kept ‘contento’ (282) echoing Gaseno’s invitation. In this way, Da Ponte disrupts Tirso’s moral logic: it is no longer the seducer who violates the code of hospitality, but rather Donna Elvira, Donna Anna and Don Ottavio who do so, as they accept his invitation in order to ambush him. Thereby, they anticipate the statue’s acceptance of the invitation and subsequent killing of the host during the supper. As Renato Raffaelli points out, the masked faces of the aristocratic guests correspond to ‘the immobile features of a statue’s facial mask’.³⁶ As harbingers of death, they have abandoned part of their humanity, while the Commendatore abandons all of his when turning into stone. Raffaelli also points to the entrance of the disguised avengers into Don Giovanni’s house as a *contrapasso* for the entrance of the disguised Don Giovanni into Donna Anna’s house. He compares them to the Furies, the three goddesses of vengeance, whose advent was predicted by Donna Anna’s threat in the opening scene: ‘I shall persecute you like a desperate Fury’ (23–4).³⁷ If the interruption of the party is one of the seducer’s crimes in Tirso, it is one of his punishments in Da Ponte.

Unlike Tirso’s seducer, Don Giovanni is liberal and convivial, his party invitation even extending to the audience. Some commentators have found the mood

ominous, Abert observing that ‘by the time we enter the ballroom, in spite of the festive merriment, there is already the overwrought atmosphere that tends to precede a catastrophe’.³⁸ But this does not seem to have been the case in Guardasoni’s production. Lyser describes the first finale as ‘brimming over with zest, fun and audacity’, save for ‘a passage for the three maskers’, i.e. the trio they sing before entering the ballroom.³⁹ And the Hamburg Critic, probably remembering the company’s guest performances in Leipzig, described the scene as follows:

What animation does not reign in the first finale ...! The many people edging their way through the crowd in their scenic activity only need to learn their notes by heart, their characterisation being so obviously and so keenly distinctive that they are bound to become actors, even if against their will. In the ballroom scene, for example, how quite different is the melody of Zerlina and Masetto from that of Leporello who, standing closer to his master, accompanies the latter in dancing! With the Maestoso that announces the maskers, one immediately hears that aristocrats are entering, and they also convey that with their singing, just as Don Giovanni – this prototype of gallantry – immediately behaves differently towards these guests than he behaved towards the peasants, and also immediately finds the right measure in the melody.⁴⁰

What struck this critic was not only the contrast between the peasant dance that opens the ballroom scene and the dignified march that accompanies the entrance of the maskers, but also the way Don Giovanni is able to adapt to the musical idioms of the different social classes – just as Bassi’s Don Giovanni was able to adapt to the personalities of the different women. This does not mean that the seducer lacks a personality of his own but that he is in possession of ‘measure’, or discretion, which only contributes to the social inclusiveness of the mood.

Bassi told Hohenthal that the spectators at the premiere of *Don Giovanni* had received not only the duettino, the champagne aria and the canzonetta but also the ‘glorious [Act I] finale in all its splendour’ with ‘enthusiastic warmth, rapturously demanding the repetition of the shorter numbers’.⁴¹ That the duettino and Don Giovanni’s two solos were received this way is not surprising, since they have been among the opera’s hit numbers ever since; but it is remarkable that the first finale belonged in the same category. Perhaps the excited reaction to this number is hinted at in the newspaper report from the premiere which made a point of mentioning the ‘several choruses and changes of scenery’ that ‘Herr Guardasoni had brilliantly [*glänzend*] attended to’.⁴² The remark is puzzling since the only choruses in the opera are the brief peasant chorus in the Act I street scene, Don Giovanni’s four servants in the first finale and the subterranean male chorus in the second finale, none of which seems to warrant the epithet ‘brilliant’. The reporter (or the first-hand account on which he based his report) is more likely to have referred to the ballroom scene, with its onstage bands and dancing couples. This impression is reinforced by the review of a German-language production that premiered at Prague’s National Theatre on 7 October 1796, in which the (same?) critic asked the director to ‘make the ball offered by Don Giovanni somewhat

more brilliant [*glänzender*].⁴³ Since the critic compares the German production unfavourably to the Italian production, this demand reflects indirectly on the theatrical impact of the ballroom scene in the original staging.

The ball as a festive Act finale was indebted to the popular *Stone Guest* plays, in which Tirso's ominous wedding supper was turned into a lively dance party. For over a century, the seducer had carried the peasant bride off during the dancing to the consternation of the bridegroom and the other guests, the use of dance music and the ensuing chaos being an effective way of bringing down the curtain between Acts. We find this episode already in Cicognini's play where it concludes Act II. Here the bridal couple are cast as typical *commedia* characters, Pantalone and Brunetta. Passarino, Don Giovanni's servant, sees them dancing, and he 'calls Don Giovanni who starts dancing as well, together with Passarino; eventually, Don Giovanni carries Brunetta off and leaves'.⁴⁴ The Act ends with the angry yelling of Pantalone and the father of the bride. In Andrea Perrucci's *Il convitato di pietra*, printed in Naples in 1690, it is the wedding of Pollecina and Pimpinella that is interrupted at the end of Act II by Don Giovanni and his servant (Coviello in this version).⁴⁵ Don Giovanni asks Pimpinella for a dance, and she confesses in an aside that she would rather marry him than her lower-class bridegroom. Despite Pollecina's protests, Don Giovanni shows her how to dance and then carries her off during the dancing. When her father and Pollecina realise she is missing, they turn on Coviello, beating him with canes. While this or a related version is the source of the failed attempt of Da Ponte's Don Giovanni to put the blame for Zerlina's abduction on his servant, the seducer's re-entry probably took its cue from Act IV of Marinelli's *Dom Juan*, which is set in a peasants' tavern. During the ball, Rosa tells Dom Juan she prefers him to Peter, her bridegroom. 'After a while, Juan departs together with Rosa; they are followed by the Host and the Hostess. They all enjoy themselves' (IV.2). Suddenly, Peter calls on his bride, and the whole company starts yelling too. The Host and the Hostess then return with Rosa who declares that she wants to be 'a well-bred lady' rather than marry a peasant, the guests rebuking her for her lack of decency (IV.3). In an attempt to save himself from the situation, Dom Juan returns 'with bared sword', exclaiming: 'Pull back, you beasts! He who opposes me must die' (IV.4). He then tells his servant Kaspar to accompany him to the graveyard.

Da Ponte combined plot details from such standard versions of the scene, but he made some crucial changes. First, as mentioned, the seducer invites the peasants to his party rather than inviting himself to theirs. Second, Zerlina protests vigorously after Don Giovanni has led her away from the ballroom, which the peasant bride never does in the traditional plays. Third, the bridegroom and the guests direct their wrath at the seducer, not at the servant or the bride. Finally, Da Ponte's Don Giovanni is more reminiscent of Casanova than of the trickster villain of the *Stone Guest* tradition. This appears from a comparison of Don Giovanni's party to the party Casanova threw in honour of Zenobia in Milan in 1763. According to Casanova's account, the wedding party (which took place at the Cassina de' Pomm, a well-known *cascina a corte* functioning as an inn) included the bridal couple and eighteen or twenty townspeople. Casanova arrived late together with

three aristocratic friends: Marquis Triulzi and Count and Countess Attendolo-Bolognini. The arrival of the distinguished guests initially made the lower-class people uneasy, but the mood soon improved, thanks partly to the abundant food and exquisite foreign wines purchased by Casanova:

Everyone proposed rarely ingenious healths in verses improvised on the spur of the moment, and everyone felt called upon to sing. A very good orchestra striking up, dancing began. Etiquette demanded that it begin with a minuet by the bride and groom. Zenobia danced it in time, but the tailor made the Countess laugh so hard that we thought she would be ill; however, she had to dance with him while the bride danced with me. In less than an hour there was an end to the minuets, and the contradances began, to last until the end of the ball, when coffee was served to everyone five or six times, together with *confetti*. These are sweets of various kinds, which are made to perfection in Milan.⁴⁶

After the dancing, Casanova asked permission of the bridal couple to see Zenobia home, and he then had sexual intercourse with her in the carriage with the result that his breeches were stained. When he met the tailor later in the evening, the latter almost discovered his wife's infidelity when noticing that Casanova had changed his breeches. The adventure ended peacefully, however, Casanova carrying on his affair with Zenobia until leaving Milan.

Several details of this story recall features of the operatic ballroom scene that have no equivalent in the *Stone Guest* plays: Casanova paying for the lower-class wedding party while intending to seduce the bride; the serving of *caffè* and *confetti*; the late arrival of three aristocratic guests of honour; the contredances that follow the minuets; and Casanova dancing expertly with the bride, while the choreographic ineptitude of the bridegroom causes laughter. It is not difficult to imagine how these details might have served as hints to Da Ponte's old Venetian friend – and to other insiders among the original audience who had heard Casanova narrate the story – that Don Giovanni was, in this moment, a fictitious portrayal of the real-life seducer as a young man inserted into the traditional *Stone Guest* episode.

Scholars have long disagreed about the exact meaning of the line 'viva la libertà' ('long live liberty', 710) with which Don Giovanni welcomes the masked aristocrats. It looks harmless enough in the printed libretto where it is delivered only by the host, and where it might simply be taken to mean 'my house is open to everybody'; but Mozart gave it a surprisingly emphatic setting, Leporello and the maskers repeating it numerous times to the sound of trumpets and timpani. Wherein consists the liberty the seducer praises with such triumphant exultation? While some original spectators might have associated it with Casanova's lifelong defence of his personal freedom in social and sexual matters, there is no doubt that audiences understood the passage as a tribute to political freedom from quite early on. The Neefe-Schmieder translation, prepared for the German premiere in that eventful spring of 1789, made the peasant chorus join in Don Giovanni's tribute to liberty, 'Es leb die Freiheit hoch!' Twelve years later – during the Second Coalition War against Revolutionary France – Rochlitz clearly felt obliged to tone down the

political implications, translating the line, less literally, as ‘Hier lebt ein freier Sinn’ (‘here reigns a liberal spirit’). Elsewhere, too, the political connotations were suppressed. At the Neapolitan premiere in 1812, which took place during the reign of Joachim Murat, ‘viva la libertà’ was replaced with ‘viva la società’: a modification retained in most productions in Italy before the Unification.⁴⁷ In German-speaking countries, the ‘liberty chorus’, as it came to be labelled in the nineteenth century, never failed to ‘electrify the audience’, Lyser said: he himself remembered how the cry ‘eljèn a szabadság’ (‘long live liberty’) was sung on Mozart’s tune ‘to the immense cheering of the Viennese population’ when leaders of the Hungarian Revolution arrived in Vienna in March 1848, and how the chorus was received with ‘thunderous applause’ in the Kärntnertortheater during the siege that put an end to the Vienna Uprising in October the same year.⁴⁸ In his review of a performance three days after the defeat of the imperial troops in the First Battle of Komárom on 26 April 1849, Lyser described how it had to be repeated ‘to thunderous cheers’.⁴⁹

In the twentieth century, when the abuse of class privilege came to be regarded as the key to *Don Giovanni*, commentators were hard-pressed to explain Da Ponte’s and Mozart’s decision to furnish the aristocratic libertine with this revolutionary-sounding hymn to liberty. Abert’s theory turned out to be influential:

With the amiability of a man of the world, Don Giovanni keeps repeating the words ‘È aperto a tutti quanti, viva la libertà’ ..., a remark which, curiously enough, has prompted performers to raise a completely unmotivated toast to political freedom in which the chorus and even the audience have occasionally taken part. But it would never occur to an aristocrat like Don Giovanni to champion political freedom: all that he is referring to is the freedom conferred by the wearing of masks, and if his distinguished visitors concur with this, it is merely out of courtesy towards their host: they are unwilling to give ground to him in matters of social refinement. The herd of peasants, meanwhile, is expected to remain silent during this ceremonial on the part of their social superiors, and the fact that Mozart depicts this ceremonial in such a realistic way invests the scene with bitter irony, especially for audiences of his own day.⁵⁰

Abert’s interpretation was followed in Losey’s film where the peasants watch from a distance, restrained by footmen, while the aristocrats bellow their hymn. And some modern scholars have thought along similar lines, Allanbrook maintaining that if the passage has a political meaning, then ‘Mozart’s forecast for human freedom is a bleak and frightening one’, since liberty and human freedom, in Don Giovanni’s world, can mean nothing but ‘libertinage’ and ‘the anarchy of individual appetite’.⁵¹ Rejecting this negative line of interpretation, Tomislav Volek has attributed the political intent to the creators of the opera rather than to the characters singing it. Mozart’s call for liberty, he proposes, was a protest against the Viennese court, which could only be uttered in Prague, and the libretto printed in Vienna in the summer of 1787 omits the last eight scenes of Act I because the creators did not want the censor to see the controversial line.⁵² There are a number of problems with this theory, however. It is hardly plausible that Da

Ponte would cut such a large chunk from the libretto – and it even breaks off in the middle of the quartet – because he wanted to avoid censorship of a single line in the finale. Moreover, Volek's interpretation is hardly consonant with the facts that the opera was commissioned for a Habsburg wedding (as we now know), that the line was retained in the 1788 Vienna libretto, and that both Da Ponte and Mozart were devoted to Joseph II.⁵³ It is more likely that the tribute to liberty – a word not yet associated with riots and rebellion, as it came to be a few years later – was intended as a tribute to the liberalising policies of the enlightened emperor, the most progressive ruler of his time, as Clemens Höslinger has suggested.⁵⁴ Joseph's memory was also revered by the revolutionaries of 1848 who revolted against the less reformist government of his grandnephew Ferdinand, which fits well with their enthusiastic responses to the chorus during those turbulent months. Hans Ernst Weidinger has added that, if Höslinger is right, the maskers' immediate response to Don Giovanni's tribute to liberty, 'We are grateful for all these marks of generosity' (711–2), may count as the actual homage to Joseph II.⁵⁵ By implication, the freedom-loving Don Giovanni was, in this moment, a theatrical stand-in not only for Casanova but also for the generous and liberal ruler.⁵⁶

The tribute to liberty gives way to the recommencement of the dancing, Don Giovanni telling Leporello to pair the couples. Da Ponte does not indicate which dances are performed; in the printed librettos for both Prague and Vienna, immediately after Don Giovanni has given his order to Leporello, he simply 'starts dancing with Zerlina', telling her: 'Il tuo compagno io sono: / Zerlina vien pur qua!' ('I'll be your partner: come here, Zerlina!' 715–6). Later, Leporello forces Masetto to dance as well, to distract his attention from the seduction of his bride, but there is no indication that any of the three maskers enters the dance floor. Mozart, however, let three stage bands accompany three different dances, which start one after the other until the dancing is 'without any order', as Don Giovanni demanded in his aria (550). In the autograph score, we find the stage direction: 'Don Ottavio dances the minuet with Donna Anna' when the first band begins to play; Don Giovanni's lines to Zerlina have been moved to a later point, coinciding with the onset of the second band and the stage direction: 'he starts dancing a contredanse with Zerlina'. And finally, when the third band starts, Leporello 'dances the teitsch with Masetto'. While the graceful minuet, originally a French court dance, made demands on the noble carriage of the individual couple, the boisterous contredanse required no such thing. A group dance deriving from the English countryside, it was performed in squares or rows with little hopping movements, calling for enthusiastic participation rather than aesthetic admiration. At the Milanese wedding party in 1763, the guests danced minuets for an hour before proceeding to the contredanses, which was common at the time, as Wye Allanbrook and Daniel Hertz have shown in their studies of eighteenth-century ballroom practices.⁵⁷ The transition from minuets to contredanses was essential to the festive build-up of the ball, with its gradual loosening of social and physical constraints.

The presumed symbolic association of the individual characters with the various ballroom dances has preoccupied scholars a great deal, however, with Dent already suggesting that the three dances represent different social strata: the

minuet stands for the aristocracy, the contredanse for the bourgeoisie and the teitsch, or allemande, for the proletariat.⁵⁸ This interpretation especially gained support in the 1970s when the view of *Don Giovanni* as an opera about class struggle became increasingly common, and the demonising of the title hero acquired an explicitly political tinge. Thus, in an influential paper from 1974, Stefan Kunze argued that the seducer's ordering of the simultaneous performance of the three dances represents 'the breakup of the foundations that sustain society, of which the party is the emblem'.⁵⁹ The interpretation of the dance quodlibet as a symbol of class society has been endorsed by multiple scholars, though the moral implications have been interpreted differently, some seeing it as a musical symbol of social disharmony and others as a celebration of the breakdown of rigid social barriers. Though the latter view is no doubt truer to the spirit of Josephinism, treating the dance scene as an allegory of class society is problematic. First, the social connotations of the dances were not as fixed as some modern commentators have assumed: Henze-Döhring points out that the contredanse was danced by the aristocracy as well, that the minuet had been adopted by the bourgeoisie, and that none of the characters in the opera is bourgeois anyway.⁶⁰ As Hertz has shown, the simultaneous performance of different dances in the same room was not unheard of: Mozart knew this phenomenon from personal experience, and the ballroom scene therefore represents a more realistic depiction of contemporary practices than Kunze acknowledges.⁶¹ Finally, and most importantly, recent philological discoveries made by Jonášová have raised the question of what Don Giovanni and Zerlina are actually supposed to dance.

In the Breitkopf & Härtel score from 1801, Don Giovanni asks Zerlina for a dance on *two* occasions: in place of the two lines he addresses to her in Da Ponte's libretto as the dancing begins, and which Mozart moved to the moment the contredanse starts, he is given the following two lines, which indicate that he dances the minuet with her *before* they dance the contredanse: 'Meco tu dei ballare, / Zerlina vien pur qua!' ('You must dance with me: come here, Zerlina!').⁶² In the autograph score (and therefore also in the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*), Don Giovanni remains silent at this point.⁶³ This discrepancy came to the attention of the musicologist Bernhard Gugler already in the 1860s, as he prepared the first edition of the score based on the autograph. Speculating that Mozart might have provided Bassi with the missing bars at a later point while neglecting to insert them into the score, on 4 August 1868 he wrote to Bedřich Smetana, the principal Kapellmeister of Prague's Provisional Theatre, asking whether these bars might be found in 'an old vocal part' used in Prague.⁶⁴ On 21 August Smetana replied in the affirmative, transcribing the setting of Don Giovanni's lines exactly as they appear in the Breitkopf & Härtel score, unfortunately without mentioning whether he was quoting from the original vocal part. Since the parts are no longer extant, Smetana's letter is the only philological evidence that Don Giovanni and Zerlina danced the minuet at the premiere. However, Jonášová notes that the bars are found in the so-called 'Stuttgart' score as well, another early Prague copy (though here with German text), and more recently she has found them in the so-called 'Lobkowitz' score, along with the stage direction 'he [i.e. Don Giovanni] starts

dancing with Zerlina' at the onset of the minuet, added in the handwriting of the Prague harpsichordist Johann Wenzel.⁶⁵ Jonášová argues that Wenzel conducted the performances of *Don Giovanni* that took place at Raudnitz in September 1804 – and since Bassi probably sang the title role in this production, this is further evidence that he danced first the minuet and then the contredanse with Zerlina.

The anecdotal evidence lends further support to this theory, Börner-Sandrini telling the following anecdote about Bassi's portrayal:

Bassi displayed [another] nuance before the onset of the minuet in the first finale, in which he first asked Donna Anna and Donna Elvira for a dance, with respectful gallantry and in accordance with his duty as a host. Not until he had been refused by both, did he turn – with an indescribable gesture of indifference – to Zerlina, dancing the minuet with her according to all the rules and with the greatest nobleness (not just letting her turn around under his arm a few times, as is common nowadays). Only at the figure when the couples join both their hands did he lead Zerlina away.⁶⁶

The seducer's serene contentment precludes any suggestion of bitterness: since Zerlina is happy to dance with him, Don Giovanni does not care about the refusals he receives from the noblewomen. Lyser was clearly familiar with this story. 'In the ballroom scene in Act I, where Bassi's dancing failed to satisfy him', he writes in the 1837 novella, Mozart himself 'stepped into the lines and danced the minuet with Zerlina-Bondini with so much decorum and so much grace that he did his master Noverre credit'.⁶⁷ Lyser provided an alternative version of the story in his fictive interview with Bassi: 'In the ballroom scene, Bassi danced in front with Zerlina; Mozart, who is supposed to have been an excellent dancer, coached him and the chorus in the minuet *hinselb*'.⁶⁸ It would be typical of Lyser to include Mozart in a story about Bassi's performance for narrative effect, so this detail should be treated with reservation. Yet, considering the scenic complexity of the ballroom scene, it is not unlikely that the composer would have demonstrated to the performers what he had in mind. In any case, the story of Don Giovanni, Zerlina and the peasants dancing the minuet fits the philological evidence, Börner-Sandrini's anecdote and general eighteenth-century ballroom practice.

Taken together, the sources suggest that Don Giovanni, in the original production, asked the two masked noblewomen for a dance while he simultaneously told Leporello to pair the couples (otherwise, there would hardly be time for this piece of silent stage business); that Donna Elvira, standing on one side, talked softly to Donna Anna who danced with Don Ottavio (shocking her with the news that the peasant woman dances right next to her), while Leporello, standing on the other side, talked softly to Don Giovanni who danced with Zerlina (receiving the order to divert Masetto's attention from the ongoing seduction of his bride); and that Don Giovanni led Zerlina to the other end of the ballroom to dance the contredanse after the figure when the couples join both their hands. This fits with the music. Mozart's minuet is made up of eight-bar strains of music, each of which corresponds to a four-step danced figure; in the 1801

score, Don Giovanni invites Zerlina to dance the first time during the first strain and invites her to dance the second time during the fourth strain. This suggests that they are able to dance three complete figures before abandoning the minuet in favour of the contredanse, which fits with one of the most common sequences of minuet figures: after a leading-in figure, with which the couple enter the dancing space (which Don Giovanni and Zerlina might do at the end of the first strain), the first figure consists of the giving of right hands, the second figure of the giving of left hands, and the third figure of the giving of both hands. It was at the end of the third figure, where the couple dance sideways, facing each other with both their hands joined for the first time, that Bassi as Don Giovanni led Zerlina away.⁶⁹

The minuet is no less characteristic of Don Giovanni than the contredanse; the two dances simply represent different stages in the process of seduction. This allows us to see another aspect of Mozart's score in a different light: the connection commentators have detected between the catalogue aria and the champagne aria. Kunze suggested that the contredanse of Don Giovanni's aria is the *Nachtanz* of the minuet section of Leporello's aria, exactly like the contredanse section of Figaro's 'Se vuol ballare' is the *Nachtanz* of the minuet section with which his aria opens.⁷⁰ In both Figaro's and Leporello's arias, a servant mimics his master's wooing to the strains of a minuet, the classic dance of noble courtship; but while Figaro's sarcastic imitation of Count Almaviva drips with pent-up rage, Leporello is carried away by his own voluptuous imitation of Don Giovanni's gallant practices (as Hertz points out, it is 'the suave minuet strains of the *Andante con moto*' that reveal Leporello to be 'a clever mimic' of 'Giovanni's wooing').⁷¹ At the premiere in Prague, such similarities and differences must have been brought out by the fact that the singers of Leporello and Don Giovanni were the ones who also sang Figaro and Count Almaviva: Ponziani and Bassi. The champagne aria complements the servant's aria; it is the seducer's own catalogue aria, Kunze argues, wherein 'burns the fire whose consuming force also manifested itself in Leporello's catalogue aria, though here from the perspective of the affected and enraptured beholder and narrator'.⁷² Moreover, he adds, the arias anticipate the minuet and the contredanse in the ballroom scene. Tomaschek seems to have sensed this connection as well, for he gave the crotchet of both Leporello's minuet and of the ballroom minuet the metronome number 96 (implying a rather fast pace, which lends support to Lyser's story about Mozart setting a much faster tempo for the minuet than was customary in 1847).⁷³ The effect of that symmetry is enhanced, of course, if Don Giovanni dances the minuet as well as the contredanse. In that case, the ball emerges as the culmination not only of his seduction of Zerlina, but also of Mozart's analogous seduction of the listeners in the auditorium, which helps explain why the original audience experienced the Act I finale as such a festive climax. After echoing in Leporello's aria and singing with its own voice in Don Giovanni's aria, the erotic persuasion is embodied and visualised as actual rhythmical movement in the ballroom scene. It is this seductive progression that constitutes the central musical-dramatic build-up of Act I.

That the sense of progression was essential to the attempted seduction was also implied by Philippi whose image of the scene was probably inspired by Sandrini-Caravoglia's stories:

What effects are not possible ... if a Don Giovanni completely understands his business among the female dancers! Indeed, he will not turn around unintentionally anywhere, as if he stood among the lads in the marketplace. Every glance, every step, every demonstration is a small manoeuvre in itself, though connected with the others by means of inconspicuous transitions. The whole must, as it were, suggest the planned Rape of the Sabine Women on a reduced scale. Also, when Don Giovanni wants to abduct the one he believes to be his prey he must by all means beware of any jerky movement of his arm, since such an exertion gives the impression of bad manners and thus becomes offensive. Instead, he must look for that gentle, continuous progress that, through its measured crescendo and with aesthetic beauty, prefigures the decrease in resistance, the signal of victory and the certainty of the impending prospects.⁷⁴

Clearly, this image of the dancing Don Giovanni evokes the aristocratic minuet more than the boisterous contredanse. Moreover, Philippi's insistence on Don Giovanni's non-violence corresponds to the stage direction: 'While dancing, he leads Zerlina to a door and makes her enter, *almost* by force' (729; author's emphasis). As Baker points out, this procedure does not warrant the name of violence.⁷⁵ It only became that with the German adaptations. Already in the Neefe-Schmieder translation, Don Giovanni 'pulls Zerlina towards a door and pushes her through it'; and the violence became more pronounced with the Rochlitz translation. Instead of 'caressing' Zerlina when complimenting her at the beginning of the scene, as he does in Da Ponte (699), he 'pulls Zerlina close to him', after which she 'disengages herself': a repetition of the action that occurred in Rochlitz's version of the garden scene.⁷⁶ The departure from the stage also takes place later than in the Italian libretto: it is only after she has emitted her first cry, 'Ich Arme! Ach, ich bebe!' ('Wretched me! Alas, I tremble!'), that Don Giovanni 'grasps Zerlina as the dancing takes her close to the door and carries her into the closet'.⁷⁷ This conception of the scene was essentially retained in Slevogt's illustrations for the Italian libretto, in which the episode is the subject of no less than three pictures that show the traditional conception of the build-up. The first woodcut, 'Don Giovanni dances with Zerlina' (see Figure 4.4), really shows him ogling rather than dancing with Zerlina, the demonic rattlesnake preparing its attack. The second woodcut, 'Don Giovanni pulls Zerlina into the closet' (see Figure 4.5), with its strikingly predatorial image of the seducer, provides a telling contrast to Marstrand's depiction of Don Giovanni's recent attempt to seduce Zerlina in the garden. And the last woodcut, 'Don Giovanni tries to rape Zerlina' (see Figure 4.6), which depicts the imagined offstage action, reverses the composition of Slevogt's picture of Don Giovanni's struggle with Donna Anna in the opening scene: Zerlina, dressed in white, tries to fight off the dark, cloaked, anonymous-looking figure of Don Giovanni, her legs spread wide in a desperate



Figure 4.4 Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni dances with Zerlina (Act I scene 20). Woodcut. From Da Ponte 1921. Photo ©: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, 4 L.sel.I 1062, p. 62.

exertion of power, and her left arm trying to push him away while he stifles her cries with his hand.

Rochlitz's conception of the scene not only influenced stage productions and visual artists; many commentators, too, take for granted that Don Giovanni attempts to rape Zerlina offstage, even though the situation is exactly as ambiguous as his alleged attempt to rape Donna Anna. Since Zerlina only cries for help the moment she hears Masetto calling her name, the possibility remains that her resistance is motivated not by violence on Don Giovanni's part but by fear of the jealous (and violent) Masetto. As with Donna Anna, the primary audience of her charge against Don Giovanni is, apparently, her fiancé. And as unmarried women in an unrelentingly patriarchal society, both of them have very good reasons to defend their reputations and put the blame for any offences against that society's notions of sexual decency on the seducer. 'Zerlina screams during the Act I finale not because Don Giovanni is attempting rape', Elaine Sisman suggests, 'but rather because she knows that if she does not make a scene no one will ever believe that nothing occurred'.⁷⁸

As a consequence, the outrage that Don Giovanni's and Zerlina's exit cause in the other characters seems exaggerated. It can be viewed, in fact, as a satire of theatrical censorship in the Holy Roman Empire. As Weidinger points out, according to the theatre censor Hägelin, 'a woman may never consent, not even for the sake of appearances', if a man assails her virtue on stage; and dramatic



Figure 4.5 Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni pulls Zerlina into the closet (Act I scene 20). Woodcut. From Da Ponte 1921. Photo ©: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, 4 L.sel.I 1062, p. 65.

poets should take care ‘that two enamoured characters never leave the stage together unaccompanied’.⁷⁹ The latter regulation explains why the Host and the Hostess accompany Don Juan and Rosa when they leave the stage in the equivalent scene in Marinelli’s play; and also why the Act I finale of Mozart’s opera caused the opera to be banned in Munich during the composer’s lifetime, while the scene was later censored in Vienna.⁸⁰ Indeed, Martin Nedbal argues, it is unlikely that any of the three Mozart-Da Ponte operas would have been allowed to be performed in Vienna during the 1780s had they been German singspiels.⁸¹ Since the genre of Italian opera was given more licence, it could be used to reflect critically on the ideological underpinnings of censorship, which was enforced with greater rigour on the German stage. In *Don Giovanni*, the seducer’s first two attempts to seduce Zerlina end with thwarted efforts to leave the stage together in order to consummate a sexual passion: an offence, in other words, against the censorial principle that forbade such actions in German stage works. The first time it is Donna Elvira who prevents them from leaving the stage; the second time it is Masetto; and when they finally do leave the stage, it is Zerlina herself who summons the upholders of public morality with her cries of protest.⁸²

Don Giovanni’s three attempted ‘indecorous’ exits are set off against Don Ottavio’s three ‘decorous’ exits. When Donna Anna leaves the stage after each of her arias, Don Ottavio remains on stage to deliver a short speech in *secco* recitative



Figure 4.6 Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni tries to rape Zerlina (Act I scene 20). Woodcut. From Da Ponte 1921. Photo ©: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, 4 L.sel.I 1062, p. 67.

before he follows her; neither of these soliloquies is essential to the drama (indeed, they both tend to be cut in performance if his Act I aria is omitted), but they serve the theatrical purpose of displaying the scrupulous propriety of the noble fiancé. We find the same procedure in the atrium scene where Donna Anna leaves with her servants immediately after the sextet, while Don Ottavio remains on stage and later sends the two other women off to console her instead of following her into her private apartment himself. However, the opera also features two scenes in which amorous couples (Donna Elvira and Leporello, Zerlina and Masetto) do leave the stage unchaperoned, and where the spectators are invited to speculate what has been going on in the darkness when they return to the stage in the atrium scene ‘about an hour or so’ later (1070). It is ironic, of course, that neither of these couples includes Don Giovanni, and that neither of them provokes the same condemnation from the other characters as his ‘censored’ exits with Zerlina.⁸³

We might attribute the furious reaction of Don Giovanni’s enemies to their comic ‘Spanishness’. That extreme moral uproar is not a reaction one would normally expect from a group of young eighteenth-century aristocrats who saw a libertine seduce a woman of the people appears from a comparison of the operatic nobles to the three guests Casanova brought along to Zenobia’s wedding: Marquis Triulzi and the Attendolo-Bolognini. Not only did Casanova, unlike Don Giovanni, succeed in seducing the bride during the wedding party, with the

tacit acceptance of the bridegroom; the previous day the count had taken pleasure in watching the sexual activities of Casanova and Zenobia through a crack in the bedroom wall, after which Casanova went on to have sexual intercourse with the countess – otherwise courted by the marquis, her *cicisbeo* – with the tacit acceptance of her husband. When heard in the context of such indulgent *galanterie*, which provided a frame of reference for at least some audience members in 1787, the Spanish characters' frenzied denunciation of Don Giovanni's 'horrendous and foul misdeed' (754) may indeed have sounded over-the-top.

After Zerlina has returned to the stage, Don Giovanni 'comes out, sword in hand. He brings Leporello with him, holding his arm and pretending to want to wound him, though his sword never leaves the scabbard' (742). That he does not draw his sword is noteworthy since Don Ottavio 'draws a gun and points it at Don Giovanni' (745); but as Baker shows, the non-drawing of Don Giovanni's sword is part of a larger pattern. Whereas Don Ottavio threatens to kill the seducer (as he indeed tries to kill him in the atrium scene, until 'Don Giovanni' turns out to be Leporello in disguise), the stage directions indicate 'that Don Giovanni's threats of violence addressed to Leporello are pretences'.⁸⁴ Leporello, who knows this, repeats the question 'Ah cosa fate!' ('Ah, what are you doing!' 742), which suggests embarrassment rather than terror. As Baker says, he does not fear Don Giovanni as a person, 'even if he fears the risks Don Giovanni incurs that could implicate them both'.⁸⁵ Don Giovanni does not respond with real violence, in other words, even though the armed Don Ottavio, the murderous Masetto and the three women invoke 'the thunder of vengeance' (756) whose lightning shall strike the sinner's head. As Raffaelli notes, the mention of thunder and lightning points back to an old tradition for divine interventions in the *Stone Guest* plays, such as the seventeenth-century *commedia dell'arte* scenario *L'ateista fulminato*, and we even find it in Goldoni's play.⁸⁶ But Da Ponte's thunder is only metaphorical. As Rushton points out, the scene is no 'confrontation of a criminal with the forces of law, or with divine justice; it is a social contretemps'.⁸⁷ Don Giovanni's last two quatrains betray bewilderment as he is threatened with a gun in his own home, until he summons his well-known courage:

È confusa la mia testa
non so più quel ch'io mi faccia,
e un'orribile tempesta
minacciando, oddio, mi va.

Ma non manca in me coraggio,
non mi perdo o mi confondo,
se cadesse ancora il mondo,
nulla mai temer mi fa.

(My mind is confused; I no longer know what I'm doing, and a horrible tempest, O God, is threatening me. But I'm not lacking in courage; I don't feel lost or confounded; even if the world should come to an end, nothing will ever make me afraid', 760–7)

Rochlitz changed the scene fundamentally, and his changes have had a lasting impact on stage practice. In the translation, Zerlina enters together with the seducer, 'pale, with dishevelled hair', while Don Giovanni 'plunges out, clutching Leporello with one hand and his sword with the other'.⁸⁸ The bride's appearance indicates that Don Giovanni has tried to rape her, just as the drawn sword and Leporello's horrified reaction indicate that his master considers killing him: 'Ach habt Erbarmen! So jungem Leben den Rest zu geben –!' ('Alas, show mercy! Allow me what remains of my young life...!'). Moreover, Rochlitz left out Don Ottavio's gun, in line with his consistent softening of Don Giovanni's enemies, replacing this threat of violence with the wrath of God. In another departure from Da Ponte, the chorus remains on stage, which lends a new grandeur to the scene, reinforcing the transformation of the thunder of vengeance into actual thunder and lightning, as in the old *Stone Guest* plays. 'The thunderstorm, which has only been perceived very rarely so far, flashes, crashes and thunders most intensively', says the stage direction, as the peasants unite with Don Giovanni's enemies in their climactic denunciation of the seducer.⁸⁹ As a consequence, Don Giovanni's transition from bewilderment to defiance has given way to pure blasphemous arrogance in his final quatrains:

Alles hat sich nun verschworen!
Ohne Mut bin ich verloren!
Tobt und raset all Ihr Toren!
Die Gefahr – ich trotze ihr!

Lasst den Erdenball erzittern!
Sklaven zagen bei Gewittern!
Freie Geister zu erschüttern
Gnügen falbe Blitze nicht!

(‘Everything has conspired against me! I’m lost
without valour! Only clamour and rage, you fools! I
brave the danger! Let the globe tremble! Only slaves
falter at thunderstorms! Ineffective thunderbolts
cannot shake free spirits!’)

Rochlitz's adaptation directly informed Hoffmann's conception:

Zerlina is saved, and in the mightily thunderous finale Don Giovanni bravely faces his enemies with drawn sword. He strikes the steel small-sword from the bridegroom's hand and breaks his way into the open, through the common rabble that he confounds as the valiant Roland does with the army of the tyrant Cymosco, everyone tumbling quite comically on top of each other.⁹⁰

The comparison of Don Giovanni to Ariosto's Orlando – who impales six of King Cimosco's soldiers on a single spear while killing the seventh with the push – establishes the operatic seducer as a quintessentially Romantic hero who is as invincible as a warrior as he is irresistible as a lover.⁹¹ Don Ottavio, whom

Hoffmann elsewhere describes as ‘a dainty, prim, sleek little man of twenty-one years at most’, is made completely harmless, his gun replaced with a small-sword that poses no threat to Don Giovanni.⁹² In this way, the finale is given an entirely new dramatic meaning: no longer an *anticipation* of Don Giovanni’s encounter with the stone guest, it rather indicates that Don Giovanni is a figure of such overwhelming demonic power that no earthly authority can constrain him.

Slevogt’s illustration of this scene was based directly on Hoffmann (see Figure 4.7): it is now Don Ottavio rather than the seducer who is in danger, Donna Anna trying to protect her fiancé from Don Giovanni who threatens him with his sword while pulling Leporello through the crowd of peasants. In the Czinner-Graf film, the peasants also remain on stage, reinforcing the soloists in the concluding *stretta*; and in the final moments of the Act, a religious procession of figures dressed in black and carrying altar candles marches silently across the stage, evoking the religious origins of the Don Juan story. In Losey’s film, Don Ottavio’s gun is omitted, as in Rochlitz and Hoffmann, and again we find the angry peasant chorus and the bolts of lightning, though the thunderstorm has now become a political metaphor, as Don Giovanni and Leporello run for shelter, pursued by the chorus: it is the Revolution rather than God or the Devil that is needed to stop the progress of this tyrant. The conception has found its way into opera criticism too. Rushton dismisses the non-drawing of Don Giovanni’s sword as ‘a ridiculous piece of play-acting’ and commends the standard decision of directors to ignore the stage direction and let Don Giovanni enter with ‘his sword drawn as if to stab in earnest’, while he ends up concluding that ‘human rage is impotent against Giovanni’.⁹³ And Till, who concludes that Don Giovanni ‘is perfectly willing to sacrifice [Leporello] to the wrath of the maskers to save his own skin’, hears intimations of a ‘divine sphere’ in the concluding *stretta*.⁹⁴

Already Bassi himself objected to the performances of the Act I finale informed by Rochlitz and Hoffmann. Hohenthal tells this anecdote that he heard from the singer:

According to Mozart’s original idea, the peasantry assembled at Don Giovanni’s party escape as soon as they realise that a serious quarrel is arising between the two gentlemen, and the agitated *stretta* of the first finale is performed by the main characters alone. Only in Vienna this *stretta* was later accompanied by the peasant chorus. At this theatrical moment as well, the enthusiast through whom Hoffmann speaks may have seen too much.⁹⁵

Notably, Bassi not only reacted against the adding of the chorus but also against the minimising of Don Ottavio’s role: far from the soft and seemingly gentleman constructed by Rochlitz and Hoffmann and perpetuated by traditional stage practice and critical commentaries, the man who points a gun at his host poses a real threat to Don Giovanni who is momentarily unsettled. Therefore, the steadfastness with which the latter finally stands up to his accusers was an impressive feature of Bassi’s portrayal. The Hamburg Critic complained, when reviewing Forti’s guest performance, that he was unable to ‘take the same pleasure in the



Figure 4.7 Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni fencing with the peasants (Act I scene 20). Woodcut. From Da Ponte 1921. Photo ©: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, 4 L.sel.I 1062, p. 69.

heroic scene in the first finale that we have felt with other performers, and especially with the incomparable Bassi'.⁹⁶ And Lyser's 'old musical director' takes a similar view. 'I never again heard such energy at the words "ma non manca in me coraggio" in the first finale as with Bassi'.⁹⁷ The vocal power was not expressive of Don Giovanni's demonic or superhuman defiance; it rather reflected his angry rejection of the self-proclaimed moral authority of his enemies.

Notes

- 1 This section repeats and develops points I made in Schneider 2009.
- 2 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 86.
- 3 As appears from Nedbal's study of the 1798 German-language production in Vienna, Rochlitz's translation of the fourth stanza drew heavily on Lippert's, which was used here: 'Ich unterdessen / nach alter Weise, / führe mein Liebchen / ins Seitengemach trotz Weh und Ach!' ('In the meantime, according to an old habit, I'll steer my sweet-heart to the by-place, for all her whingeing'). For the complete aria text in Lippert's translation (1798 Vienna version), see Nedbal 2017a: 193. Since 'bedchamber' suggests rape more unambiguously than 'by-place', it would seem that Rochlitz enhanced the implication of sexual violence, but I have not been able to check the 1790 Berlin version of Lippert's translation for the original wording. Nedbal shows that the violence of the text was toned down in subsequent revivals in Vienna.
- 4 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 85.
- 5 Imiela and Roland 1991: 2.
- 6 Leibowitz 1969: 634–5.
- 7 Allanbrook 1983: 60, 223.
- 8 Allanbrook 1983: 220–1, 223.
- 9 Kerman 1990: 117–8.
- 10 Kerman 1990: 118.
- 11 Kerman 1990: 118–9.
- 12 Schmid 2009: 80–1.
- 13 Pirrotta 1994: 133.
- 14 'was leichtsinnig fröhlicher, als *Don Juans* Ausruf: *Treibt der Champagner &c.?*' Wendt 1818: 660.
- 15 Heinse 1837: 207, in Schneider 2009: 44n.
- 16 Heinse 1837: 211, in Schneider 2009: 45n.
- 17 Schmid 1926: 131, in Waidelich 2001: 191–2.
- 18 Letter to his father of 17 January 1778: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/briefe-dokumente/> (accessed on 29 August 2019).
- 19 Lyser 1833: 127, in Schneider 2009: 47n.
- 20 Lyser 1837: 28, in Schneider 2009: 49n.
- 21 Dent 1947: 161.
- 22 Tomaschek gives the minim of the aria the metronome number 116, indicating a tempo slightly slower than the customary *prestissimo*, though it is still fast; see Fink 1839: 480. Like Hohenthal and Miksch, the Hamburg Critic reacted against the exaggerated tempo and against singers' vulgarity and imitation of the dances in a review of Woltereck's performance: 'Möchten doch unsere Schauspieler die Schicklichkeit auf der Bühne (convenance du Théâtre) von den so oft verschrieenen Franzosen lernen. Diese, am wenigsten, wenn sie einen Mann vom Stande vorstellen, tanzen nie, es müsste denn vorgeschrieben seyn, und auch dann nur mit der grössten Mässigung' ('If only our actors would learn theatrical propriety (*convenance du théâtre*) from the French who are so often decried. At least, these never dance when representing a gentleman unless it is prescribed; and in that case, they only do so with the greatest moderation'); *Originalien*, 1820, no. 93: 755.

- 23 The drawing is reproduced by Waidelich who misidentifies the scene with Don Giovanni's welcome to the maskers in the ballroom scene, 'viva la libertà'; see Waidelich 2001: 198. Zerlina hiding among the bushes shows that the picture represents the garden scene.
- 24 'Juan hält Zerlinen zurück. Sie entwischt ihm, kömmt aber sogleich wieder. Juan hat sie unter dem Gedränge verlohren, ist gefolgt; da er sie vermisst, kömmt er gleichfalls zurück. ... JUAN (kömmt, sie will entfliehn, er hält sie auf;) ... ZERLINE (sucht sich los zu machen)'; Rochlitz 1801: 24.
- 25 'Juan zieht sie der Laube näher'; Rochlitz 1801: 24.
- 26 Similarly, in the 1814 Dresden libretto, Don Giovanni no longer promises to make Zerlina 'happy' in the niche; instead, 'un secreto t'ho a svelar' ('I have a secret to tell you').
- 27 Mila 1988: 151.
- 28 Kerman 1990: 111.
- 29 Gallarati 1994: 112.
- 30 Brown-Montesano 2007: 75.
- 31 Ford 2012: 154.
- 32 Ford 2012: 154.
- 33 The singing translation used at the Royal Danish Theatre from 1845 was Abrahams 1864.
- 34 Baker 2005: 99.
- 35 Brown-Montesano 2007: 76.
- 36 Raffaelli 2006: 73.
- 37 Raffaelli 1996: 100.
- 38 Abert 2007: 1076.
- 39 Lyser 1847: 96, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 40 'Welch ein Leben herrscht nicht zum Beispiel in dem erste Finale[.] Die vielen, in scenischer Thätigkeit sich durchdrängenden, Personen brauchen nur ihre Noten auswendig zu lernen, und sie müssen selbst wider ihren Willen Schauspieler werden, so deutlich und scharf bezeichnend ist die Charakteristik. Z. B. bei der Ballscene, wie ganz anders ist die Melodie der Zerline und des Masetto gegen den Leporello, der, seinem Herrn schon näher stehend, diesen im Tanze begleitet. Mit dem Maestoso, welches die Masken anmeldet, erfährt man sogleich, dass vornehme Leute eintreten, und das bewähren sie auch durch ihren Gesang, so wie Don Juan, dieser Prototyp der Galanterie, sogleich auch gegen diese Gäste ein anderer ist, als er gegen seine Bauern war, und sogleich auch in der Melodie den richtigen Tact findet'; *Originalien*, 1824, no. 111: 88.
- 41 'Bei der ersten Production des Don Juan hat das ... Prager Publicum zwar das Duett des Don Juan und der Zerlina, die Arie: "Finch' han dal vino," das herrliche Finale in seiner Pracht und im zweiten Acte das Ständchen mit enthusiastischer Wärme aufgenommen, und die Wiederholung der kleinern Piecen stürmisch verlangt'; Heinse 1837: 210.
- 42 *Prager Oberpostamtszeitung*, 3 November 1787, quoted from Deutsch 1990: 303–4.
- 43 *AeJ*, November 1796: 190, in Volek 2016: 222.
- 44 Cicognini's *Il convitato di pietra* is reproduced in Macchia 1966. All references are to this edition.
- 45 Perrucci 1998: II.20.
- 46 Casanova 1997: VIII, 174.
- 47 Cf. Arienta 2004: 85, 89, 91.
- 48 'Der Freiheits-Chor verfehlt, gut ausgeführt, nie das Publikum zu elektrisiren; in Wien erbebte selbst während der Zeit des Belagerungszustandes das Kärnthnerthor-Theater zom donnernden Beifall, so oft er in der Oper ertönte, und als in den Märztagen die feurigen Juraten von Pesth nach Wien kamen, erklang nach derselben Weise unter dem unermesslichen Jubel der Wiener Bevölkerung ihr: "Eljèna a szàbatzay!"' Lyser 1856: IV, 38.

- 49 ‘Don Juans Champagnerlied und der Freiheits-Chor *unter donnerndem Jubel* wiederholt werden mussten’; Lyser 1849: 66.
- 50 Abert 2007: 1080–1.
- 51 Allanbrook 1983: 287.
- 52 Volek 1987: 57–66.
- 53 Da Ponte’s admiration for Joseph II appears from multiple passages in his *Memorie*. As for Mozart, Vincent Novello wrote in his diary after a conversation with Constanze von Nissen, the composer’s widow, that he ‘was so much attached to the Emperor (Joseph II) that he preferred remaining with the latter from whom, however, Mozart received no salary whatever’; Mary Novello wrote in her diary after the same conversation that Mozart ‘was very fond of Joseph II’; see Hughes 1955: 81. For a refutation of the stubborn myth that the emperor did not support or appreciate the composer, which can be traced back to Niemetschek’s anti-Viennese Mozart biography, see the section ‘Music and drama, with special reference to Mozart’, in Beales 2009: 455–76.
- 54 Cited in Robbins Landon 1989: 170.
- 55 Weidinger 2002: IV, 896.
- 56 For a similar interpretation of Da Ponte’s libretto *L’arборе di Diana*, which he wrote for Martín y Soler at the same time as he wrote *Don Giovanni* for Mozart, see Baker 2010. The English original of this essay is included in Baker 2021.
- 57 See Allanbrook 1983: 31–6, 55–66; Hertz 1990: 182–90.
- 58 Dent 1947: 164.
- 59 Kunze 1978: 171.
- 60 Henze-Döhring 1986: 191n.
- 61 Hertz 1990: 191–3.
- 62 Mozart 1801: 259.
- 63 Mozart 1968: 219.
- 64 See Jonášová 2008: 308.
- 65 Jonášová 2008: 309; Jonášová 2016: 113.
- 66 ‘Eine zweite Nüance brachte Bassi im ersten Finale vor Beginn des Menuetts, woselbst er, seiner Pflicht als Hausherr genügend, zuvor Donna Anna und Donna Elvira mit respectvoller Galanterie zum Tanzen auffordert, von Beiden abgelehnt – mit einer unbeschreiblichen Geberde von Gleichgültigkeit – sich nun erst zu Zerlinen wendet, mit ihr das Menuett nach allen Regeln mit der grössten Noblesse (nicht wie jetzt gebräuchlich dieselbe blos einigemal unter dem Arme herumdrehen lassend) tanzte und erst bei der Tour, wo die Paare sich bei beiden Händen fassen, Zerline bei Seite führte’; Börner-Sandrini 1876: 214–5.
- 67 ‘In der Ballscene des ersten Acts, wo Bassi ihm nicht zu Dank tanzte, trat er selber in die Reihen und tanzte die Menuett mit Zerlina Bondini mit so vielem Anstande und so vieler Grazie, dass er seinem Meister *Noverre* alle Ehre machte’; Lyser 1837: 45. Lyser, who drew heavily on Nissen’s biography of Mozart, seems to have confused the dancers Jean-Georges Noverre and Gaétan Vestris. Mozart met and worked with Noverre in 1778 in Paris, composing the music for his ballet *Les petits riens*. But according to Constanze von Nissen, the composer’s dancing teacher was Vestris; he could have met the latter in Vienna in 1767, at the age of eleven. ‘He danced very beautifully, too, especially the minuet’, we read in the biography; ‘Vestris had been his teacher in dancing’; Nissen 2010: 531.
- 68 ‘In der Ballscene tanzte *Bassi* mit Zerline vor, Mozart *selber*, der ein vortrefflicher Tänzer gewesen sein soll, hat ihm und dem Chore die Menuet eingeübt’; Lyser 1847: 96.
- 69 Cf. Sutton 1985: 121. I would like to thank Deda Cristina Colonna for commenting on my reconstruction of the blocking of the ballroom scene.
- 70 Kunze 1984: 413.

- 71 Hertz 1990: 189. Pointing out that the ‘pitch centre of gravity’ in the aria is ‘noticeably higher than is normal for Leporello’, Julian Rushton concludes that the servant is, ‘if not imitating Giovanni in D major, at least empathizing with him’; see Rushton 1997: 421.
- 72 Kunze 1984: 413.
- 73 Fink 1839: 480–1.
- 74 ‘Und welche Effekte sind möglich; wenn Don Juan unter den Tänzerinnen sein Geschäft vollkommen versteht! Er wird sich gewiss nirgends absichtslos herumdrehen, als stände er zwischen den Buben auf dem Markte; jeder Blick, jeder Schritt, jede Demonstration ist ein kleines Manövre für sich, das aber mit den übrigen durch unmerkliche Übergänge zusammenhängt; und das Ganze muss gleichsam im verkleinerten Maassstabe den projektirten Raub der Sabinerinnen vorstellen. Wenn Don Juan ferner seine geglaubte Beute entführen will, so hüte er sich durchaus vor jeder ruckweisen Bewegung des Armes, denn diese Anstrengung erregt den Begriff der Unkultur und wird dadurch anstössig, sondern er suche jenen sanften continuirenden Fortschritt hervorzubringen, der durch sein graduirtes Crescendo die Abnahme des Widerstandes, das Signal des Sieges, und die Gewissheit der nächsten Perspektive ästhetisch schön vorbildet’; Philippi 1825: 80.
- 75 Baker 2005: 101.
- 76 ‘JUAN zieht Zerlinen zu sich: ... ZERLINE macht sich los’; Rochlitz 1801: 27.
- 77 ‘Juan fast Zerlinen, indem sie der Tanz nahe zur Thür bringt, und trägt sie ins Kabinet’; Rochlitz 1801: 29.
- 78 Sisman 2006: 191n.
- 79 Hägelin, *Denkschrift*, quoted in Weidinger 2002: IV, 871–2.
- 80 Weidinger 2002: IV, 835; Nedbal 2017a: 180–2.
- 81 Nedbal 2017a: 177.
- 82 Weidinger interprets the aria Donna Elvira sings as she leads Zerlina away earlier in the Act as a playful way of dealing with imperial censorship; see Weidinger 2002: IV, 878–9. Nedbal has objected that there is no evidence of Italian operas being subject to the same censorship requirements as German operas; see Nedbal 2017a: 178–9. In my view, we should not underestimate the possibility of a satirical intent, however, which would help explain Mozart’s decision to set the aria in a deliberately antiquated style as a ‘sermon’, as Weidinger puts it.
- 83 The exit of Leporello and Donna Elvira did concern the Viennese censor, however, when the opera was mounted in German; see Nedbal 2017a: 202n.
- 84 Baker 2005: 101.
- 85 Baker 2005: 102.
- 86 Raffaelli 2006: 102.
- 87 Rushton 1981: 63.
- 88 ‘Juan stürzt heraus, hat mit der einen Hand Leporello’n, mit der andern den Degen gefasst. Zerline bleich, mit zerstreutem Haar’; Rochlitz 1801: 30.
- 89 ‘Das Gewitter, das bis dahin sehr selten bemerkbar geworden ist, leuchtet, stürmt und donnert hier stark’; Rochlitz 1801: 31.
- 90 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 87.
- 91 The episode occurs in Lodovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, IX.lxviii–lxix.
- 92 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 85.
- 93 Rushton 1981: 62–3. Charles C. Russell, who points out that the stage direction referring to Don Giovanni’s sword is missing in Mozart’s autograph, and that he enters ‘with a sword drawn’ in the English parallel translation in the libretto Da Ponte published for the 1826 New York premiere, sees this as proof that Mozart conceived of the seducer as more violent than Da Ponte and that the latter had come closer to sharing the composer’s point of view in his old age; see Russell 1997: 35. More likely, though, the stage directions in the New York libretto were adapted to fit the Don Giovanni of the famous tenor Manuel García who had already sung the role to acclaim in Paris and London.

94 Till 1992: 215, 224.

95 'Nach Mozart's ursprünglicher Idee entflohen die bei Don Juan's Fest versammelten Landleute, sobald sie merken, dass es zwischen den beiden Cavalieren zu ernstem Streite kommt, und nur die Hauptpersonen tragen die bewegte Stretta des ersten Finale's vor. Erst später hat man in Wien die Bauernchöre auch diese Stretta begleiten lassen. Auch bei diesem theatralischen Momente dürfte also der Enthusiast, den Hoffmann sprechen lässt, zu viel gesehen haben'; Heinse 1837: 209.

96 See Chapter 3, note 73.

97 'Nie hörte ich später ein solches Durchgreifen, wie von Bassi im ersten Finale bei den Worten "ma non manca, in me corraggio [*sic*]!"' Lyser 1833: 127.

5 The disguise episode

The first duet with Leporello

The disguise episode, which centres on Don Giovanni's and Leporello's exchange of clothes and identities, is set off by the former's attempt to seduce Donna Elvira's chambermaid, believing his chances will improve if he presents himself to her dressed as a servant. To lure her mistress out of the house, he then forces Leporello to pose as himself. As in the preceding party episode, however, which was set off by Don Giovanni's attempt to seduce Zerlina, the ploy fails and rather contributes to the strengthening of the league of the seducer's enemies. No longer content merely to threaten him with revenge, they now attempt to murder him, and when they fail due to Don Giovanni's and Leporello's wiliness, Don Ottavio decides to approach the authorities. This ten-scene episode, in which older critics like Otto Jahn, Edward Dent and Hermann Abert were unable to see anything but an incoherent assemblage of farcical situations, which they only thought redeemed by Mozart's music, constitutes the falling action of the drama (to use Gustav Freytag's terminology).¹ However, it also transfers the action to a metaphorical level revolving around the theme of transformation: the exchange of identities is a dissolution of identities, in which the transformative power of musical-erotic seduction, deriving from but transcending the character of Don Giovanni, emerges as the real protagonist of the opera. In the original production, the symbol of that power would have been the red cloak worn by Bassi and then bestowed on Leporello.

Commentators have wondered how master and servant escape from the ballroom after the armed confrontation with the avengers. And the desire for an explanation is enhanced by the fact that the finale tends to be followed by an interval, which turns it into a cliffhanger. Surviving playbills for performances by Guardasoni's company, in Leipzig in 1788 and 1794 and in Prague in 1801, indicate a complete playing time of two and a half hours, however, suggesting that the opera was performed without an interval originally, as it lasts between 150 and 160 minutes on most modern recordings (if we omit the scenes and numbers Mozart added for Vienna).² In other words, the curtain was only lowered between the Acts for as long as it would take to change the scenery, this being the only scene change in the opera that involves two consecutive deep

stage sets. If the comic duet for Don Giovanni and Leporello that opens Act II follows immediately after the *stretta* with which Act I ended, the details of the hero's escape are less likely to attract attention, just as the comicality of the first finale is reinforced.

When Leporello threatens to leave Don Giovanni's service, objecting to the treatment he suffered at the end of Act I, the master asks what he has done to hurt him. The servant replies, sarcastically: 'Oh niente affatto! / quasi ammazzarmi!' ('Oh, nothing at all! You almost killed me', 776–7). But Rochlitz turned Leporello's lines into a general complaint about the violence he suffers at Don Giovanni's hands, of which there is no indication in the Italian libretto: 'Angst, Schrecken, Schläge / Fast alle Tage' ('Fear, terror, blows almost every day'). The implication that Don Giovanni behaves violently towards Leporello inevitably adds a sinister undertone to the number, which is still felt in Losey's film where the master's tone in the duet is angry and sneering, and which has even slipped into criticism: Marshall Brown claims that Leporello 'is beaten as Zerlina imagines herself to be'.³ Such arrogant condescension on the part of Don Giovanni may have given rise to the idea that he imitates Leporello's musical idiom in this number, stooping to his level in order to manipulate him, as it were. This conception was first formulated by Otto Jahn who thought that Don Giovanni 'expresses himself altogether after the manner of [Leporello]'.⁴ But it gained further acceptance in the late twentieth century, along with the widespread view of Don Giovanni as a social and psychological chameleon who has no musical personality of his own.

The problem with this interpretation is not only that it is Leporello who imitates Don Giovanni's musical phrases and not the other way around; as Gallarati points out, Mozart set the duet as a contredanse, as he did with the champagne aria, and the number therefore reflects Don Giovanni's musical idiom, not Leporello's.⁵ The former simply resumes the frivolous, cheerful tone in which he addressed the servant when planning the party. That Leporello echoes Don Giovanni on the musical level while contradicting him on the verbal level, which Manfred Hermann Schmid describes as a 'pointedly staged paradox', serves to depict the servant's mental dependency on his master.⁶ But his melodic or stylistic echoes, or parodies, of Don Giovanni, which recur through the opera – we also hear them in his opening solo, in the catalogue aria and in the ballroom scene – remain an unrealised potential if the singer does not strive to imitate Don Giovanni vocally. Benincasa, who sang Leporello in the Dresden production Bassi directed, was later considered particularly excellent, notably, 'in the scene where he is forced to play Giovanni, which he does with an extremely effective imitation also of his easy-going master's voice and style of delivery'.⁷ And in a performance where the Don Giovanni and the Leporello are both expert impersonators, visually and vocally, the characters may indeed tend to dissolve, as if by theatrical magic, when they exchange identities: Leporello is transformed into Don Giovanni in the scene with Donna Elvira just as Don Giovanni is transformed into Leporello in the scene with Masetto. The servant's transformation implies that he is 'lit' with the erotic ardour characteristic of his master, which then spreads to Donna Elvira.

'I'm all ablaze for you', she says, the disguised Leporello responding, 'I'm all ashes', while Don Giovanni comments from his hiding place: 'The scoundrel's warming up' (882–3). In Guardasoni's production, the verbal metaphor would have corresponded to the visual metaphor of the seducer's red cloak, now donned by his imitator, servant and pupil whose wish to 'play the gentleman' (5) finally comes true.

With the sexual wildfire, Don Giovanni attains the status of an elemental spirit, his aesthetic-erotic fascination inflaming everyone around him. Da Ponte even leaves us wondering about the exact nature of his attraction for Leporello. Though it may strike modern readers as fanciful to imagine an actual sexual relationship between the two, changes in the 1814 Dresden libretto indicate that one censor, at least, was susceptible to this possibility. First, it is noteworthy, as Baker points out, that one of the libretto's five occurrences of the verb *sedurre* is used by Leporello to characterise his relationship with Don Giovanni, in the moment when the latter has persuaded him to accept money as compensation for the suffered inconveniences: 'non credete / di sedurre i miei pari, / come le donne, a forza di danari' ('don't think you can seduce the likes of me with money, like you do with the women', 787–9). According to Baker, these lines

perfectly spell out the double-thinking of the seduced, as Leporello states that this ritual is a habit, and must not become one; that he will go along with it just this time (again) as women do, but that he is above it.⁸

The lines also generate a parallel between Leporello and Donna Elvira whom the mischievous Don Giovanni manages to seduce a few moments later (though without the incentive of money). That 1814 Dresden censor regarded as inappropriate the analogy between the seduction of Leporello and the seduction of the women (and also, of course, that the seducer allegedly pays the women), appears from the fact that he replaced 'come le donne' with 'come tant'altri' ('like so many others'). Somewhat more suggestive is Leporello's response to Don Giovanni's subsequent defence of his 'buon natural' ('good nature', 803), which the women fail to understand and appreciate, according to the seducer, since they continue to misinterpret it as deceitfulness. 'Non ho veduto mai / naturale più vasto e più benigno' ('I have never seen a vaster and more benign nature', 805–6), the servant comments. Apparently to avoid the implication that Leporello is referring to his knowledge of the seducer's 'vast natural parts', the Dresden censor changed the second line to 'naturale più strano e sì benigno' ('a stranger and so benign nature'). Most telling, however, is the change he made to Leporello's aria in Act II, in which the servant, after revealing his true identity, explains to his accusers that 'Il padron con prepotenza / l'innocenza mi rubò' ('My master took away my innocence by violence', 1064–5). Obviously aware that *rubarmi l'innocenza* is a euphemism for 'taking my virginity', the censor changed the second line to 'alla trama mi forzò' ('forced me into his plot'). Leporello's claim that he was raped (literally or metaphorically) by Don Giovanni echoes Donna Anna's and Zerlina's previous claims that Don

Giovanni tried to rape them. Like the women, Leporello faces violent retribution, or even death, at the hands of their fiancés, which means that we cannot simply take his allegation at face value: he has very good reasons to put the blame on Don Giovanni.

The trio

When Donna Elvira comes to her window to vent her secret desire for Don Giovanni, ‘night is falling little by little’, according to the stage direction. The timing is no coincidence. In comedy, nightfall announces the time of unreason, blurred boundaries and the interchangeability of lovers. After Puck has dripped the juice of wild pansies in their sleeping eyelids, Lysander and Demetrius desire Helena instead of Hermia, and Titania loves an ass instead of the king of fairies. The next morning, everybody is loath to admit that the desired objects of their dreams were different from the people they selected, while awake, as their lawfully wedded spouses. Yet the dream allowed them to apprehend the fundamental illusoriness of social identities and the substitutability of sexual partners, unacceptable as it is in the eyes of patriarchal society. Mozart and Da Ponte hinted at this theme already in the last Act of *Le nozze di Figaro*, when the Count desires and courts his wife while mistaking her for Susanna, and they would go on to explore it in *Così fan tutte* (1790), their own version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where the surreal action is transferred to a contemporary domestic setting with Don Alfonso and Despina taking the parts of Oberon and Puck. But we also encounter the theme in *Don Giovanni* where the title hero plays the king of shadows (Oberon) as well as the merry wanderer of the night (Puck), with Donna Elvira and Leporello taking the parts of Titania and Bottom. ‘Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind’, as Helena says: the desiring gaze can transpose anyone to ‘form and dignity’.⁹ And like the evasive moon in Shakespeare’s comedy, Don Giovanni’s fiery cloak is a surface that reflects the longings of the onlookers rather than emitting any light of its own. Donna Elvira, hoping to reform the unruly rake and chain him in the fetters of matrimony, will eventually learn that the object of her desire was a romantic fantasy, a mental image she projected onto the random body she held in her embrace: in this case, his servant Leporello, the current wearer of the cloak. Don Giovanni’s school for lovers is as cruel and sobering as the schools of Oberon and Don Alfonso.

At the beginning of the trio, Don Giovanni serenades Donna Elvira with feigned passion while Leporello can barely control his laughter; at the end of the trio, Don Giovanni extols his own powers of seduction while Leporello pities the seduced woman. ‘In a certain sense’, as Jahn observes, ‘the two have exchanged their parts as well as their clothes’.¹⁰ Few later commentaries have been that subtle, surely due to the widely held view that the dramatic situation is a low farce without any deeper meaning. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Abert was still willing to concede that Mozart’s music describes ‘the interplay of inner, psychological forces and the way in which those forces attract

and repel one another, surrounded by the mysterious workings of nature', but this was in spite of the Italian poet's 'dull-wittedness, coarseness and crowd-pulling effects'.¹¹ Dent replaced psychological scrutiny with moral censure. While he found the trio 'perhaps the most beautiful number of the whole opera', the dramatic situation was

the most repulsive; it is endurable only if one takes a completely frivolous view of the whole play, and even then one feels that it would be more appropriate to a puppet-play than to one in which real human beings appear.¹²

Dent's moralism set the tone for the later reception. Worrying that Da Ponte and Mozart might be 'manipulating us with words and music into enjoying a sadistic play of power over a helpless woman', Brown-Montesano declares that if the scene 'arouses our sympathy, it should also prick our conscience'.¹³ Some critics have found the number so disturbing, in fact, that it even seems to them to mark a break with the dramatic aesthetics of the Enlightenment. Kunze, who describes it as the 'cruellest scene of seduction one can imagine', compares it to the famous scene in *Richard III* when the wicked Duke of Gloucester seduces Lady Anne (whose husband he has killed) as she accompanies the bier of her father-in-law (whom he has also killed).¹⁴ By interpreting Don Giovanni's disguise in the light of Shakespearean tragedy (rather than Shakespearean comedy, as I do), Kunze follows the lead of the Romantics with their emphasis on the tension between the sublime and the grotesque. So does Goehring, according to whom the incongruity between 'the formal control and elegance of the trio' and 'the contrivance and frivolity of the situation' serves to 'separate creativity from virtue', whereby it reveals 'the ethical distance separating *Don Giovanni* from some of the great reform movements in eighteenth-century theatre'.¹⁵

These more or less explicit endorsements of the Romantic view of *Don Giovanni*, at least with regard to the trio, seem to me problematic for two reasons. Above all, they jar against Mozart's own account of his musical-dramatic aesthetic. Describing his musical depiction of Osmin's comic rage in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782), which 'exceeds all order, measure and intent', Mozart explained that 'the passions, intense or not, must never be expressed to the point of arousing disgust, and music, even in the most sinister situation, must never offend the ear but must delight even then, and thus always remain music'.¹⁶ His insistence on the comparable boundaries of emotional and musical expression and on the primacy of beauty, which determines emotional and moral effects, strongly suggests that Mozart would not intend one of his operatic scenes to arouse the kind of disgust that Don Giovanni's treatment of Donna Elvira arouses in Kunze, Goehring and Brown-Montesano. A more appropriate historical context is evoked by Stefano Castelvechi who shows how *Le nozze di Figaro* explores tensions between sentimentality and anti-sentimentality, which was typical of the second half of the eighteenth century.¹⁷ The trio in *Don Giovanni* fits well with this tendency: the seducer's mischievous parody of Donna Elvira's novelistic sentimentality is counteracted by the irresistibility of his music. Pirrotta therefore seems

more to the point when he describes it as ‘a masterpiece of balance between passion and parody, emphasis and irony, seduction and cynicism’.¹⁸

But the ‘Romantic’ interpretation of the trio is also problematic because it reflects a skewed view of the motivations of the characters. While Don Giovanni is seen as the opera’s most callous character, Donna Elvira is seen as its most compassionate character. But if we compare the trio to her entrance aria in Act I, during which Don Giovanni was also wooing her while Leporello was commenting wryly on his master’s conduct, we get an impression of the possessive nature of her passion: in Act I she wanted her faithless lover dead; in Act II she wants to marry him. She only thinks he deserves pity as long as he is willing to return to her, which is essentially what she tells herself at the end of her first quatrain in the trio: ‘è un empio, è un traditore, / è colpa aver pietà’ (‘he’s wicked, he’s a traitor; it’s a sin to pity him’, 823–4). If he won’t return, he might as well die. But does such a selective notion of pity count as pity at all? This inner contradiction in her attitude towards Don Giovanni, glossed over in most performances and commentaries, helps us understand why the seducer treats her as cruelly as he does. Are we to assume that he has forgotten how his ex-lover – whose reputation and marriageability are still intact, we must remember – joined forces with people who desire his death, taking part in an armed ambush on him in his own home, simply because he left her? Surely, this is an unforgivable betrayal that suffices to explain why he ignores her repeated claims to love and forgive him. Though the revenge he takes is cruel, it is less cruel than hers, and it even contains an element of sentimental education: by means of the carnivalesque transformations, he gives Donna Elvira a chance to realise that her ‘love’ and ‘pity’ (just like his) are really sexual desire, which can easily be directed towards another object.

Such a non-idealised view of love and sexuality, and especially of women’s sexuality, was unacceptable to the opera’s nineteenth-century adapters who were keen to whitewash Donna Elvira while portraying Don Giovanni as an evil trickster. Rochlitz set the tone, replacing erotic allure as a motive for Don Giovanni’s disguise as a generic servant with a somewhat shiffter attempt to deceive Donna Elvira’s maid by actually posing as Leporello: ‘I’ve initiated a little episode with the girl on your account’, he tells his servant before the beginning of the trio.¹⁹ Rochlitz also enhanced Don Giovanni’s callousness in the trio itself, giving the entire number a thoroughly tragic colouring. The seducer’s comically hyperbolic suicide threat has been omitted, and he now repeats his marriage vow in an infernal display of deceitfulness, Rochlitz translating his lines ‘vedrai che tu sei quella / che adora l’alma mia’ (‘you’ll see you’re the one my soul adores’, 838–9) as ‘Ich schwöre Dir aufs Neue / In Tod und Leben Treue’ (‘Once again, I swear to be faithful to you even unto death’). The diabolising of Don Giovanni tallies with the angelising of Donna Elvira who no longer thinks it’s a sin to pity him: ‘Ich zittere vor dem Verbrecher, / Und ach, ich lieb’ ihn noch’ (‘I tremble for the villain, and I still love him, alas’). Her final quatrain, sung immediately before she comes down to join her lover, has also been given quite a different meaning than in the Italian original. In Da Ponte she sings:

Dei! che cimento è questo?
Non so s'io vado o resto!
Ah proteggete voi
la mia credulità.

(‘Gods, what a trial is this? I don’t know if I should
go or stay! Ah, do protect my credulity’, 845–8)

Like Zerlina in Act I, Donna Elvira possesses a double awareness when Don Giovanni seduces her: observing herself succumbing to his charms, and realising that it is naïve of her to do so, she is not devoid of agency. Rochlitz, however, consistently portrayed the seducer as a mesmeric predator and the women as passive victims, turning Donna Elvira into a helpless woman who submits to the superior power of the male:

Ich kann nicht widerstreben!
Und kostet’s mir mein Leben:
Ich muss, ich muss vergeben –
Mein Schicksal reisst mich fort!

(‘I can’t resist! And even if it costs me my life, I must,
I must forgive him... My destiny sweeps me along!’)

The changes that had the most far-reaching consequences for the scenic and vocal performance of the trio, however, concern Rochlitz’s treatment of Leporello. Since the translator reinvented the situation as tragic, the audience needed an ally on stage with whose emotional responses they could identify; hence the ambiguous reaction of Da Ponte’s Leporello to the hoax, wavering between amusement and compassion, between anti-sentimentality and sentimentality, gave way to indignation pure and simple. The servant’s first aside, ‘State a veder la pazza / che ancor gli crederà’ (‘Look at that madwoman who believes him once again’, 835–6), was turned into a reproach addressed to his master: ‘So täuscht der Falk die Tauben! Was Sie sich hier erlauben, / Möcht’ ich nicht um eine Welt!’ (‘Thus, the hawk deceives the doves! What you allow yourself to do here I wouldn’t do for all the world!’). And his next line, ‘Se seguitate, io rido’ (‘If you go on, I’ll start laughing’, 843), the second part of which is repeated several times, the music mimicking Leporello’s attempt to control his laughter, was given the very opposite meaning in the translation: ‘Das heisst zu weit es treiben! Wer kann da scherzhaft bleiben? O Herr, das geht zu weit!’ (‘You’re taking it too far! Who could go on joking here? O master, this goes too far!’). Clearly, Rochlitz took his cue from Leporello’s concluding quatrain, in which he appears more sympathetic to Donna Elvira:

Già quel mendace labbro
torna a sedur costei:
deh proteggete, o dei,
la sua credulità!

(‘And thus, his lying lips seduce her once more.
Protect her credulity, O Gods!’ 849–52)

In the German translation, however, sympathy has been turned into horrified outrage:

O könntst Du widerstreben!
Verachtet wirst Du leben –
Ja, meine Glieder beben –
Verwünscht sei dieser Ort!

(‘Oh, if only you could resist! You’ll live on in disgrace... Oh, my limbs are trembling... A curse on this place!’)

Rochlitz’s Leporello seems to speak for some commentators more than Da Ponte’s does, the transmutation of the scene anticipating modern interpretations of the trio as a moment of Romantic-Shakespearean tragedy that combines the horrifying and the burlesque. Since the German Leporello participates in the deception against his will, the comicality of his subsequent dialogue with Donna Elvira has been minimised, moreover, Rochlitz furnishing him with some double-edged comments to make clear that he takes no pleasure in the situation, unlike his Italian counterpart. This had inevitable consequences for his acting in the trio as well, since an unwilling Leporello will be less inclined to offer a faithful copy of his master. Don Giovanni has to make him gesticulate by force, thus turning the situation into the grotesque puppet show criticised by Dent.

It was against such performances of the trio that commentators familiar with Bassi’s portrayal reacted, to judge from an 1820 review by the Hamburg Critic:

During the glorious trio at the beginning of Act III [*sic*], [Herr Woltereck] only struggled to make Leporello’s hands perform ridiculous gesticulations, whereby he neglected the melting song with which he is to win back Elvira’s heart entirely. In this trio, Leporello is merely a subsidiary role: if he is pressed forward he will totally spoil the effect of the beautiful vocal number.²⁰

Lyser made very similar comments in his fictive memoir of Bassi’s portrayal:

how charmingly [Bassi] carried and sighed the melody in the glorious A-major trio in Act II. His acting was unsurpassable here, too: reclining with graceful negligence against the Leporello and embracing him with one arm, with the other hand he only made him make a movement now and then, which matched his (Don Giovanni’s) words perfectly, thereby enhancing the *subtly-comical* force of the situation without destroying the least of the effect of the glorious musical number, as is only too often the case, unfortunately, in the usual clumsy performances.²¹

Lyser supplied this description with an illustration (see Figure 5.1), which represents an interesting contrast to Slevogt’s depiction of the same scene from 1921



Figure 5.1 Johann Peter Lyser: the trio (Act II scene 2). Drawing. Frontispiece for Lyser 1833. Photo ©: Institute of Theatre Studies of the Freie Universität Berlin, Theaterhistorische Sammlung Walter Unruh.

(see Figure 5.2). In Slevogt's picture, Don Giovanni's graceless puppeteering of Leporello demonstrates the master's brutal manipulation of the servant. And since the effectiveness of the disguise is not at the centre of attention, Donna Elvira has been placed far away from the wooers to make it plausible that she falls for the trick. In Lyser's picture, however, the situation is indeed *hochkomisch*, and it corresponds to what Sandrini-Caravoglia said of the treatment of Donna Elvira by Bassi's Don Giovanni. Lyser's seducer is less a puppeteer than a voice actor, Leporello himself contributing to the illusion, which has no trace of the force and grotesquery it has in Slevogt. Since the artifice is seductive, we understand why Donna Elvira yields, and hence she is placed much closer to the wooers, though without becoming ridiculous. Lyser represents her as a beautiful and fashionable young lady, also implying that Don Giovanni avoids her not because he finds her unattractive but because he finds her behaviour unreasonable. (Hoffmann, in contrast, describes her as 'the long, lean Donna Elvira, with visible traces of great but faded beauty'.²²)

Neither Lyser nor Slevogt attempted to depict the trio as it might have been performed in the theatre, their visualisations rather transferring the scene to an imaginary reality. On the eighteenth-century stage, with its footlights and remnants of frontal acting, Leporello must have been facing the audience directly, with Don Giovanni singing behind him, standing towards stage right, while Donna Elvira sang from a window on stage left, as suggested by the street set depicted in Thönert's print. That would have created an effect of Don Giovanni's mellifluous voice emanating from the red-cloaked figure with the feathered hat; and in this way, the trio becomes a heightened version of the catalogue aria, representing a more advanced stage in the servant's transformation into his master: a process completed in his subsequent dialogue with Donna Elvira. Such an effect requires, of course, that Don Giovanni really sings his serenade meltingly, as Bassi apparently did. Notably, the melting quality was also associated with the performance, in Prague and Dresden, of the duettino, which is also in A major: the typical key of love and seduction duets among Mozart and his contemporaries.²³

As for the specific quality of Bassi's delivery, Don Giovanni's line 'Ah credimi, o m'uccido!' ('Ah believe me, or I'll kill myself!' 842) is sung 'with affected sorrow' in Da Ponte's libretto, but 'with transport and almost weeping' in Mozart's score, the composer perhaps adapting the musical expression to the skills of the singer. That Bassi was able to sing in a weeping mode appears from a number of later roles adapted or written for him in Prague. In *Il flauto magico*, the Guardasoni company's 1794 adaptation of *Die Zauberflöte* (1791), which featured Bassi as Papageno, the latter sings his lines in the Act II quintet 'weeping' after the three Damigelle have told Papageno he is doomed, and his suicide song later in the Act also calls for a degree of emotionality lacking in Schikaneder's original libretto. He 'weeps' when Papagena fails to appear and again when he bids farewell to the world, and he 'weeps bitterly' when realising that no other woman will prevent him from taking his life. Along with the trio in *Don Giovanni*, these scenes may have served as inspiration for the recitative dialogue in Peter



Figure 5.2 Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni in Leporello's clothes (Act II scene 2). Woodcut. From Da Ponte 1921. Photo ©: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, 4 L.sel.I 1062, p. 77.

Winter's *Il trionfo del bel sesso o sia Il tartaro convinto in amore* (1795) where Tiziano, probably written for Bassi, is 'weeping' when he reproaches his faithless girlfriend Barberina, only to question her 'with irony' in the following line, which would have allowed the singer to display his ability quickly to change the colour of his voice. In the last finale of Ferdinando Paer's *Sargino ossia L'allievo dell'amore* (1803), finally, Filippo Augusto – a role created by Bassi – weeps before giving his blessing to the young lovers, Sargino and Sofia.²⁴ The tearful colouring, once integral to the expressive palette of Italian singers, should not be confused with the melodramatic sobs of twentieth-century verismo tenors. The raised larynx and thinned vocal cords rather produce a soft, vulnerable effect, which fits well with the early German commentators' preference for a 'melting' and 'sighing' delivery of Don Giovanni's lines.

The trio in *Don Giovanni* was not an instant success in Prague, however. At the premiere, Bassi said, the audience listened to the quartet, the trio and the sextet 'quite coldly and, as it were, with astonishment and their mouths agape', which Hohenthal took as proof that 'Mozart's genius had rushed ahead of his time with regard to *these* excellent inventions, which is indeed the true hallmark of genius'.²⁵ This reaction of the original audience directs our attention to the meta-operatic dimension hinted at in Don Giovanni's last quatrain in the trio:

Spero che cada presto!
che bel colpetto è questo!
Più fertile talento
del mio, no, non si dà.

(‘I hope she yields soon! What a fine stroke this is!
There's no talent more fertile than mine’, 853–6)

As Baker observes, the 'stroke' here is 'less a means to a seductive end than an end in itself, an art form'.²⁶ Yet that art form is Mozart's no less than Don Giovanni's, the former's musical-artistic radicality mirrored by the latter's erotic-social radicality. This analogy has been picked up by Herwitz who characterises the opera as 'a celebration of the seductive/sensuous power of Mozart's own music', convincingly arguing that Leporello is a scenic stand-in for Da Ponte while his master is a stand-in for Mozart.²⁷ Like the seducer and the servant, the composer and the poet were bound together by mutual dependence, the latter obediently serving the former and, though sometimes grudgingly, accepting his position in the shadow of the great master while still taking pride in his contributions. Leporello's 'non picciol libro' ('non-small book', 191) is more than simply a *libretto* (literally, a 'small book') that drily enumerates the scenes and types of the seducer's conquests; it is a real work of poetry, though one that owes its inspiration to the copiousness, variety and charm of the musical-erotic genius. And Don Giovanni's instruction to Leporello, 'una gran festa / fa' preparar' ('go and prepare a great party', 544–5), may refer not only to the servant's last-minute planning of a ball, but also to the librettist's planning of a complex Act finale, commissioned at short notice by an enthusiastic composer with specific ideas about its choreographic arrangement. Perhaps the absence of the last

eight scenes of Act I, including the party episode, from the 1787 Vienna libretto suggests that Mozart, at an infuriatingly late point, had asked Da Ponte to write or rewrite the end of Act I. The poet, who later stated that he wrote the libretto at night and prided himself on having penned the first two scenes in one go, could be alluding ironically to the imposition of this workload with Don Giovanni's lines:²⁸

Ah la mia lista
doman mattina
d'una decina
devi aumentar.

(‘Ah, tomorrow morning you’ll have to expand my
list with a dozen more’, 560–3)

The highpoint of the meta-operatic narrative, however, is the exchange of costumes, when Leporello is clothed in Don Giovanni's fiery cloak just as Da Ponte's poetry is clothed in Mozart's fiery tones. Within the operatic action, the virtuosic blending of artistries and identities is launched in the trio and ceases in the sextet: the two most daring numbers in Act II, musically-aesthetically as well as dramatically-morally. The two collaborators may have anticipated the astonished response of the audience to these ‘excellent inventions’ at the premiere while still hoping that they would ‘yield soon’, like the bewildered and infatuated Donna Elvira listening to Don Giovanni's serenade.

That reflexive layer may help us understand the curious mood change after Leporello's disclosure in the sextet, when the tempo changes from Andante to Molto allegro and Don Giovanni's pursuers react with an extravagant display of mental disorientation. ‘The entire Act II does not comprise a single tragic moment that is not immediately dissolved again in amusement’, Lyser says, ‘for however seriously the grand sextet begins, the anxious tension is over once Leporello has been recognised’.²⁹ This implies that the carnivalesque exchange of identities, despite the violent intent of the pursuers, translates the armed confrontation into a comic mode. It is because Don Giovanni is absent, as Reinhard Eisendle writes, that ‘he seems more present and more available than those who are actually present’, Da Ponte using this ‘almost avant-gardist moment’ to wage a metaphorical battle against ‘the conventionalism of society which is guarding the rules’.³⁰ This meta-operatic layer, which suggests a parallel between social and artistic innovation, is hinted at in the last lines sung by Don Giovanni's bewildered enemies: ‘che giornata, o stelle, è questa, / che impensata novità!’ (‘O stars, what a day this is! What an unforeseen surprise!’ 1045–6). Literally, *novità* means ‘novelty’, and this is Da Ponte's invitation to the composer to astonish the audience with a display of his artistic originality which, as Noiray says, seems to ‘kindle in Mozart a fantasy without limits’.³¹ The composer's setting transcends the dramatic situation and develops into pure autonomous play, a musical counterpart of the mad dream of Titania and Bottom, or, as Sergio Durante argues, ‘a compositional *tour de force* where text and drama become a subsidiary, or even a decorative, function of compositional display, a “spectacularization” of Mozart's skill’.³² As a symbol of Mozart's virtuosity, the

sextet is linked to the trio, however. In both numbers, the listeners' implied reaction to the music – and, in 1787, the reaction of the actual audience – mirrors the reaction of Donna Elvira and the other characters to Don Giovanni's trick.

The canzonetta

After Donna Elvira and the disguised Leporello have disappeared into the wings, Don Giovanni serenades Donna Elvira's unseen chambermaid. The canzonetta was among the numbers encored at the premiere, and the fact that Thönert selected this scene to emblematisé Bassi's Don Giovanni shows how central the number was to his performance, Hohenthal emphasising that it is essential to the portrayal of Don Giovanni as a 'charming, subtle, mellifluous seducer'.

It was the music theorist Johann Christian Lobe who, in 1857, first drew attention to the fact that the melodic phrase to which Mozart set the first line of the canzonetta, 'Deh vieni alla finestra, o mio tesoro' ('Ah, come to your window, O my darling', 891), is strikingly similar to a phrase Don Giovanni sings when serenading Donna Elvira in the trio: 'Discendi, o gioia bella!' ('Descend, O my fair joy', 837).³³ Clearly, Mozart took his cue from Da Ponte, as the poetic lines are similar too, and he let Don Giovanni repeat the words 'o gioia bella', so that both lines became *endecasillabi*, the metre of traditional Venetian serenades.³⁴ Musically, both numbers are in 6/8 metre, Allanbrook pointing out that the orchestra in the trio already imitates the 'mandolin-strumming figure' that later accompanies the canzonetta.³⁵ But the two statements of the tune are also distinctly different. The 'weeping' vocal gestures we heard in the trio are absent from the canzonetta, which is more lightly orchestrated and calls for a sugary voice quality. It is also faster: *Allegretto* rather than *Andantino*. While Tomaschek gives the quaver of the trio the metronome number 104, he gives the dotted crotchet of the canzonetta the number 80: a rather fast tempo that tends to divest the tune of the fervid sentimentality with which it was invested at its first appearance.³⁶

The seducer's variations on the same tune demonstrate the accuracy of Leporello's parody of his seduction strategy in the catalogue aria, in which the servant used melodic variations to depict the variations in his master's modes of approach to women. Philippi's assertion, cited in Chapter 3, that the performer's ability to adapt Don Giovanni's behaviour 'to the rank and even the mentality of the beauties' is the surest way to demonstrate the seducer's talent, applies here. It is in the trio that the audience understands why Donna Elvira 'cannot let go of the charming monster'; it is in the canzonetta that 'garlands of roses' should 'bloom forth from every syllable, audibly explaining the defeat of so many ladies by the music of his lips'; and it is in the contrast between the two numbers that we experience the difference between Don Giovanni's way of seducing 'sophisticated city ladies' (Donna Elvira) and 'naïve country girls' (her chambermaid).³⁷

The recurrence of the serenade tune has led to different interpretations, reflecting the changing attitudes towards Don Giovanni. According to Abert, it is 'perhaps the most seductive tune that we ever hear on his lips', expressive of 'a sensuality that has no specific object to it, his bewitching melody being directed

not to any one particular woman but to womankind in general'.³⁸ This view differs from that of commentators familiar with Bassi's portrayal who put emphasis on the seducer's attention to each individual woman. With the more hostile attitude towards him that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, however, some commentators refused altogether to succumb to the seduction. While even Kerman maintains that it is impossible to listen to the canzonetta 'and doubt for a moment the deep truth (if not the statistical particulars) of Leporello's account of his master's success as a seducer', Mila thinks that the

dryness of Don Giovanni's heart and the curse of being a great lover incapable of loving is communicated to us both by the indication of that melodic quotation and, in the serenade, by the fundamental, schematic simplicity of the structure and the dry, sour and taut sound of the mandolin accompaniment.³⁹

The serenade is a 'caricature', Mila adds, that expresses Don Giovanni's 'social contempt' for the chambermaid.⁴⁰ Admittedly, the mandolin does sound impersonal on Böhm's recording, which may have been this commentator's point of reference.

Don Giovanni is not the only character in the opera, however, who uses different musical styles when trying to persuade women from different social backgrounds. Part of his revenge on Donna Elvira, it seems, consists in imitating her way of doing exactly that, as he overheard how she changed her musical style when warning Zerlina and Donna Anna against him in Act I, also in two consecutive numbers. In Sisman's words, Donna Elvira 'performs her nobility' differently when addressing the peasant girl Zerlina in her Handel-style aria, 'Ah fuggi il traditor, / non lo lasciar più dir' ('Ah, flee the traitor; don't let him say anymore', 367–8), and when addressing Donna Anna, her social equal, with the melting opening phrase of the quartet, 'Non ti fidar, o misera, / di quel ribaldo cor' ('O poor woman, do not trust in that base heart', 395–6).⁴¹ It is essentially the same rhetorical strategy Don Giovanni adopts in Act II. And as for the simplicity and scoring of the canzonetta, Sisman offers this reading of Mozart's setting, which is closer, surely, to Hohenthal's conception of the number than is Mila's:

With images of sugar, sweetness, and honey, [Don Giovanni] alternates flattery with urgency in a direct come-on. Simple tonal means construct a great wheel of desire, as harmonies of the subdominant, G major, (especially *its* subdominant, C major) exert a powerful gravitational pull. The circular shape of the chord progression gives the text a surge of momentum no woman (on stage) could resist. And the grain of sound of mandolin is at once tinkly – unthreatening – and thickly tactile; every sound is clearly the sound of finger stroking against string. It is virtuosic where the voice is declarative, suggesting the perfect combination of skill and ardor. Gazing upward, Don Giovanni yields to the intoxicating experience of embodying desire.⁴²

Anyone who has heard a performance of *Don Giovanni* in which the singer accompanies himself on the mandolin can attest that the hypnotism of the sound of fingers

stroking against strings is more irresistible when those are *his* fingers. According to Lyser, Bassi did accompany himself in the canzonetta, though the rest of what he has to say about the number can probably be rejected as narrative embellishments. ‘Bassi accompanied his serenade on the *mandolin* himself’, he stated in 1847, and then adds in brackets: ‘in Vienna, Mozart took over the accompaniment, alternating with the poet, as the local singer of *Don Giovanni* didn’t play the instrument’.⁴³ And in 1856 he published the following variation of the story:

Bassi told me that Mozart accompanied the canzonetta on the mandolin himself in the first performance of *Don Giovanni* because Bassi, a native of Italy, didn’t yet know how to handle the instrument back then; he later learned it from Mozart and always accompanied himself from that point on.⁴⁴

As Dexter Edge has shown, one Joseph Zahradniczek was paid 121 Gulden for playing the mandolin at the Burgtheater in the 1788–9 season, which would seem to rule out the possibility of Mozart (or Da Ponte) playing the mandolin in the Vienna production.⁴⁵ And it is unlikely that the composer, in the midst of finishing and rehearsing his opera in Prague, would have found the time to give Bassi mandolin lessons.⁴⁶ The fact that he chose to use an actual mandolin for *Don Giovanni*’s canzonetta, however, and not an orchestral imitation, as he did when Susanna accompanies Cherubino’s song on the guitar in *Le nozze di Figaro*, does suggest that Bassi was meant to accompany himself, whether or not he did so already at the premiere. And this in itself adds to *Don Giovanni*’s characterisation. Like the stage bands in the two finales, the mandolin song is a demonstration of the singer-seducer’s virtuosic control of musical expression, including even the instrumental accompaniment, and in this way, it enhances his identification with the composer-seducer that was already hinted at in the trio.

The disguise aria

The canzonetta sets off the musical and vocal transformation that occurs in the following scene when *Don Giovanni*, impersonating Leporello, deceives Masetto and his gang of armed peasants who are searching for Zerlina’s seducer in order to kill him. In contrast to the mellifluous lyricism of the preceding number, the disguise aria, in which *Don Giovanni* sends the peasants off in different directions, is set in the *parlando* style characteristic of the *buffo caricato*, Willaschek aptly remarking that *Don Giovanni* ‘disappears as an individual character behind [its] countless guises and affects’.⁴⁷ Other commentators have noted how these affects have been adopted from his servant’s musical idiom. Written in F major, the key of Leporello’s opening solo, it also remains within his tessitura, which is lower than *Don Giovanni*’s, as Rushton points out.⁴⁸ And Mila observes that the slyly insinuating word repetitions at the end, ‘Bisogna far il resto, / ed or vedrai cos’è’ (‘It’s necessary to do the rest, and now you’ll see what that is’, 938–9), bring to mind the no less insinuating word repetitions at the end of the catalogue aria: ‘purché porti la gonnella / voi sapete quel che fa’ (‘as long as she wears a

skirt, you know what he'll do', 223–4).⁴⁹ Such features will help the singer imitate Leporello's characteristic style of delivery, too, as will Mozart's setting of Don Giovanni's auto-description: 'addosso un gran mantello, / e spada al fianco egli ha' ('he's wearing a large cloak and a sword at his side', 934–5). Here, as Allanbrook comments, Don Giovanni 'slips into a courtly march with fanfares' that parodies the servant's parody of his master in the introduction, 'Voglio far il gentiluomo, / e non voglio più servir' ('I want to be a gentleman, and I don't want to serve anymore', 5–6), which Mozart set as a cavalry march.⁵⁰

Rushton, who sees the auto-description as a sign of Don Giovanni's narcissism, Mozart presumably intending to show the audience that the seducer is 'immensely pleased with himself', does not take its element of self-mockery into account as Don Giovanni describes himself through his servant's eyes.⁵¹ Indeed, this aspect tends to get lost in modern performances, partly due to historical changes in performance practice. At least from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the classical comedian who let his character disappear behind the changing masks gradually gave way to the naturalistic actor who strives for complete psychological consistency; and this explains why it is mainly on older recordings that the Don Giovannis attempt to mimic the Leporellos vocally. The difference appears from a comparison of Pinza's 1942 rendition of the disguise aria to Fischer-Dieskau's from 1967. Pinza sings the aria from beginning to end in a *parlando* style with open vowels and no hint of the mellifluous legato he employs in the canzonetta, thus offering a perfect impersonation of Leporello. He only lets the mischievous humour shine through (though still in character as Leporello) when singing of the sword hanging at his side, hinting to the audience that Masetto will soon be chastised with that very sword. This performance fits Noiray's description of the aria as expressive of the 'spirited and inventive trickster who cannot but win the favour of the audience'.⁵² Fischer-Dieskau, on the other hand, barely tries to change his voice when singing the number, retaining both the legato phrasing and the sonorous baritone tone of his Don Giovanni throughout. Unlike Pinza, he then sings the command to the peasants, 'ferite pur, ferite' ('just strike him, strike him', 930), as well as the following auto-description with a menacing power that clearly expresses the aggression of the aristocratic master, not his servant's mocking imitation. Portrayals like this one not only contribute to the image of Don Giovanni as a demonic sadist, as we get the impression that he truly wants the peasants to find and harm Leporello; they also contribute to the image of Don Giovanni as a narcissist.

Like the canzonetta, the disguise aria was written on paper Mozart acquired in Prague, which suggests that it may have been written or adapted with Bassi in mind, as discussed in Chapter 1. That Bassi was good at impersonating his colleagues was even pointed out by Niemetschek: 'With his truly subtle and droll humour [Bassi] sometimes parodies the flaws of the other singers so subtly that it is not noticed by them, only by the spectators'.⁵³ While many of the ca. thirty roles Bassi is known to have sung with the company by that point involve disguises, Don Giovanni is the only one that required him to impersonate another character in the same opera. It is therefore likely that the critic specifically thought of this scene,

which is the only known instance where such a parody would have been dramatically appropriate. In that case, the singer he imitated must have been the current Leporello of the company, the *primo buffo* Gaetano Campi, whom Niemetschek, in the same review, accused of having ‘but little depth’ and of appearing ‘clumsy and forced’ in the comic bass roles imposed on him by Guardasoni.⁵⁴ The theory receives support from one of Lyser’s stories. ‘In the aria “Metà di voi quà vadano”’, says the ‘old musical director’, Bassi ‘gave his humour the freest reins! In the most delightful way he was able to parody the acting and singing of the Leporello: the deception really reached its maximum’.⁵⁵ Such a performance of the aria is closer to Pinza’s than to Fischer-Dieskau’s.

Niemetschek’s review has contributed to shaping today’s image of Bassi as an actor and of his portrayal of Don Giovanni. It has been assumed that he was a virtuoso of transformations more or less in the style of seventeenth-century quick-change artists, which, in turn, has been used to support interpretations of Don Giovanni as a chameleonic master of deception.⁵⁶ Despite what Lyser says, however, there is some evidence that Bassi stopped singing the disguise aria at an early point. It is certainly noteworthy that it was the only one of Don Giovanni’s three solos not encored at the premiere in 1787, according to Hohenthal: an honour even accorded to the duettino. And as Woodfield has shown, its text was replaced with the following lines – that call for a recitative setting – in the 1789 Warsaw libretto:

Metà di voi vadan da questa parte
gl’altri vadan dall’altra,
ch’io qui con lui mi resto;
sì, sì lo troverem: via fate presto.⁵⁷

(‘Half of you go in this direction, the rest go in that one while I stay here with him; yes, yes, we’ll find him! Away, hurry up!’)

Woodfield suggests that the suppression of the aria might have been due to Costa who sang Don Giovanni in Leipzig in the summer of 1788, and who might have been ‘a less convincing mimic of his servant’ than Bassi was.⁵⁸ Yet Costa had left Guardasoni’s company at the time of the Warsaw premiere, and though we lack precise casting information for this performance, Bassi would almost certainly have resumed his creator’s role at that point. After all, Costa is the only other singer known to have sung Don Giovanni in Guardasoni’s company, and he only seems to have done so because Bassi, exceptionally, did not perform with them during the 1788 Leipzig summer season.⁵⁹ It is hard to see, therefore, why the aria could not simply have been restored in Warsaw if Bassi had wished to sing it. That he did not sing the aria again, however, is suggested by the fact that it is replaced with the same four lines of recitative in the score used for the 1804 Lobkowitz production.⁶⁰ Although Bassi’s participation is not certain here either, he is the most likely candidate for the title role, and the presence of the

replacement recitative from the Warsaw production supports this theory. In conclusion, it seems more likely that Bassi stopped singing the aria shortly after the premiere than that Lyser's story is accurate: like Niemetschek's review, however, the anecdote on which he probably drew may have referred to Bassi's impersonation of the Leporello in the recitative.

As Baker writes, the subsequent beating of Masetto is 'usually staged today as the great opportunity for displaying the seducer's violence', although it 'actually represents his non-violence'.⁶¹ She points out that Don Giovanni starts by asking Masetto whether it really is his plan to kill him and whether it might not be enough 'to break his bones... to smash his back' (942–3). Masetto insists, however: 'No, no, I want to kill him, I want to break him into a hundred pieces' (944–5). It is after this exchange that the young nobleman first tricks the peasant into handing over his pistol and his musket and then 'strikes Masetto with the backside of his sword', explicitly punishing him for his homicidal plans: 'this is for the pistol... this is for the musket' (950–1). 'Threatening him with his own weapons' as Masetto cries out, Don Giovanni then takes leave of him with the words: 'Shut up, or I'll kill you: this is for killing him... this is for breaking him to pieces' (952–4). Notably, in the 1787 Vienna libretto, instead of striking him with the backside of his sword, Don Giovanni 'laughingly kicks and punches Masetto'; but Da Ponte decided to tone down the seducer's violence in the final version of the libretto. As Baker says, hitting a man with the flat of a small-sword 'would inflict no physical injury': Don Giovanni, who easily could have killed his attempted murderer, rather chooses to chastise him in a humiliating but basically non-violent way.⁶² Zerlina, who arrives immediately afterwards, quickly ascertains that her bridegroom is unhurt: 'Come on, it's not so bad as long as the rest is intact' (972). And yet, the *contrapasso* for Don Giovanni's punishment of Masetto is his own disproportionately harsh punishment at the end of the opera:

Masetto's plan to murder Don Giovanni is far in excess of the humane though insulting lesson he receives, the mild chastisement of a beating; thus the beating scene serves to demonstrate, by contradistinction, that Don Giovanni's death by torture is far in excess of the disturbance he has caused in his society and the pain he has inflicted on women. The importance of the beating resides in its counter-demonstration of the injustice and cruelty of the seducer's death.⁶³

Intent on making Don Giovanni deserving of his punishment, however, Rochlitz enhanced Don Giovanni's aggressiveness in the scene while reducing Masetto's. In Da Ponte's libretto, when the entering peasants eye the cloaked figure, Masetto tells them: 'Have courage! Be ready to shoot!' (907), and his first answer to the disguised Don Giovanni is said 'angrily'. This immediately establishes the ferocity of the lynch mob. In Rochlitz's translation, however, Masetto merely tells his companions: 'Hey there! Watch out, folks!', and his response to the cloaked

figure is no longer angry.⁶⁴ More importantly, he no longer starts out declaring that he wants to slay Don Giovanni. Instead, it is the presumed Leporello who tells Masetto that he would like to ‘tear out some handfuls of hair’ from the ‘wretched villain’ his master ‘without revealing myself’, after which Masetto admits that ‘we are up to something similar’.⁶⁵ In other words, instead of pretending to follow Masetto’s example, it is Don Giovanni who fuels his anger, deliberately endangering his own servant. This distortion would seem to have informed Till’s view of the aria as ‘a crude incitement to violence, an indication of the true baseness of Giovanni’s nature’, the latter apparently considering it ‘a huge joke to direct Masetto and his gang of thugs to beat up (and indeed, to shoot) Leporello’.⁶⁶ It is more likely, though, that Don Giovanni tries to protect his servant by sending the peasants off in the wrong directions, as Baker suggests, since they never manage to find him.⁶⁷ Moreover, Rochlitz’s Masetto explains that he is merely armed because ‘one has to think of one’s safety’, and it is made clear that his weapons never posed a real danger to the disguised aristocrat, the latter commenting when he receives his musket: ‘Surely, not a soul has shot with this one since the times of your late grandfather!’⁶⁸ Don Giovanni’s lines at the end of the scene, which spell out that the beating is a chastisement for the attempted murder, have been left out too. In this way, the German translator entirely removed what Baker characterises as the main point of the scene: displaying the disproportion between Masetto’s murderous intent and the mildness of his punishment.

Rochlitz’s transformation of the scene heralded an enhancement of Don Giovanni’s violence in most later productions. Already in the 1814 Dresden libretto, Don Giovanni no longer strikes Masetto with the backside of his sword. According to the libretto, he simply ‘beats him’, without any specification of the weapon used, but the verb *batte* (‘strikes’) has been replaced with the verb *bastona* (derived from the noun *bastone*, ‘stick’ or ‘cane’), implying that he beats Masetto with the butt of his own musket: a much severer use of violence. Moreover, he continues to do so: whereas Don Giovanni only strikes Masetto twice with his sword in the Prague libretto, the stage direction ‘as above’, which accompanies his concluding speech in the Dresden libretto, indicates that he continues beating the peasant until leaving the stage. Indeed, the scene was performed this way through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: both in Slevogt’s illustration of the scene (see Figure 5.3) and in the Czinner-Graf and Losey films, Don Giovanni beats Masetto savagely (and in the films, repeatedly) with the butt of the musket, and he still does that in Loy’s production from 2014. Since the visual image is so powerful, some academic commentators have found it impossible to detach themselves from it when studying the opera, Willaschek asserting, for example, that Don Giovanni manages to ‘brutally beat up’ Masetto, and Borchmeyer that he beats him ‘black and blue with the pommel [*sic*] of his sword’.⁶⁹ Others, who stay truer to the letter of Da Ponte’s libretto, have tried to explain not Don Giovanni’s violence but his *non-violence* in this scene as a sign of the nobleman’s arrogance: Don Giovanni ‘doesn’t defile his sword with peasant blood’, Bitter concludes.⁷⁰ The seducer’s critics are indeed hard to satisfy.



Figure 5.3 Reinhold Hoberg after a drawing by Max Slevogt: Don Giovanni pummels Masetto (Act II scene 5). Woodcut. From Da Ponte 1921. Photo ©: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich, 4 L.sel.I 1062, p. 87.

Like his brutalising of Don Giovanni, Rochlitz's mellowing of Masetto, which began in Act I, has proven influential. Hoffmann describes him as a 'good-natured bumpkin', and Jahn as a 'coarse, jealous, but good-natured clown'.⁷¹ As this characterisation hints, one way of diminishing the significance of the peasant's violent intent has been to write it off as comical, in contrast to the demonising of Don Giovanni. Masetto wants to avenge himself on Don Giovanni 'in his own inimitable way', Abert writes of the beating scene, and therefore the text 'becomes indistinguishable from that of any ordinary *opera buffa*'.⁷²

Notes

- 1 See Jahn 2013: 164; Dent 1947: 164; Abert 2007: 1084.
- 2 For online reproductions of the Leipzig playbills, see <https://www.stadtmuseum.leipzig.de/> (accessed on 12 November 2019); the Prague playbill is reproduced in Pešková and Volek 1987: 119.
- 3 Brown 2010: 291.
- 4 Jahn 2013: 181.
- 5 Gallarati 1994: 144–5.
- 6 Schmid 2018: 227.
- 7 'haben wir ihn noch besonders als Leporello, namentlich in der Scene zu rühmen, wo er gezwungen wird, den Giovanni zu spielen, was er mit äusserst wirksamer Nachahmung auch der Stimme und der Vortragsart seines lockern Herrn zu thun weiss'; *AmZ*, 23 June 1830: 411.
- 8 Baker 2005: 97.
- 9 William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I.i.233–4.
- 10 Jahn 2013: 194.
- 11 Abert 2007: 1086.
- 12 Dent 1947: 165.
- 13 Brown-Montesano 2007: 48–9.
- 14 Kunze 1984: 427–8.
- 15 Goehring 2003: 144–5.
- 16 Letter to his father of 26 September 1781: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/briefe-dokument-e/> (accessed on 3 December 2019).
- 17 See the chapter 'Sentimental, Anti-Sentimental', in Castelveccchi 2013.
- 18 Pirrotta 1994: 138.
- 19 'Da hab' ich denn eine kleine Episode auf deine Rechnung mit dem Kinde angesponnen'; Rochlitz 1801: 32.
- 20 'Ferner war er während des herrlichen Tercetts zu Anfang des dritten Acts nur bemüht, die Hände des Leporello zu lächerlichen Gesticulationen zu bereiten, wobei er den schmelzenden Gesang, durch welchen er das Herz der Elvira völlig wieder gewinnen soll, vernachlässigte. Der Leporello ist bei diesem Tercett nur Hilfsrolle, wird er vorge-drängt, so verdirbt er den ganzen Eindruck des schönen Gesangstückes'; *Originalien*, 1820, no. 93: 755–6.
- 21 'Dagegen welch ein reizendes Tragen und Hinhauchen der Melodie in dem herrlichen A-Dur Terzett im 2. Act. Sein Spiel war hier ebenfalls unübertrefflich, graziös-nachlässig auf den Leporello hingelehnt, ihn mit einem Arm umschlungen haltend, liess er ihn mit der andern Hand nur dann und wann eine Bewegung machen, welche zu seinen (des Don Juan) Worten vollkommen passend die *hochkomische* Kraft der Situation erhöhte, ohne im mindesten den Effect des herrlichen Tonstücks zu zerstören, wie das bei der gewöhnlichen plumpen Ausführung leider nur zu oft der Fall ist'; Lyser 1833: 127–8.
- 22 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 86.

- 23 See Noiray 1996: 76; Schmid 2018: 231.
- 24 See Piattoli 1794 II.5 and II.27; Bertati 1795: II.3; Foppa 1803: II.13. On Bassi's performance in these operas, see Schneider and Tatlow, *Arias for Luigi Bassi*.
- 25 'das Quartett aber, so wie das Terzett und das grosse Sextett im zweiten Acte, ganz kalt und gleichsam mit Staunen und offenem Munde angehört, ein Beweis, dass Mozart's Genius in diesen trefflichen Conceptionen seiner Zeit voran geeilt war, wie denn eben dies das wahre Merkzeichen des Genies ist'; Heinse 1837: 210.
- 26 Baker 2005: 101.
- 27 Herwitz 2006: 133.
- 28 Da Ponte 1976: 126.
- 29 Lyser 1847: 96, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 30 Eisendle 2004: 55–6.
- 31 Noiray 1996: 90.
- 32 Durante 2012: 86.
- 33 Lobe 1857: 11–3.
- 34 See Osthoff 1981: 295, 298.
- 35 Allanbrook 1983: 250.
- 36 Fink 1839: 481
- 37 Konrad Küstner's suggestion that Bassi would have tried to imitate the voice of Leporello in the serenade does not seem plausible and also disagrees with what Hohenthal implies concerning Bassi's portrayal. The mood and melody of the canzonetta resemble music Don Giovanni sings as himself elsewhere when seducing women, while it bears no resemblance to any music sung by Leporello; see Küstner 1995: 174–5.
- 38 Abert 2007: 1085.
- 39 Mila 1988: 187–8.
- 40 Mila 1988: 189.
- 41 Elaine Sisman, 'Don Giovanni's Indifference' (unpublished conference paper presented in Salzburg in October 2014).
- 42 Sisman 2019: 311–2.
- 43 'Sein Ständchen begleitete sich *Bassi* selber auf der *Mandoline*, (in Wien übernahm *Mozart*, abwechselnd mit dem Dichter die Begleitung, da der dortige Don Giovanni-Sänger das Instrument nicht spielte)'; Lyser 1847: 96.
- 44 'Bassi erzählte mir, dass Mozart bei den ersten Vorstellung des *Don Giovanni* selber die Begleitung der Canzonette auf der Mandoline spielte, weil Bassi, der geborne Italiener, das Instrument damals noch nicht zu behandeln wusste; später erlernte er es bei Mozart und begleitete sich von da an immer selbst'; Lyser 1856: I, 88.
- 45 Edge 1992: 87n.
- 46 I owe this observation to Weidinger, in private conversation.
- 47 Willaschek 1996: 227.
- 48 Rushton 1997: 421.
- 49 Mila 1988: 193.
- 50 Allanbrook 1983: 219.
- 51 Rushton 2012: 17.
- 52 Noiray 1996: 82.
- 53 *AmZ*, 30 April 1800: 539, in Angermüller and Geffray 1995: 51.
- 54 *AmZ*, 30 April 1800: 538, in Angermüller and Geffray 1995: 51. Campi, who sang Leporello in Leipzig in 1794, is likely to have performed the role during all the years Ponziani was absent from the company, i.e. between 1792 and 1800; cf. Woodfield 2012a: 226. A Prague critic compared Ponziani's and Campi's portrayals of the role favourably to that by Franz Siebert, the current German singer of the role, in *Der Sammler*, 3 March 1814: 114.
- 55 'Dagegen liess er seiner Laune in der Arie: / "Metà di voi quà vadano" etc. / den vollsten Zügel schiessen! Auf die ergötzlichste Weise wusste er hier das Spiel und den

- Gesang des Leporello zu parodieren, die Täuschung stieg wirklich auf's Höchste'; Lyser 1833: 128.
- 56 Cf. Pirrotta 1994: 115; and the chapter 'Il primo Don Giovanni di Mozart-Da Ponte: Luigi Bassi, pesarese', in Raffaelli 2006.
- 57 Woodfield 2012a: 118.
- 58 Woodfield 2012a: 123.
- 59 Costa sang in Genoa in the fall of 1789; see Sartori 1990, no. 1574. Bassi's whereabouts during the 1788 summer season are unknown, but he is not included in the list of Guardasoni's singers who performed in Leipzig in that year; see Woodfield 2012a: 112.
- 60 Jonášová 2016: 117–9. The article reproduces the musical setting of the four lines, both in facsimile and in modern transcription.
- 61 Baker 2005: 103.
- 62 Baker 2005: 103.
- 63 Baker 2005: 104.
- 64 'He da! aufgepasst, ihr Leute!' Rochlitz 1801: 35.
- 65 'JUAN. Dem nichtswürdigen Bösewicht, so – versteh' mich wohl – unbekannter Weise einige Hände voll Haare ausraufen! / MAS. ... Im Vertrauen: wir führen auch so 'was im Schilde!' Rochlitz 1801: 35.
- 66 Till 1992: 202, 215.
- 67 Baker 2005: 103.
- 68 'MAS. ... Man muss auf seine Sicherheit denken! / JUAN. ... Aus der hat wohl seit deines sel'gen Grossvaters Zeiten kein Mensch geschossen!' Rochlitz 1801: 36.
- 69 Willaschek 1996: 227; Borchmeyer 2005: 153.
- 70 Bitter 1961: 28.
- 71 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 86; Jahn 2013: 188.
- 72 Abert 2007: 1087.

6 The graveyard scene

After the party and disguise episodes, the opera returns to the central plot of the *Stone Guest* plays with the graveyard scene two-thirds into Act II. Coming across the statue of the Commendatore and seeing the inscription that calls for revenge on his killer, Don Giovanni invites the statue for supper. In Act III of Tirso's play, Don Juan and Catalinón come across the statue of Don Gonzalo in a church in Seville where Don Juan has sought shelter from his pursuers. Inviting the statue for supper, he pulls at its stone beard and mocks it for the futility of its threat. Already in Cicognini's play, however, the Christian implications of this scene gave way to farcical humour. Here, the scene is no longer set in a church but in an 'open temple' (III.2), and the seducer's servant now figures more prominently: when seeing the inscription, Don Giovanni throws down his gauntlet, defying the statue to take revenge; when Passarino cautions him not to mock the dead, he tells him to invite the statue for supper 'to show you that I don't respect him the least'. Unlike Tirso's statue, this *commedia dell'arte* statue actually accepts the invitation, nodding and replying with the word 'si', which prompts Passarino to collapse in horror. Although he sees the statue nodding with his own eyes, Don Giovanni remains unmoved, simply telling his servant to stay cheerful.

It was this Baroque mixture of superstition and comedic improbability that Molière parodied. His Dom Juan has heard about the tomb beforehand; with the air of a discerning art critic, he comes to admire the statue of the man he killed, though his servant objects that such behaviour isn't 'civil' (III.5). He then invites it for supper in pure capriciousness and leaves when he sees the statue nodding, later telling his servant that their senses deceived them. 'There's nothing truer than that nod', Sganarelle objects (IV.1), Molière using the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* to poke fun at the servant: everyone knows that nodding statues only exist in the theatre where they are tangible and hence 'true'. But the theatre is the site of illusion, and the moving statue therefore epitomises Sganarelle's inability to distinguish between reality and fantasy.

Goldoni's view of the statue as a dramatic device may not have differed so much from Molière's as it seems; he just replaced parody with regularisation and the statue's 'true' nodding with dramatic verisimilitude. Therefore, he chose not to call his play *Il convitato di pietra*, describing 'the marble statue, erected in a few moments, which speaks, walks, goes out for supper, invites people for

supper, threatens, revenges itself and performs wonders', as one of the silliest and most improper aspects of the *Stone Guest* plot.¹ The statue is still featured in the last Act of his play, but only to be exposed as an ordinary statue: an intertextual corrective to the old plot. In their more farcical adaptations, however, Porta, Marinelli and Bertati all reverted to the traditional *dénouement* with its pseudo-religious morality.

As Willaschek says, Da Ponte and Mozart treated the graveyard scene as an example of 'pageantry and pulp fiction' inherited from the old subject.² Yet their parody is more ambiguous than Molière's. Devoid entirely of supernatural terror, the French playwright's tongue-in-cheek treatment of the scene exposes the avenging statue as an absurd dramatic device, which implies that hypocrites like Dom Juan receive their just deserts on stage but not in real life. Da Ponte and Mozart depicted the statue as no less absurd, but they went on to create a powerful tension between the implausibility of the action and the uncanniness of the mood. While neither of them is likely to have 'believed in supernaturally empowered statues', as Baker reminds us, 'they made no attempt to weaken or change the story's *dénouement*'.³ The fact that the statue is pure make-believe does not make it less terrifying, in other words; it simply reveals it to be a human invention: an emblem of toxic social condemnation rooted in superstition and religious bigotry. The absence of the divine is signalled already by the inscription on the pedestal, one of the commonplaces of the plot, which makes no reference to heaven's revenge, in a clear departure from the tradition. In Tirso, the inscription reads: 'Aquí aguarda del Señor, / el más leal caballero, / la venganza de un traidor' ('Here the most honest knight awaits the Lord's vengeance on a traitor', III.450–2). Cicognini gave the inscription as follows: 'Di chi a torto mi trasse a morte ria, / dal ciel qui attendo la vendetta mia' ('Here I wait for heaven to inflict my vengeance on him who wrongfully dragged me to my sorry death', III.2). Bertati's version, written one and a half centuries later, is strikingly similar: 'Di colui che mi trasse a morte ria, / dal ciel qui aspetto la vendetta mia' ('Here I wait for heaven to inflict my vengeance on him who dragged me to my sorry death', II.20). Da Ponte's inscription, however, reads: 'Dell'empio che mi trasse al passo estremo / qui attendo la vendetta' ('Here I await the vengeance on the wicked man who dragged me to my death', 1161–2). The vengeance that this statue awaits is not that of heaven.

The tension between implausibility and eeriness is signalled by the timing of the scene. 'Oh, it's not yet two at night' (1108–9), Don Giovanni informs us when consulting his clock after entering the graveyard. Rushton points out that 'two at night' means two hours after twilight, Don Giovanni's clock following the old Italian six-hour system.⁴ In other words, the graveyard scene takes place two hours after the last street scene and one hour after the atrium scene. The significance of the timing is dual. On the one hand, in contrast to earlier *Stone Guest* versions, the first encounter with the statue takes place at night, which adds to the eeriness of the mood. Very likely, the creators of the opera made use of recent developments in lighting techniques to enhance the ghostlike effect that made the scene so popular with the Romantics. Yet the creepiness also serves to distinguish

between the role played by the statue in the opera and in Tirso's play: no longer a pseudo-religious morality play, the tale of the speaking and walking statue is revealed to be a mere fantasy that is used to scare superstitious souls. As a man of the Enlightenment, Don Giovanni is not intimidated by such ancient yarns.

The other purpose of placing the graveyard scene two hours after twilight was clearly to demonstrate that the action adheres strictly to the classical unity of time: it is not yet twenty-four hours since Don Giovanni killed the Commendatore. But while the unity of time is normally supposed to enhance the verisimilitude of a dramatic action, it serves the opposite purpose here: it is not plausible, obviously, that an inscription calling for the killer's death has been made in such a short time. In Tirso's play, Don Juan's first encounter with the statue takes place at least two weeks after the killing of Don Gonzalo, and most later versions seem to operate with a similar time gap, although Goldoni complained that the statue was traditionally 'erected in a few moments'. Bertati, who was the first one to introduce the unity of time into the plot, solved the problem by inserting a scene where Duke Ottavio speaks to a sculptor, explaining that the mausoleum was finished 'not yet a month ago', after which the inscription is created in full view of the audience (scene 19). But by renouncing this contrivance while reminding the audience of the exact temporal frame of the drama, Da Ponte points to the statue's absolute unreality. Alert to this discrepancy in the Danish adaptation, Oehlenschläger argued that 'it is best if *time* is not referred to at all', since a 'Romantic play does not conform to French rules regarding the unity of time'.⁵ But *Don Giovanni* is not a Romantic opera, and Da Ponte does refer to time, thus inviting the audience to accept Don Giovanni's scepticism as the most reasonable attitude. Losey's attempt to rationalise the scene by depicting the mausoleum as half-finished, with marble blocks strewn on the ground, misses the point.

It has never been pointed out, to my knowledge, that the events in the graveyard reverse the moral perspective of the old *Stone Guest* plot: just as it is the Commendatore who initially attacks Don Giovanni in the opening scene, and not the other way around, it is his statue that initially scorns Don Giovanni in the graveyard scene, and not the other way around. The two scenes are symmetrical in this regard, both of them raising the critical question of the extent of the young man's guilt and hence the fairness of his punishment. After Leporello has joined his master in the graveyard, and the latter has recounted how he almost succeeded in seducing a young woman who turned out to be one of the servant's paramours, the latter objects indignantly that she might have been his wife, at which Don Giovanni 'laughs very loudly': 'Better still!' (1147). This prompts the mysterious voice to intervene: 'Di rider finirai pria dell'aurora' ('You will cease laughing before dawn', 1148).⁶ Leporello thinks the mysterious voice belongs to 'some soul from the other world who knows you inside out' (1149–51), but Don Giovanni, who knows that the departed are not wont to rebuke the living for their salacious adventures, starts striking the gravestones with his sword in search of the man who threatens him. Then the voice is heard once more: 'Ribaldo audace, / lascia a' morti la pace' ('Audacious scoundrel, leave the dead in peace', 1152–3). The admonition is out of place, since Don Giovanni

is searching for a live person, not trying to disturb the dead. And his assumption that the speaker is ‘someone outside who’s tricking us’ (1154–5) is therefore entirely logical. It is only now that he eyes the statue of the Commendatore, moreover, and Leporello reads the inscription with the death threat. The subsequent supper invitation is intended neither as an insult to the Commendatore (who is dead and therefore cannot take offence) nor as defiance of God (since the statue does not represent Christ). As it says on the 1794 playbill for Guardasoni’s production, Don Giovanni’s supper invitation is ‘a joke’.⁷ A joke, we might add, on his superstitious servant. ‘What an idea, what a joke! I’ll make him tremble’ (1178–9), as Don Giovanni mutters to himself in the duet. Even the sight of the statue’s nodding does not prompt him to question his own enlightened worldview.

As Baker points out, the graveyard scene is placed later in the Mozart-Da Ponte opera than in the traditional *Stone Guest* plays and operas, and so it ‘seems to act not so much as the cause but rather as the final trigger that sets in motion a pursuit of the seducer that has been inevitable from the overture onwards’.⁸ From a very early point in the opera’s reception history, however, translators and commentators began to project actual religious meanings into it in an attempt to provide Don Giovanni’s supernatural punishment with the dramatic justification it lacks in Da Ponte’s text. Already in the Neefe-Schmieder translation, the dialogue before the first intervention of the statue was expanded to include a moralising sermon by Leporello. Here Don Giovanni laughs at the thought of Donna Elvira’s humiliation – not at that of potentially seducing Leporello’s wife – which provides the statue’s protest with a weightier motivation. A more radical alteration was made by Lippert who, for the 1790 Berlin premiere, added the earlier-mentioned ‘hermit scene’, which derived from a seventeenth-century *Stone Guest* tradition.⁹ Here Don Giovanni murders a hermit he meets in the graveyard in order to disguise himself with his cowl and thus deceive Don Ottavio who enters a little later. Posing as a holy man, he first urges the latter to abandon his vengeful thoughts but then murders him and exclaims that nobody on earth can harm him now. It is this appalling misdeed – infinitely graver than the attempted seduction of Leporello’s girlfriend, obviously – that then prompts the statue to intervene. Notably, Neefe himself found that this and other later insertions made ‘the whole more coherent’.¹⁰ And a Berlin critic reasoned as follows in 1803: ‘Now the *spiritual realm must* be called into play; and here we recognise at least an analogue of tragic necessity, which is only suggested very patchily without this scene’. It is good, too, he adds, ‘to enhance the crimes of the hero, so that it’s worthwhile seeing him fetched by the devils’.¹¹ A similar point was made by the critic of a production in Brunswick in 1819:

The murder of the hermit in *Don Giovanni* should not be omitted. It is the only outrageous crime that Don Giovanni commits before the eyes of the spectator. ... Only when this assassination is committed is the spectator appalled and may witness with some kind of satisfaction that the criminal is sent to hell alive. Without this assassination, Don Giovanni’s punishment

might appear too harsh and not sufficiently motivated, and a large part of the audience would not even find him guilty without it.¹²

It is worth noting that the attempt to ‘make the crime fit the punishment’ occurred already in Mozart’s lifetime. It was still clear, at that point, that the killing of the Commendatore and the seduction of women did not sufficiently motivate the supernatural intervention, though this was seen by translators and critics as a dramaturgical flaw that had to be corrected and not as a structuring principle of the drama, as Baker has shown it to be. Therefore, the hermit scene became an integral part of the opera to such an extent that even Kind, who admired Bassi as Don Giovanni, was unable to fully distinguish his memories of his portrayal from the depiction of the character in the adaptation used in Weber’s Dresden production. Hence, he criticised Unzelmann for not portraying Don Giovanni as an ‘egoist hardened into wickedness who does not hesitate the least to buy the satisfaction of his desires with abduction and murder’, and whose sins include ‘murder[ing] a pious hermit quite unknown to him, and in the churchyard at that, merely in order to disguise himself with his cowl’.¹³

Rochlitz, who strove for fidelity to what he thought was Mozart’s dramatic conception, omitted the hermit scene. Instead, he ventured, as he explains in the preface to his translation, to ‘put Don Giovanni in a mood where it becomes at least credible that one invites stone guests to one’s home’.¹⁴ Yet his changes were prompted by the same concerns as the ones underlying Lippert’s: the supernatural punishment had to fit Don Giovanni’s actions. Rochlitz’s solution was, first, to change the mood of his opening soliloquy, removing the laughter, the light-hearted references to the chasing of girls and to Leporello dallying with Donna Elvira. Instead, the seducer speaks at length of his lack of belief in ghosts. Later, when Leporello has joined him, he orders his servant to organise a party, but fearing that the guests might betray him to the police, he exclaims: ‘Ha, I wish I could take you with me, ye white shapes who seem to pace around in the pale moonlight! At least you keep quiet!’¹⁵ It is this act of disrespect – not the attempted seduction of Leporello’s girlfriend – that provokes the statue’s first intervention, which no longer refers to the seducer’s laughter: ‘Verwegner, gönne Ruhe den Entschlafnen!’ (‘Audacious man, let the deceased rest in peace!’). Leporello tells his master not to offend the dead, and even Don Giovanni himself seems less convinced than in Da Ponte that the speaker is a live person. Recognising the statue of the Commendatore, he cries out: ‘Old nitwit, you’ve been commandeered!’¹⁶ It is this insult – not the striking of the gravestones – that provokes the statue’s next intervention, which merely adds emphasis to the protest already made: ‘Verbrecher! Verbrecher! / Gönne Ruhe den Toten!’ (‘Villain, villain, let the dead rest in peace!’). Then Don Giovanni catches sight of the inscription below the statue where the traditional reference to heaven, omitted by Da Ponte, has been restored: ‘Justice sits enthroned above the stars. Behold, murderer, her avenging sword above thy head!’¹⁷ Unsettled by these events, Don Giovanni strives to suppress his growing awareness of the spiritual dimension: ‘But what a fool I am to let myself be driven around by such bogeys!’¹⁸ No longer a joke on Leporello, the

supper invitation is issued in an attempt to silence his own secret fears, Rochlitz translating his aside in the duet as follows: 'Wie er sich dreht und wendet! / Er muss, er muss hieher!' ('How he twists and turns! He must, he must hither!').

This transformation of the scene directly informed Hoffmann's interpretation of the opera. In the second part of his novella, Hoffmann subjects it to two different interpretations, the first one based on a reading of the libretto, and the second one professedly based on a reading of the score. In the libretto, Don Giovanni's supernatural punishment is not sufficiently motivated, Hoffmann thinks, agreeing with the German critics and adapters of his time:

A bon viveur who loves wine and women beyond measure, and who wantonly [*mutwilliger Weise*] asks the stone man, who represents the old father he stabbed in defence of his own life, for his merry supper: truly, not much of poetic value is found herein; and to be honest: such a person hardly deserves that the subterranean powers honour him as an eminent showpiece of hell, that the stone man, animated by his transfigured spirit, bothers to dismount his horse in order to urge him to repent before his last hour, and finally that the Devil sends out his best henchmen in order to prepare the transport to his realm in the most dreadful way.¹⁹

But Mozart's music provides that motivation; and Hoffmann introduced the first Romantic opera aesthetic in the process. In the score, we learn, the hero's behaviour in the graveyard is portrayed differently than it is in the libretto: 'Don Giovanni scoffingly [*höhnend*] invites the image of the old man he stabbed to his merry banquet'.²⁰ In other words, he behaves 'scoffingly' in the score while he behaves merely 'wantonly' in the libretto. In reality, though, Hoffmann would have found that scoffing attitude in performances based on the German translations.

The Rochlitz-Hoffmann conception of the graveyard scene has proven extremely influential. That Da Ponte's seducer takes the mysterious voice for that of a prankster is rarely acknowledged in productions, and commentators tend to insist on his blasphemousness while ignoring the fact that it is the Commendatore who initiates the verbal duel. As a consequence, many of them have inadvertently become advocates of anti-Enlightenment orthodoxy, which they then go on to attribute to Mozart and Da Ponte, even if any treatment of theological matters in the context of an *opera buffa* would have been out of the question in eighteenth-century Prague and Vienna. There is little agreement about the exact nature of Don Giovanni's sin, however. Borchmeyer thinks it is 'Don Giovanni diabolical laughter as a mark of his *superbia* that calls down heaven's judgement on him'; Mila thinks heavenly justice is called for, more generally, because he is blinded 'by his rationalistic sensualism'; Gallarati proposes that it is Don Giovanni calling the speaking statue 'most comical old man' (1163) that 'touches the sphere of sacrilege: it is a sin against the spirit of explicitly libertine origins'; while Goehring maintains that it is the supper invitation that is a 'blasphemous' act, which 'only a degenerate or a Romantic' could commend.²¹ The continued impact of the opera's Romantic performance and reception history is seldom as obvious as here.

As we search for a scenic interpretation truer to Da Ponte and the eighteenth-century *dramma giocoso*, let us start with Don Giovanni's brief soliloquy after he has entered the graveyard. 'What a beautiful night', he exclaims, 'it's brighter than day; it seems made for taking a stroll while chasing girls' (1105–7). Philippi, who may have relied on a story about Bassi's portrayal told by Sandrini-Caravoglia, has the following to say about singers' delivery of these words:

When Don Giovanni enters alone with the exclamation: 'What a beautiful night!' he should speak those words in such a way that the fullest and deepest sympathy with the beauties of nature is apparent. Thus, his demonic soul gains a touching charm, and at the same time we feel relocated, on the wings of imagination, to the heart of Spain. How beautiful it is when the Don Giovanni is able to enliven his exuberant emotion with external expressions as well and to greet and absorb the surrounding area pantomimically!²²

This could well have been one of the moments when Bassi displayed Don Giovanni's 'peculiar and almost buoyant stateliness', as Börner-Sandrini mentioned. Despite the Gothic horror of the setting, the non-superstitious Don Giovanni feels quite at home in the dark.

The Gothic horror would have been enhanced by the trombones accompanying the speeches of the Commendatore: though it has been argued that they are borrowed from church music, they rather seem to evoke the supernatural scenes of modern *opera seria*. Kunze characterises the speeches as a 'paraphrase and a good deal of parody' of oracular scenes like the ones in Gluck's *Alceste* (1767) and Mozart's own *Idomeneo* (1781).²³ Moments such as these are not religious, though they are certainly solemn and eerie. The obvious point of reference for spectators in Prague and Vienna would have been Apollo's oracle in *Alceste* where the mysterious voice also sounds through the mouth of a statue, Mila reminding us that it also predicts the death of the male protagonist.²⁴ But Mozart probably aimed to create an effect similar to that of the subterranean voice of Neptune's oracle in *Idomeneo*. 'Imagine the theatre', he had written to his father from the rehearsals in Munich, 'the voice must be terrifying, it must penetrate; one must believe it to be real'; and later he described how the accompaniment consisting of three trombones and two horns was 'placed in the self-same location where the voice comes from; the entire orchestra is quiet at this point'.²⁵ Clearly, the theatrical effect partly depended on the voice emerging from below the stage. Similarly, in *Don Giovanni*, the effect is enhanced if both voice and accompaniment emerge from behind the statue, as Dent suggests.²⁶ According to Lyser, the accompanying instruments were indeed 'placed on stage, behind the pedestal' in the original Prague production, though it is possible that he took inspiration from the 1836 Dresden production, in which he mentioned that they were 'placed in the floor trap behind the horse, which has a gruesome effect'.²⁷ Much depends on the tempo as well. Tomaschek gives the crotchet of the two Adagio speeches the relatively fast metronome number 69, which tends to make them menacing rather than otherworldly.²⁸

That Giuseppe Lolli, who doubled as the Commendatore and Masetto in Prague in 1787, was visible to the audience in the graveyard scene can be positively excluded: there would have been no time for him to change costumes since he had appeared as Masetto in the previous scene. In other words, he must have been standing behind the pedestal, still wearing Masetto's costume, while the statue's nodding was enacted mechanically.²⁹ The doubling might have had symbolic as well as artistic and practical implications, however: the singer's swift transformation from Masetto – who tried to kill Don Giovanni two hours ago, and who has just tried to kill Leporello – into the (voice of) the statue that announces the imminent death of Don Giovanni would have invited the audience to reflect on the connection between the two characters, adding subtext to the seducer's assumption that the voice belongs to 'someone outside who's tricking us'. In a performance where Masetto and the Commendatore are literally sung by the same voice (even if composer and singer took care to distinguish between the two characters by means of musical style and vocal colour), the non-superstitious Don Giovanni might infer that the voice belongs to Masetto who has come to take revenge for the attempted seduction of Zerlina and for the trick he recently played on him.³⁰

Da Ponte does not spell out that Don Giovanni takes the speaking statue for Masetto hiding among the grave monuments. As always, he leaves it to the audience to figure out what the seducer thinks and feels, and the scenes with the statue are shrouded in ambiguity. But as we shall see, this interpretation is consistent with Bassi's acting in the supper scene, and it may explain why the two characters were invariably doubled in productions connected to the original production. At the Vienna premiere in 1788, the Commendatore and Masetto were doubled by Francesco Bussani, and Lolli is known to have reprised the double role at the 1788 Leipzig premiere. But Guardasoni continued to cast the two characters with a single singer even after Lolli had left the company: they were sung by Antonio Bertini in Leipzig in 1794 and by Felice Angrisani in Prague in 1801, and they were also doubled by Franz Strobach in the Lobkowitz production at Eisenberg in 1808.³¹ The consistency in the double casting is noteworthy because the characters rarely were doubled in other productions during this period. Among the few exceptions were the 1809 Amsterdam premiere and the 1816 Naples premiere, in both of which they were doubled by Michele Benedetti, and the 1817 London premiere and the 1826 New York premiere, in both of which they were doubled by Carlo Angrisani, Felice's brother.³² It may be no coincidence, however, that the Amsterdam Donna Elvira was Teresa Strinasacchi who had sung the same role with Guardasoni's company in the mid-1790s, and that the Amsterdam and London Don Giovanni was her husband, Giuseppe Ambrogetti. This might suggest that Strinasacchi and Ambrogetti were responsible for orally transmitting the tradition for doubling the Commendatore and Masetto, which could explain why Carlo Angrisani had sung the Commendatore but not Masetto in the 1811 Paris premiere while he sang both characters later on.³³ In Italy and Germany, the two characters were mostly (and in Denmark, always) cast individually during the nineteenth century. Thus, when the Austrian bass Franz Dalle Aste sang both of them in Hamburg in 1847, Lyser felt compelled to criticise a Viennese theatre

journal for ‘making sport of Herr Dalle Aste’s reverence for Mozart’, pointing out that the two characters had, in fact, been portrayed by the same singer in 1787.³⁴ It is striking, in this context, how London critics’ initial scepticism regarding Carlo Angrisani’s doubling was gradually overcome. At the premiere, one critic considered it ‘inconvenient and destructive of scenic illusion’, complaining that the singer failed to give ‘the required solemnity and awfulness’ as the Commendatore although his ‘dry comic humor’ as Masetto was praised.³⁵ But the following year, William Hazlitt observed that Angrisani ‘displayed much drollery and *naïveté*’ as Masetto, while he, as the Commendatore, ‘was as solemn, terrific, and mysterious as a ghost should be’; another critic commenting that ‘never was Angrisani more spirited in Masetto, nor more awful in the Ghost’.³⁶ Either Angrisani had to learn to perform the double role effectively, or the critics had to learn to appreciate it as a feat of virtuoso acting.

The use of doubling in *Don Giovanni* may be regarded as a borrowing from seventeenth-century theatre on a par with the Spanish cloaks, the episodic structure of the plot, the genre of revenge tragedy and the supernatural interventions. Quick-change acting and virtuoso doubling in contrasting roles were prominent features of European theatre from the late sixteenth until the mid-seventeenth century when they were gradually abandoned due to the increasing emphasis on scenic verisimilitude and the unity of character promoted by French classical poetics.³⁷ By the late eighteenth century, there were examples within *opera buffa*, however, of the practice being used for comic, meta-theatrical purposes, especially in operas set in ancient Spain or otherwise associated with Baroque drama. Apart from *Don Giovanni*, in fact, the only librettos by Da Ponte that seem to call for doubling are those for *Le nozze di Figaro* and Stephen Storace’s *Gli equivoci* (1786), based on Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors*. In both operas, two singers were required to perform two distinctly different characters each.³⁸ Some recent operatic versions of the *Stone Guest* also called for virtuoso doubling, evoking the seventeenth-century origins of the subject matter: in Giuseppe Callegari’s *Il convitato di pietra*, premiered in Venice in 1777, the *prima buffa* Geltrude Flavis appeared successively as Donna Isabella, the shepherdess Rosalba and Donna Anna, and Bertati’s and Gazzaniga’s *Don Giovanni* was originally preceded by another one-act opera, *Il capriccio drammatico* with music by various composers, in which the same cast appeared as a travelling company about to perform a new *Stone Guest* opera.³⁹ Notably, Bertati had made similar use of the doubling practice in an opera with music by Pasquale Anfossi, *Isabella e Rodrigo o sia La costanza in amore*, premiered in Venice in 1776, which is of particular relevance for the study of *Don Giovanni*, since it was performed by Guardasoni’s company in 1783 and 1784.⁴⁰ A parody of Spanish Baroque drama, *Isabella e Rodrigo* shares several features with *Don Giovanni*, including the nocturnal abduction of a noblewoman, a fearless hero, his timid servant (sung by Ponziani) and a blustering Commendatore who jealously guards his daughter’s honour. The classical unities are blatantly disregarded, Act I taking place in Valencia and Act II in Aden, the change in location coinciding with four of the seven cast members appearing as new characters, all transformed from Spaniards into Arabs. Along with *Le nozze*

di Figaro, this opera would have established the connection between doubling and Spanishness for the Prague audience in 1787.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Da Ponte created a parallel between the maskers who disrupt Don Giovanni's party in the first finale and the statue who disrupts his supper in the second. The parallel also extends to the seducer's manner of inviting the ill-intentioned guests: in Act I, when Leporello eyes the maskers from the window, Don Giovanni orders him to invite them to the ball; in Act II, when Don Giovanni eyes the statue in the graveyard, he orders Leporello to invite it for supper. Raffaelli sees this parallelism as an invocation of ancient ritual practices and folklore where maskers act 'as substitute presences, as vicarious figures of the dead'.⁴¹ But the analogy also allows for an interpretation closer to Enlightenment rationality: a mask is a theatrical device, an image of deception, and the nodding head of the statue is a mask like the ones worn by Don Giovanni's human adversaries, its 'theatrical', 'Baroque' or 'Spanish' nature undermining its moral authority. Indeed, as Baker argues, the many examples of the *contrapasso* that we find in the graveyard scene reflect a purely temporal desire for revenge, unlike in Tirso's play and its later adaptations. Don Giovanni's belief that the mysterious voice belongs to 'qualcun di fuori / che si burla di noi' is a *contrapasso* for Zerlina's lines 'felice è ver sarei, / ma può burlarmi ancor' ('it's true I'd be happy, but he might still trick me', 343–4); while Leporello's terrified comment, 'Ah padron mio, mirate / che seguita a guardar' ('Ah my master, look how he continues to watch us', 1184–5), is a *contrapasso* for Don Giovanni's earlier comment to Leporello, 'oh guarda guarda / che bella gioventù, che belle donne!' ('oh watch out, watch out: what pretty young people, what pretty women!', 254–5).⁴² It is worth noting that it is Masetto rather than the Commendatore who would have taken offence at these 'sins', which further strengthens the hypothesis that Don Giovanni takes the statue for him. As for the ominous 'watching', in fact, this could also be Masetto's retribution for Don Giovanni's threat in Act I: 'Masetto guarda ben, ti pentirai' ('Just watch out, Masetto: you'll repent', 295).

Since Lolli, still dressed as Masetto, clearly was situated behind the statue, the duet that concludes the scene could be regarded as a *contrapasso* for the trio earlier in the Act, moreover, one artful 'stroke' serving as retribution for another. In both numbers, a mischievous trickster is hiding behind a mechanically animated figure – in the trio, the disguised Leporello – whom he lends his voice, singing through it as if were, while he manipulates its physical movements. As in the trio, Don Giovanni forces Leporello to issue an invitation to an adversary, the talking statue's acceptance of the supper invitation serving as a *contrapasso* for the deception of Donna Elvira, which culminated with her acceptance of Don Giovanni's invitation to join him in the street. It may have been the invitation to the statue in the graveyard that inspired Mozart and Da Ponte to devise the theatrical situation of the trio, in fact, the connection between the two numbers highlighting their meta-theatrical dimension and hence the speaking statue's basic illusoriness. Since such an interpretation is incompatible with the widespread view of the statue as a divine authority, it might be worth pointing out that when *Don Giovanni* was first proposed for performance at the Royal Danish Theatre in the season 1803–4, a conservative member

of the theatre commission, the critic Jørgen Kierulf, objected that the opera might promote superstition in the audience, and he insisted that the statue was either omitted entirely or was represented by a disguised friend of Don Giovanni who wants to frighten him. As a consequence, the opera was not produced before 1807, and without these rectifications.⁴³ Yet Kierulf simply defended the rational outlook of the Enlightenment in the Age of Romanticism, and his suggestion may have been closer to the authors' intentions than it immediately appears.

Kierulf does seem to have been insensitive to the grotesque mood of the graveyard scene, however, which is particularly prominent in the duet, and which was highlighted by commentators familiar with Bassi's portrayal. In no other vocal number 'is jest and seriousness as boldly mixed', Wendt declares.⁴⁴ And the Hamburg Critic gave the singer Johann Christoph Gloy as Leporello the following praise: 'far from any scurrility, his acting is truly comical and, to tell the truth, his fear before the tomb of the Commendatore most delightful'.⁴⁵ This fits the very fast tempo Tomaschek recorded, as he gave the crotchet of the Allegro the metronome number 160, which tends to emphasise the playful mood, into which the responses of the statue intervene eerily.⁴⁶ Lyser also states that, although the statue's two interventions 'are indeed shocking', Don Giovanni's 'blasphemous [*sic*], bold invitation drowns them out'.⁴⁷ And he claims that Mozart required Bassi to sing 'almost *parlando*' in the duet until addressing the statue directly with the line: 'verrete a cena?' ('will you come for supper?' 1198). At this point 'Bassi let his voice sound loudly and for a long time', Lyser claiming that the audience at the premiere interrupted the singer with such loud applause that the statue's reply could only be guessed from its nodding.⁴⁸ Whether the last detail is a narrative embellishment or not, the point when Bassi went from comic *parlando* to full-toned singing occurred when Don Giovanni might be assuming that he is addressing his would-be murderer, Masetto. Lyser used this moment, along with Leporello's revelation in the sextet, to argue that Act II 'does not comprise a single tragic moment that is not immediately dissolved again in amusement', implying that the eerie mood of the graveyard scene was dispelled by Don Giovanni's supper invitation.

Notes

1 Goldoni 1960: 216.

2 Willaschek 1996: 227.

3 Baker 2005: 83.

4 Rushton 1981: 53.

5 'det er bedst, at *Tiden* her slet ikke bliver berørt. Et romantisk Skuespil retter sig ikke efter franske Regler om Tidens Eenhed'; Oehlenschläger 1868: 111.

6 In 'Don Giovanni's Indifference', Sisman points out that the structure of Don Giovanni's narration is similar to Donna Anna's narration in Act I: in both accounts, Don Giovanni tries to seduce a young woman who initially takes him for her lover and who cries out when she realises her mistake, after which Don Giovanni takes flight. While Donna Anna's narration ends with the intervention of her father, Don Giovanni's narration ends with the intervention of the statue of her father. Here, again, we recognise the *contrapasso* structure highlighted by Baker.

- 7 See Woodfield 2012a: 182.
- 8 Baker 2005: 97.
- 9 For studies of the scenes inserted into German-language productions, see Oehl 1988; Nedbal 2017a: 183–4.
- 10 Letter to Gustav Friedrich Grossmann of 8 November 1791, in Oehl 1988: 248.
- 11 *AmZ*, 18 May 1803: 576, in Oehl 1988: 261–2.
- 12 *Abendzeitung*, Braunschweig, in Oehl 1988: 262.
- 13 ‘den bis zur Verruchtheit verhärteten Egoisten, der die Befriedigung seiner Begierden durch Mädchenraub und Mord zu erkaufen nicht das mindeste Bedenken trägt, ... der selbst den ihm ganz unbekanntem, frommen Klausner und zwar auf einem Kirchhofe mordet, bloss, um sich mit dessen Kutte unkenntlich zu machen’; *Abend-Zeitung*, 1 August 1822: 732.
- 14 ‘den Don Juan im zweiten Akt in eine Stimmung versetzen zu müssen, wo es wenigstens gedenkbar wird, dass sich Einer steinerne Gäste bittet’; Rochlitz 1801: iii.
- 15 ‘Ha, ich wollte, dass ich euch, ihr weissen Gestalten, die ihr im falben Mondlicht umherzuschreiten scheint, mit mir nehmen könnte! Ihr schweigt wenigstens!’ Rochlitz: 1801: 43.
- 16 ‘Alter Schwachkopf, du hast auskommandirt!’ Rochlitz 1801: 43.
- 17 ‘Über den Sternen thronet Gerechtigkeit. / Sieh ihr rächendes Schwert, Mörder, schon über dir!’ Rochlitz 1801: 44.
- 18 ‘Was bin ich aber für ein Narr, dass ich mich durch solche Popanze eintreiben lasse!’ Rochlitz 1801: 44.
- 19 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 92.
- 20 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 94.
- 21 Borchmeyer 2005: 191; Mila 1988: 223; Gallarati 1994: 197; Goehring 2003: 141.
- 22 ‘Wenn Don Juan in der Einsamkeit auftritt mit dem Ausruf: Wie herrlich ist diese Nacht! da spreche er diese Worte dergestalt, dass die vollste und tiefste Sympathie mit den Schönheiten der Natur daraus hervordringt; seine dämonische Seele erhält dadurch einen rührenden Reiz, und zugleich fühlen wir uns auf den Flügeln der Phantasie mitten in das Herz Spaniens versetzt. Wie schön, wenn Don Juan sein überströmendes Gefühl auch noch durch äussern Ausdruck zu beleben und die Gegend ringsumher mimisch zu begrüssen und aufzunehmen versteht!’ Philippi 1825: 80.
- 23 Kunze 1984: 368.
- 24 Mila 1988: 219.
- 25 Letters to his father of 29 November 1780 and 3 January 1781: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/briefe-dokumente> (accessed on 5 May 2020).
- 26 Dent 1947: 252–3.
- 27 ‘Die 3 Posaunen, 2 Contrabässe und Fagotts ... waren auf der Bühne hinter den Postamenten postirt’; Lyser 1847: 96. ‘die Posaunen, Fagotte und die sechs Contrabässe ... sind in der Versenkung hinter dem Pferde placirt, was eine schauerliche Wirkung macht’; Lyser 1849: 66. The detail was mentioned already in Lyser 1837: 46.
- 28 Fink 1839: 481.
- 29 It is difficult to see how Lolli would even have found the time to place himself behind the pedestal if he did not leave the stage before the commencement of Don Ottavio’s aria, which is addressed to Masetto, Donna Elvira and Zerlina in the Prague libretto. The solution to this problem appears in the Warsaw libretto from 1789, at which point Lolli was still a member of the company. Here a new stage direction has Masetto run after the fleeing Leporello after exclaiming: ‘The rascal has wings on his feet’ (1086). He must have done so already at the Prague premiere, however. It would also be more logical from the perspective of social and scenic decorum if Don Ottavio’s aria is addressed exclusively to the two women, as it would be inappropriate for the peasant Masetto to go and ‘dry the tears’ (1098–9) of the noblewoman Donna Anna. In the 1788 Vienna production, however, there would have been time for Francesco Bussani

- to change costumes (if that was considered preferable), since four new scenes were inserted between Masetto's exit and the graveyard scene.
- 30 The connection between the statue and Don Giovanni's human enemies is musical as well. In his analysis of Mozart's orchestration, Simon Keefe argues that the graveyard duet 'solidifies the association of the Commendatore with a swathe of wind sound, and thus with his fellow Don Giovanni pursuers', since this was also a feature of the *stretta* in the Act I finale; see Keefe 2016: 364.
 - 31 Pešková and Volek 1987: 119; Woodfield 2012a: 222, 226; Jonášová 2015: 23.
 - 32 Da Ponte 1809; Da Ponte 1816; Da Ponte 1817; Müller and Panagl 1991.
 - 33 Castil-Blaze 1852: 321.
 - 34 'Ein hiesiges Blatt ... beging die Bêtise, sich über Hrn. *Dalle Aste*'s Pietät für *Mozart* bei dieser Gelegenheit *lustig* zu machen'; Lyser 1849: 67n.
 - 35 *The Literary Gazette, or Journal of Belles Lettres, Politics and Fashion*, 19 April 1817: 199–200.
 - 36 Hazlitt 1818: 429; *The Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror*, no. 73, August 1818: 137.
 - 37 For my studies of the symbolic implications of doubling in seventeenth-century Venetian opera, see Schneider 2012; Schneider 2014; Schneider 2018c; Schneider, 'Heavenly Masquerades: On Doubling in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*', in *Monteverdi's Venetian Operas: Sources, Performance, Interpretation*, ed. Ellen Rosand and Stefano La Via (forthcoming).
 - 38 For the doubling of roles in these operas by Guardasoni's company in 1793, see Woodfield 2012a: 223–4.
 - 39 For the casts for these operas, see Russell 1993: 230, 384.
 - 40 Woodfield 2012a: 221, 234.
 - 41 Raffaelli 2006: 75.
 - 42 Baker 2005: 91–2.
 - 43 Schwab 2008: 79–82.
 - 44 'In welchem Gesangsstücke ist Scherz und Ernst so kühn gemischt, als in dem Duette *Don Juans* mit dem Bedienten auf dem Kirchhofe?' Wendt 1818: 660.
 - 45 'fern von jeder Possenreisserei, ist sein Spiel ächt komisch und seine Angst bei dem Grabmal des Comthur, der gediegenen Wahrheit halber, höchst ergötzlich'; *Originalien*, 1824, no. 114: 912.
 - 46 Fink 1839: 481.
 - 47 Lyser 1847: 96, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
 - 48 'In dem Duett aus E-dur mit Leporello, behandelte *Bassi* nach *Mozarts* ausdrücklichem Willen seinen Part als Don Giovanni fast parlando ... Bei dieser Stelle: "Venete [*sic*] a cena," liess *Bassi* seine Stimme lang und voll austönen, er wirkte damit in Prag so, dass bei der ersten Vorstellung ein donnernder Applaus ihn hier unterbrach und man die Antwort des Steinbildes nur aus dem Kopfneigen desselben errathen konnte'; Lyser 1847: 97.

7 The second finale

The supper

The second finale, in which Don Giovanni's supper is interrupted by the walking statue of the Commendatore who ends up sending him to hell, is the most complex number of the opera. It is also here that the early German adaptations left their deepest imprint as they generated the conception of the opera as either a Christian morality play or a tragedy of fate. In the original production, however, the scene with the stone guest rather seems to have functioned as an uncanny, and ultimately tragic, incursion into the comic drama. If Don Giovanni represents the spirit of comedy, the stone guest represents the end of comedy, the end of laughter, as he announced in the graveyard.

Along with the duel and graveyard scenes, the supper scene is one of the central scenes of the *Stone Guest* plot, and once more Da Ponte engages critically with the subject matter. Like the two other scenes, this one goes back to Tirso's play where Don Juan and Catalinón arrive, halfway through Act III, at an inn late at night. They both feel anxious. The two waiters, who have been decking the table while complaining that the food gets cold due to the late arrival of the guests, are surprised to see the servant sit down to dine with his master. In the popular *Stone Guest* plays and operas, this rather insignificant scene, which precedes the arrival of the stone guest, was filled with carnivalesque pranks, often including comic, meta-theatrical acknowledgements of the local audience. The festive mood is less pronounced in Molière's comedy, though, where the supper has been transferred to Dom Juan's house. In IV.7, when the master sees his servant gobble a piece of meat from a plate, he comments on Sganarelle's 'swollen cheek', approaching him to cut away the 'growth' with his knife. The servant explains that he merely wanted to see 'if your cook had not added too much salt or too much pepper', Dom Juan threatening that 'I'll deal with you when I've supped'. He then allows the servant to sit at his table, but the footmen keep removing Sganarelle's plates before he can eat.

Retaining Molière's setting of the scene and adding a stage band, Da Ponte and Mozart designed the supper scene as a parallel to the ballroom scene of the first finale, which was set in a hall in Don Giovanni's house as well and also featured three pieces of festive stage music. Da Ponte adopted Molière's routine with the

food theft, but as usual, he showed the seducer in a more sympathetic light: when Don Giovanni sees Leporello stealing a piece of pheasant, he tells him to whistle, and when the servant proves unable to do so with his mouth full the master simply joins him in singing the praises of the cook.

Rochlitz was influenced by Molière's malicious Dom Juan. Don Giovanni's lines 'già che spendo i miei danari, / io mi voglio divertir' ('since I spend my money, I want to have fun', 1240–1) are given as 'Mut im Herzen, Geld im Beutel: / Alles andre ist nur Tand!' ('Valour in the heart and money in the purse: everything else is worthless!'), while Leporello's response, 'Son prontissimo a ubbidir' ('I'm more than ready to serve you', 1242), is turned into a 'vexed' aside: 'O das ist ja wohlbekannt!' ('Aye, that is well-known!'). The master's praise of the wine, 'Eccellente marzimino!' ('What an excellent Marzemino!' 1252), has become a gloating aside referring to Leporello: 'Lüstern sieht das Glas er blinken' ('Covetously, he sees my glass gleaming'). And the concluding praise of the cook, 'Si eccellente è il cuoco mio / che lo volle anch'ei provar' ('My cook is so excellent that he wanted to try him too', 1265–6), has become a corrective to the thieving servant: 'Sucht er wirklich seinesgleichen? / Und entzieht Dich deiner Pflicht?' ('Does he really have no equal? And does that deprive you of your duty?').

In line with these changes, Hoffmann gave the scene a sinister undertone. The supper, characterised by 'sinful gaiety', is set in 'a shallow room with a large Gothic window in the background through which one looked out into the night'.¹ Da Ponte, who set the ballroom and supper scenes in a 'hall', may have intended to set them in the same deep (and brightly lit) stage set, but Hoffmann was clearly inspired by the Kinner-Bolt print from the Breitkopf & Härtel score, which features a large Gothic window in the background through which strokes of lightning can be seen. The narrow room as a scenic image of Don Giovanni's precarious situation became the norm into the twentieth century, as evidenced by Slevogt's 1921 illustration of the scene, in which Don Giovanni, seated in a diminutive dining room, seems almost menacing in his stinginess, stuffing himself while picking on his starving servant.² This joyless image also influenced the conception of commentators who have referred to its 'crude humor' and to Don Giovanni's 'almost sadistic cruelty'.³

One exception is Volek who suggests that Mozart wanted to establish 'a glaring contrast between a merry, unrestrained and almost improvised comic scene and the portentous intrusion of a punishing preternatural power'.⁴ His interpretation is informed by the only one of Lyser's writings of which modern Mozart scholars have been aware, due to its citation by Bitter: the first of his two articles from July 1845 discussed in Chapter 1.⁵ With his translation of the second finale, Lyser had tried to convey the impression of a comic scene full of internal jokes, created in direct collaboration with the original performers, and he later pretended to have heard a story about the performance of the supper scene directly from Bassi. The latter had reacted as follows, he wrote, to the German-language production he saw in Dresden in the 1820s:

'This is all wrong; it lacks the liveliness, the freedom that the great master wanted in this scene. Under Guardasoni, we never sang this number the

same way in two performances. We didn't keep strict time [*strenge gehalten Takt*], but made jokes [*Witz*], always new ones, and only paid attention to the orchestra, everything *parlando* and almost improvised. That was what Mozart wanted'. – This explains a great deal and certainly more than is needed to explain Mozart's departure [in the singing translation] from the notes as they figure in the printed score. Mozart considered everything from the end of the fanfare 'Già la mensa è preparata' [(‘My meal has been prepared’, 1237)] and until the entrance of Elvira an amusing *intermezzo*: the main ideas he had prescribed for Don Giovanni and Leporello, modelled on the *improvised intermezzi* [*improvisirten Intermezzi vorgeschrieben*]. The orchestra forms the fixed point, the *basis!* *On* and *over* that basis Don Giovanni and Leporello must *chat* about whatever comes to their minds, the merrier and the wittier the better.⁶

Four days later the following variation of the story appeared in another Viennese periodical:

Bassi ... told me that this supper scene (from the end of the fanfare to which Don Giovanni enters and until the entrance of Elvira) was Mozart's *improvised* jest, arisen at the *dress rehearsal* before the premiere in Prague. As Da Ponte's text shows, Elvira originally entered right after Don Giovanni sat down to supper with his 'Già la mensa è preparata', but Mozart found at the dress rehearsal that the finale was far too short when compared to the first one, so he *improvised* this musical prank as an *intermezzo*.

As Bassi assured me, this part was always given as an *improvised intermezzo* by him and Ponziani (Leporello), and at almost *every* performance they made *new* pranks and in no way bound themselves strictly to Mozart's prescription, only keeping hold of *time* and *melody*. Mozart expressly demanded that they do this.⁷

A third version of the story appeared in the context of Lyser's *Mozart-Album* in 1856:

As Bassi told me, the delightful supper scene in the second finale of *Don Giovanni*, until Elvira's entrance, stems *entirely* from Mozart, for according to Da Ponte's prescription, Elvira should enter right after Don Giovanni has finished his 'Già la mensa è imbandita [*sic*]' and is about to sit down for dinner. But Mozart wanted to show us the debauchee truly indulging himself once more while parodying two opera composers who were popular in those days, and so he invented the priceless *intermezzo*. Unfortunately, it is not performed in Mozart's spirit nowadays, for today's Don Giovannis and Leporellos are no Bassis and Lollis [*sic*]. These played the scene in a new way in every performance, sustaining an uninterrupted crossfire of improvised jokes, droll ideas and *lazzi*, throwing the audience into the same state

of mirth in which it was Mozart's intention that master and servant should appear to be on stage.⁸

It is not true, obviously, that the supper scene was improvised on Mozart's initiative at the dress rehearsal; though its music was indeed committed to paper in Prague, we find most of the text in the preliminary Vienna libretto. It is also worth noting that Lyser changed the story in the last version: here Mozart no longer inserts the comic scene because the finale turned out to be too short but rather for reasons of characterisation and the desire to parody his colleagues. Moreover, scholars have noted that the anecdote, even if essentially authentic, exaggerates the degree of musical improvisation that is likely to have taken place in the eighteenth century.⁹

On the other hand, certain recurring phrases ('improvised intermezzo' and 'new jokes', the singers' departure from the 'strict time' and 'prescribed' letter of the score) may have derived from an oral tradition Lyser encountered in Dresden. He is likely to have heard the story from Miksch or Sandrini-Caravoglia, though his conception may also have been shaped by his experience of the Dresden production, which incorporated performance traditions that went back to Bassi. The first time he published the story, he added that the late Benincasa as Leporello (whom he heard in 1832) was the only singer who had 'achieved the ideal' in this scene, while Wächter (whom he heard in 1841) was the only Don Giovanni who had 'tried something similar', but both were unsuccessful since Benincasa lacked the right Don Giovanni and Wächter lacked 'an elegant, witty Leporello who would have been able to respond to this idea'.¹⁰ What Lyser does not mention is that Wächter and Benincasa had performed together in the opera in 1828, with Sandrini-Caravoglia as Donna Elvira, and it could well have been the two Italians, both of whom were familiar with Bassi's conception, who had taught Wächter how to perform the scene. It was probably Benincasa, moreover, who inspired Lyser's characterisation of Leporello as a 'good-natured rogue, sensual and hedonistic', and as 'a cowardly but crafty fellow', as well as his emphasis on the 'mannerly roguishness' with which Leporello apologises for his food theft in the singing translation.¹¹ These observations certainly match what we know about Benincasa's portrayal from other sources. In her review of the 1817 Dresden performance, Therese aus dem Winckel referred to 'Leporello's truly comical faintheartedness in all his roguish elegance'; in 1827 another critic noted that Benincasa 'spurned the base jests that other Leporellos venture' in the supper scene; and in 1828 a third remarked that he looked

quite as the servant of *such* a master ought to look, namely jovial – for what is merrier than such a life? Well-nourished – for Don Giovanni is also an epicurean in regard to food and wine, and Leporello is hardly averse to these solid enjoyments either.¹²

The essence of Lyser's anecdote has been widely accepted by Mozart scholars because it is corroborated by philological and historical evidence. Leporello's

announcements of the operatic excerpts performed by the stage band are not found in the Prague libretto, which Lyser could not have known. This supports his claim that they were chosen at a late point, possibly in collaboration with Bassi and Ponziani after Da Ponte's departure from Prague. It is only in Mozart's score that Leporello cries 'Bravi! Cosa rara!' ('Excellent! *Cosa rara*') when the band plays 'O quanto un sì bel giubilo' from the first finale of Martín y Soler's *Una cosa rara*; 'E vivano i littiganti!' ('Long live the *Litiganti!*') when they play Mingone's aria 'Come un agnello' from Giuseppe Sarti's *Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode* (1782); and 'Questa poi la conosco pur troppo' ('And this one I know only too well') when they play Figaro's aria 'Non più andrai farfallone amoroso' from *Le nozze di Figaro*.

Scholars are not in agreement about why Mozart chose to cite exactly these numbers, nor what his attitude towards the other composers might have been. Lyser's opinion, according to which Mozart wanted to satirise Martín y Soler and Sarti, has been shared by many later commentators who have discerned a sarcastic note in Leporello's remark to Don Giovanni that *Una cosa rara* 'is in keeping with your merit' (1244) and who have proposed that Mozart's arrangements for harmony music are deliberate caricatures of the originals. Such verdicts are consistent with the attempts to demonise Don Giovanni by denying his music any charm. The pride that Da Ponte took in the libretto for *Una cosa rara* makes it unlikely that Mozart intended to pour scorn on that opera, however, and Hertz, who reminds us that Mozart was on friendly terms with Sarti, dismisses the idea that the composer deliberately chose to incorporate music of low value into his opera.¹³ Indeed, as Woodfield points out, he had composed piano variations on the Sarti aria some years before, Simon Keefe suggesting that Mozart included a wind band in the finale in acknowledgement of 'the Bohemian fondness for *Harmoniemusik*'.¹⁴

But there are other attempts to provide the scene with a cynical subtext. According to one scholarly tradition, Mozart chose to quote these three numbers because their texts in the source operas can be understood, on a covert intertextual level, as prophetic anticipations of Don Giovanni's imminent downfall. Hertz suggests that Mozart quotes the first finale of *Una cosa rara* because it celebrates the betrothal of Lilla and Lubino, the rustic lovers, despite the designs of a lecherous prince called Giovanni (just as his namesake's designs on Zerlina have been thwarted); the aria of the gardener Mingone because it compares his unsuccessful rival for the hand of the chambermaid Dorina, the servant Titta, to a lamb being led to the slaughter (just as Don Giovanni will soon be killed); and Figaro's aria because it predicts the termination of Cherubino's philandering (just as Don Giovanni's philandering now comes to an end). It is, Hertz argues, as if the creators of the quoted operas 'were wagging a finger at Giovanni through the vehicle of his house band'.¹⁵

The intertextual implications are likely to have been a great deal more light-hearted than that. It was probably no coincidence that Bassi sang the role of Lubino (rather than Prince Giovanni) in the Prague production of *Una cosa rara*, which premiered in the same fall as *Don Giovanni*, while the tune quoted by the stage

band is initially sung by Queen Isabella, a role probably performed by Teresa Saporiti who created the role of Donna Anna in Mozart's opera.¹⁶ As Woodfield notes, this would add an extra layer to an internal joke first explained by Volek: Don Giovanni's line 'Ah che piatto saporito!' ('Ah, what a tasty dish!' 1245), which he sings to this tune, is a pun on the name of the pretty Saporiti who was known for her attractive figure.¹⁷ As Volek argues, the fact that this reference to the 'tastiness' of the Donna Anna was lost after Saporiti left the company explains why Don Giovanni's line was changed in the company's earliest conducting score, where he is made to sing instead: 'E di queste giovanotte / Leporello che ti par?' ('And what do you think of these young women, Leporello?'). Rather than referring to the singer of Donna Anna, in other words, Bassi as Don Giovanni later referred to mute extras Guardasoni added to the scene. We find the same adjustment in the Warsaw libretto, as Woodfield has shown.¹⁸

One of Lyser's stories may contain further hints regarding this tribute to Saporiti. In his 1837 novella, Mozart himself is courting her during the *Don Giovanni* rehearsals, but his vanity is offended when the following comment by the soprano is reported to him: 'I could fall in love with Signor Amadeo, for he is a great man, and therefore I won't be distracted by his unprepossessing figure'.¹⁹ Lyser repeats the story in the 1856 *Mozart-Album*, now in the context of a collection of anecdotes about Mozart's amorous adventures, in which Saporiti's comment is given as follows: 'This Herr Mozart is truly a great man despite his small, unprepossessing figure'.²⁰ Obviously, the story might be Lyser's invention: he seems to have based the description of the composer's appearance on Niemetschek's biography, and the story itself might have been inspired by the 'piatto saporito' in the libretto, although Lyser nowhere associates that line with the name of the soprano.²¹ However, it seems he really was drawing on an authentic anecdote narrated to him by one of his Dresden friends, since Bassi is known to have told a similar story to Stendhal. In the second edition of *La Vie de Rossini* from 1824, the French writer included the following memoir of his encounter with 'the old *buffo* Bassi':

One would mock me if I spoke of the respectful curiosity with which I tried to make this good old man speak. 'Monsieur Mozart', he answered me (what a pleasure to hear someone say Monsieur Mozart!), 'M. Mozart was an extremely eccentric man, very absent-minded, who was not lacking in self-esteem. He had plenty of success with the ladies, though he was short [*de petite taille*]: he possessed a very remarkable figure [*une figure fort singulière*] and eyes that cast a spell on the women'. On this subject, M. Bassi told me three or four little anecdotes that I will not insert here.²²

Bassi's 'three or four little anecdotes', which apparently referred to Mozart's erotic exploits in Prague, seem to have revolved around his height, vanity and attractiveness for women, just like Lyser's story. Of course, inside knowledge of an actual liaison between the composer and the Donna Anna – which could well have been among these stories – would have added a particularly suggestive

subtext both to Don Giovanni's line and to Leporello's reference to his 'barbaric appetite' (1246), reinforced by the quotation of Saporiti's tune from *Una cosa rara*. This would, moreover, further strengthen the identification of the seducer with the composer.

Like the Martín y Soler quotation, the Sarti quotation was probably occasioned by its association with concrete cast members: Bassi sang Mingone (not the 'slaughtered' Titta) in the company's popular production of *Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode* in Leipzig in 1786, and it is possible that he sang the role already at the Prague premiere in 1783 as one of his first principal roles.²³ A further intertextual layer may have been added by the fact that Ponziani sang Titta, the other 'quarreller', while Saporiti sang Dorina. Moreover, if the aria 'Come un agnello' was associated with Bassi's performance in the minds of the original audience, Figaro's aria would have been associated with Ponziani's, as Bitter already pointed out, since he had sung the role to great acclaim in Prague the previous winter.²⁴ Leporello's assertion that he knows the aria 'only too well' could suggest that Ponziani had been compelled to give it *da capo* on several occasions, as it was indeed the local hit number of the opera. In 1798, Niemetschek maintained that 'the songs of *Figaro* echoed through streets and gardens – even the harpist on the ale bench had to sound his "Non più andrai" if he wanted people to listen to him'.²⁵ And according to an anecdote told by the playwright Johann Nepomuk Stiepanek in 1825, Mozart himself had enthralled the local music lovers when he 'extemporised a dozen of the most interesting and artful variations' on the same tune during his piano recital at the National Theatre on 19 January 1787.²⁶ Finally, as Volek has pointed out, Leporello's line 'Si eccellente è il vostro cuoco' ('Your cook is so excellent', 1263), which is sung to this tune, was probably a reference to the harpsichordist of the premiere production, Johann Baptist Kucharz, whose name means 'cook' in Czech, his 'excellent cookery' consisting of the piano reduction of *Le nozze di Figaro* he had published a few months earlier.²⁷

These meta-operatic jokes bring us back to the identification of Don Giovanni and Leporello with the composer and the librettist, which we recognised in the catalogue aria, in the champagne aria and in the disguise episode, and which Herwitz has highlighted.²⁸ Leporello's comment to his master that *Una cosa rara* 'is in keeping with your merit' might be understood as the poet telling the composer that his and Martín y Soler's highly popular opera deserves comparison with Mozart's. Similarly, Don Giovanni's comment on the 'excellent Marzemino!' Leporello pours in his glass might be the composer's comment on Da Ponte's 'aromatic' poetry, as that particular wine is produced in Trentino, an area close to the poet's native region, as Allanbrook points out; and Noiray adds that Don Giovanni's joking description of his servant as 'quel marrano' ('that boor', 1255) might be another reference to Da Ponte's origins: in medieval Spain, *marrano* was a pejorative epithet for a Christianised Jew.²⁹

Just as the audience was invited to Don Giovanni's ball in the first finale, we are invited to his supper in the second finale, but the real host is Mozart whose house 'is open to everybody'. This seems to be the main point with quoting Martín y Soler and Sarti: without any hint of rancour or rivalry, these composer colleagues

are invited into the opera as his guests; they are splendidly served by the local wind players, their presence contributing to the merriment.

The last encounter with Donna Elvira

In Act IV of Molière's comedy, the arrival of the stone guest is anticipated by three visitors to Dom Juan's house who personify various social commitments. The merchant Monsieur Dimanche, who comes to collect his debts, represents the economic obligations of contractual society; Dom Juan's father Dom Louis, who remonstrates with his immoral son, represents the honour culture of the aristocratic family; and the seducer's abandoned wife Elvire, who urges him to repent, the institution of holy matrimony. All three are subject to ridicule and humiliation. Nothing can restrain a man powerful enough to be elevated above the law who has nothing but scorn for the bonds that tie society together. The veiled Done Elvire, whose arrival in scene 6 marks the culmination of the sequence, speaks with inspired eloquence; she has come as heaven's emissary to direct Dom Juan towards the grace of God. 'I am no longer the Done Elvire who swore at you and whose angered soul uttered only threats and breathed only vengeance', she says; all that is left of her love is 'a flame purged of all the commerce of the senses' and she no longer feels bound to him 'by any ties of this world'. When Dom Juan tries to make her stay the night, finding her attractive once more in 'this bizarre new state', she quickly leaves, telling him to consider her message instead.

In his rewriting of Molière's scene, Da Ponte raises doubts about Donna Elvira's motives, however, and about her own awareness of them. In stark contrast to Molière's sublimated Done Elvire, Da Ponte's Donna Elvira enters the stage 'frantically' (1267), just as she had entered with 'most frantic gestures' (352) when interrupting Don Giovanni's attempted seduction of Zerlina in Act I. She wants to give Don Giovanni a last proof of her love, she says; she has forgotten his deceits and only pities him now:

Da te non chiede
quest'alma oppressa
della sua fede
qualche mercé.

(*'My oppressed soul does not ask you for any recompense for its faithfulness'*, 1275–9)

When she falls to her knees and Don Giovanni mimics this gesture, she complains that he scoffs at her pain. He asks her, repeatedly, to tell him what it is she wants, but when she replies that she wants him to change his way of life he simply returns to his supper, inviting her to join him at the table (not to stay the night, as in Molière's play) and proposing a toast to women and wine, 'sostegno e gloria / d'umanità' ('the support and glory of humankind', 1305–6). His refusal to change his ways prompts her to leave after telling the 'barbarian' she hopes he will remain in his 'filthy stench as a horrible example of iniquity' (1295–6). In this

way, Da Ponte leaves it to us to figure out how and why she wants Don Giovanni to change. Since she knows that Don Ottavio plans to have him killed, we might suspect that she wants to save his life – yet unlike Molière’s *Donne Elvire*, she never alludes to the danger the seducer is in. Nor is it clear whether she wants him to return to her or not: her initial claim not to ask for recompense is called into question both by her supplicative gesture and by her outrage when he refuses to comply. One of the very few commentators to have noticed this ambiguity, Dent observes that Donna Elvira

is supposed to have undergone another emotional reaction and to have decided to go back to her convent; but from all that she actually says, Don Giovanni might quite well imagine that she was merely asking him to give up his pleasures in order to settle down to marriage and respectability with herself.³⁰

Dent’s reservation is noteworthy, since his inference that she is *supposed* to have decided to go back to a convent reveals how Molière’s character has been superimposed over Da Ponte’s.

The tendency to behold the scene through the lens of Molière went back to Schmieder who, for the 1789 Mainz production, inserted the scene with Monsieur Dimanche into Neefe’s translation. Together with the ‘hermit scene’, the ‘creditor scene’ remained a stable feature of German-language productions. And though Rochlitz omitted these insertions, he chose to remodel Donna Elvira on Molière’s character. In his translation, Donna Elvira no longer enters the hall ‘frantically’, and it is now clear that she has come to save Don Giovanni:

Hier will ich knien,
Hier will ich weinen,
Dein künft’ges Schicksal
Ängstiget mich.

(‘Here I shall kneel, here I shall weep:
your prospective destiny troubles me’.)

Even more striking is the translation of her final reply, ‘*Che vita cangi*’ (‘That you change your way of life’, 1290), which has become ‘*Ich will nicht Liebe*’ (‘I don’t want love’). Her fury has also been toned down. Her repeated angry exclamation, ‘*Cor perfido!*’ (‘Faithless heart!’ 1291), has been turned into an ardent imploration: ‘*Doch höre mich! Ach, bessre Dich!*’ (‘But listen to me! Ah, improve yourself!’). This chastening of Donna Elvira’s character makes the crudeness of Rochlitz’s Don Giovanni even more odious. His initial response to her accusations, ‘*Io te deridere?*’ (‘Me mocking you?’ 1287), has become ‘*Das klingt ja weinerlich*’ (‘How whiny you sound’), while his final reply omits the supper invitation and instead seethes with sarcasm. In Da Ponte he says simply ‘*Lascia ch’io mangi; / e se ti piace / mangia con me*’ (‘Let me eat; come eat with me if you like’, 1292–4). But in Rochlitz he responds to her call for his improvement as follows:

‘Die schöne Fromme! – Doch eh’ ich komme, / Muss ich geniessen. / Dann will ich sehn!’ (‘Fair, devout lady! Before I come, however, I’ll enjoy myself. Then I’ll think about it!’). ‘Die schöne Fromme’ is German for ‘ma belle dévote’, the cynical seducer Vicomte de Valmont’s nickname for the virtuous Présidente de Tourvel in Pierre Choderlos de Laclos’ novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782), which had been translated into German in 1783. Together with Molière’s play, Laclos’ novel was a point of reference for Rochlitz just as it has been for many later commentators on the opera. Don Giovanni’s toast has also been coarsened: women and wine are no longer the support and glory of humankind; instead, we hear, ‘Ohne sie leben / Lohnt nicht der Müh!’ (‘It’s not worth the effort to live without them!’).

As could be expected, the German translation’s manipulation of the original affected the reception of the scene among German critics. ‘Any idea of a closer connection with Don Giovanni being now out of the question’, writes Jahn, ‘Elvira, feeling also that her own existence is rendered worthless, resolves to enter a convent’.³¹ In Da Ponte’s libretto, it is only after Don Giovanni’s death that she resolves to enter a convent, but Jahn placed that decision earlier in the action, obviously due to Molière and Rochlitz. Moreover, while her ‘passionate emotion is purified and ennobled without any loss of strength or reality’, Don Giovanni’s ‘insolent scorn with which he hardens himself against Elvira’s prayers is more shocking to the feelings than his determined resistance to the horrors of the nether world’, and it is this insolence that ‘calls down upon him the fate to which, now that even Elvira has left him, he is doomed to hasten’.³² Abert, writing more than half a century later, conceived of the scene in similar terms: Donna Elvira ‘has abjured her love of Don Giovanni and intends to retire to a convent, but before she does so, she makes one last attempt to persuade him to repent’.³³ Abert even states explicitly that Da Ponte has taken over ‘the old idea that we found in Molière: so much does she go in fear of her lover’s life that she desires only one thing, to save him from damnation’, to which sacrifice Don Giovanni responds with ‘icy contempt’.³⁴ We find essentially the same conception in the Czimmer-Graf film where Lisa della Casa’s Donna Elvira behaves with great restraint, with little trace of the frantiness called for by the stage directions, while Siepi’s Don Giovanni grabs her by the arm and pulls her towards the table when inviting her to eat with him. His rude brutality fully justifies her concluding diatribe.

But the Molière-Rochlitz conception is even found in commentaries from recent decades. ‘Clearly Elvira has undergone some manner of conversion, or at least a reversion to the training of her girlhood’, writes Allanbrook; ‘she has recognized that the true object of a lover is not to possess the beloved, but to endeavor to bring him into a state of grace’.³⁵ Adhering to Rochlitz’s conflation of Donna Elvira with Done Elvire and Madame de Tourvel and adopting an explicitly Christian perspective, she observes that ‘the fulminations of *la belle Dévote* have found their proper focus, guided by the realization that the believer will always be misled unless in the orders of love she puts God first, not man’; however, the ‘grace of a Christian disciple, which in a well-ordered world should be the ultimate and saving power, loses its efficacy in the face of Giovanni’s

paralyzing aura'.³⁶ Several later critics have subscribed to this quasi-sanctification of Donna Elvira, Raffaelli seeing the scene as 'the last attempt at salvation, which has been entrusted to the love of the faithful Elvira, now purified from earthly slags', and Brown-Montesano maintaining that she has come to him 'to prove that she has forgotten his treachery and cares only about his eternal fate'.³⁷

On virtually all recordings Don Giovanni's phrases in this scene are delivered in an insolent tone, and we find the imprint of this performance tradition in scholarly comments on his individual lines. The extent to which these verdicts reflect what commentators heard in performance appears most clearly from their disagreement about what Mozart's setting of Don Giovanni's supper invitation to Donna Elvira actually expresses. In Allanbrook's opinion, it is 'a trivial waltz tune' that sounds 'cool and detached'; Mila describes it as 'a heavy and vulgar song'; to Kerman, it is 'a piercing, mocking little tune'; and according to Gallarati, Don Giovanni invites her to supper 'in the most vulgar manner possible, adopting a melody that sounds like a kind of street song'.³⁸ To Willaschek, however, the very same passage sounds like 'a gallant minuet tune'.³⁹ Ultimately, the divergence of these interpretations reveals how much power conductors and singers have over musical expression.

Unsurprisingly, the scene seems to have been performed quite differently in Guardasoni's company. Comparing textual variants in the preliminary Vienna libretto, the Prague libretto and the autograph score, Woodfield shows how it was changed at a late stage, probably during rehearsals. 'In general', he concludes, 'one senses a move away from the slightly more burlesque view of Don Giovanni himself in [the Vienna libretto] to a more nuanced characterization in [the Prague libretto]'.⁴⁰ Thus, the stage direction that originally had Don Giovanni receive Donna Elvira 'laughingly' was eventually suppressed, as was the one that made him kneel down before her 'affectedly' – though his line 'Che vuoi, mio bene?' ('What do you want, my love?' 1289) is still delivered 'with affected tenderness'. In Mozart's score, furthermore, Don Giovanni does not fall to his knees before he says 'If you won't rise, I won't remain standing' (1281–2), and when he gets up from the floor, he also 'helps Donna Elvira get up'. These changes fit the anecdotes about Don Giovanni's behaviour towards Donna Elvira in Bassi's performance, Lyser telling a story about his acting in this scene, which is likely to have derived from Sandrini-Caravoglia:

The crowning glory of [Bassi's] portrayal ... was undeniably the last and very difficult scene with Elvira. German singers seem to take a certain pride in treating the poor Donna [*sic*] quite like a dog, so much so that the inclination to mount the stage without further ado and serve the brutal ruffian up there with a sound thrashing might overcome many a civilised man.

Bassi did not for a moment forget the 'galantuomo' [('gentleman', 7)], as Leporello declares him in the opening scene, in his extreme discontent: he never turned his back on Elvira, never bared his teeth fleeringly, never kneeled down and suchlike. Subtly and elegantly, he knew how to extract himself from the situation, as if he considered Donna Elvira far too beautiful and

prudent to think earnestly of wanting to convert a Don Giovanni. Interpreted this way, even the brazen

Vivan le femmine,
viva il buon vino,
sostegno e gloria
d'umanità!

might count as a compliment. Here, the *sentimental-mischievous frivolity* emerged most unambiguously as the essential feature of the character as a whole. 'Devil! Viper!' one might have exclaimed – but it would have been impossible to bear a grudge against the handsome devil, the brilliant viper.⁴¹

It is noteworthy that Lyser focused on the laughing and kneeling in this scene, since these actions were subject to changes of which he could not have known but which may have been central to Bassi's portrayal. Though it is hardly true that Bassi did not kneel at all, this lends a certain credibility to the general point of his story. After all, Lyser's point of reference was the 1814 Dresden libretto, in which that stage direction is missing. More importantly, his description agrees with Börner-Sandrini's story about Bassi's Don Giovanni always treating Donna Elvira with 'chivalrous charm'. The seducer's ironic exclamation, 'Brava!' ('Very good!' 1291), may have been one of the 'appropriate moments' where he exhibited 'a certain impatience, which is always suppressed, to be sure, as quickly and prudently as possible'.

Another anecdote about the original production probably refers to a later moment in this scene, though it ostensibly refers to the ballroom scene in the first finale. This is the famous story told by Stiepanek in the preface to his Czech singing translation from 1825:

Mozart personally coached his opera to all of the ... members [of the cast]. During the first rehearsal in the theater, Signora Bondini, in the role of Zerlina, could not, even after several run-throughs, scream properly at the appropriate moment at the end of the first act when Don Juan is grabbing her. Mozart therefore stepped out of the orchestra, started another repeat [of the scene], and when the moment came, he grabbed her vigorously – so that she, in her shock, screamed; but he praised her for it, this was correct, and that is how she needs to scream.⁴²

If accurate, this story would strengthen the view of Don Giovanni as a sexual assaulter, but it seems that it originally referred to Donna Elvira in Act II, not to Zerlina in Act I. Although Zerlina's twice-heard exclamation 'Scellerato!' ('Villain!', 737) is described in the stage direction as a 'scream', it is a sung word nonetheless. And even if Mozart encouraged the soprano to add an unannotated scream, it is hard to see why he would then attach such importance to its forceful delivery. Donna Elvira, on the other hand, really emits an annotated

A-flat scream ('Ah!', 1307) when she runs into the stone guest after leaving Don Giovanni's house. Not only is this described in the stage direction as 'a horrible scream', it even elicits a double reaction from Don Giovanni and Leporello: 'What a scream that was!' (1308). Leporello who goes to examine the matter then 'emits an even louder scream', Don Giovanni reacting with the comment 'What a frenzied scream!' (1309). In other words, there are good dramatic reasons why Donna Elvira had to 'scream properly'.⁴³

To these dramaturgical reflections, we may add some observations on the transmission of the story. Stiepanek, who worked at the Estates Theatre in Prague, clearly drew on local anecdotes. He must have heard the stories about Mozart's concert at the theatre in January 1787 and about the *prima vista* performance of the *Don Giovanni* overture on 29 October from members of the orchestra, some of whom were old enough to have played on these occasions. Two other stories, however, which concern Mozart's comments on vocal performance, are more likely to have been narrated by the singer to whom they were made, though they may have reached Stiepanek through an intermediary. Apart from the story of the scream, he includes a story about the female singer M** who received praise from the composer during the performance of *Le nozze di Figaro* on 14 October 1787 after she 'frowned at him, because [she felt] he was rushing her' in her aria.⁴⁴ As Woodfield shows, this singer must have been Caterina Micelli who is known to have sung Cherubino with Guardasoni's company – and who was also the original Donna Elvira.⁴⁵ The copresence and similarity of the two anecdotes enhance the likelihood of both of them having been narrated by Micelli, as does the fact that she remained in Prague much longer than Caterina Bondini. While the latter seems to have left the city already in the fall of 1789, Micelli was still in the company in 1798, at which point she and Luigi Bassi were the only original cast members of *Don Giovanni* left in Prague.⁴⁶ Since the Mozart cult was on the rise in these years, people are more likely to have been interested in stories about the singers' collaboration with the composer than they would have been ten years earlier when he was still alive. While the confusion of the screams of Zerlina and Donna Elvira may have been caused by Micelli's possible assumption of the role of Zerlina after Bondini's retirement from the stage in 1788, it is symptomatic of the later transformation of the seducer into a rapist that the oral tradition transferred Donna Elvira's 'horrible scream' to Zerlina.⁴⁷

As Allanbrook has argued, however, they are connected. Donna Elvira's scream 'is the chromatically heightened counterpart of Zerlina's [exclamation] in the first-act finale, even to the use of the same A-flat, now as the top note of a darker chord', and whereas Don Giovanni in Act I

dragged forth Leporello at the surprise appearance of his *buffa* key, F major, to answer the D-minor dominants of the company, here at the same confrontation of D minor and F major Leporello enters self-propelled, by his fear of the specter who wants to attend the feast.⁴⁸

Allanbrook describes the sequence of musical events in Act II as a 'parody' of the corresponding sequence in Act I. But the offstage scream and Leporello's horror

are more intense, more frightening and serious in Act II; they are better explained as examples of how Mozart translated the libretto's *contrapasso* structure into musical terms: the terror of the second finale is an exaggerated retribution for the terror Don Giovanni caused in the first finale. Leporello's scream is 'indivolato', Don Giovanni exclaims, i.e. it sounds like the screams of the damned. As for the servant's incoherent and terrified description of the approaching statue, which most singers deliver in a broad *buffo* manner even today, physically imitating its heavy footsteps on 'Ta ta ta ta' (1317), Lyser maintained that this passage was 'more horror-inspiring than comical' when sung by Benincasa in Dresden, and that only 'the buffoonish banalisation by the ordinary Leporellos' makes it ridiculous.⁴⁹ Indeed, it is the offstage screams and Leporello's narration that announce the end of laughter and prepare the audience for the terrifying spectacle of Don Giovanni's agony and death.

Don Giovanni and the stone guest

In Tirso's Counter-Reformation drama, Don Juan emerges as the embodiment of spiritual arrogance when historical verisimilitude gives way once and for all to medieval folklore in the stone guest scene. The trickster is disturbed when he first sees the walking statue of Don Gonzalo, but he soon collects himself and treats it with cool nonchalance, while Catalinón reacts with comic fear. Don Juan says they have food enough if others should join them, scolds his servant for fearing the dead and asks the musicians to entertain the guest with a song. When the latter, who sits down at the table without eating, invites him back to the chapel, Don Juan shakes his hand in acceptance of the re-invitation. Only after the stone guest has left is he struck with fear; he describes how his heart froze and how he had a vision of hell while holding the statue's hand. Determined not to be deemed a coward, however, he goes to the chapel the following night together with Catalinón; here they are served a macabre supper of scorpions, vipers, fingernails, gall and vinegar. When the statue of Don Gonzalo asks him to shake its hand, Don Juan agrees, but he is then told his last hour has come and he must face eternal damnation for his crimes. He calls for absolution, but it is denied him. Feeling the fires of hell, he drops dead and, amid much noise, sinks into the ground along with the tomb and the statue.

In Cicognini's adaptation, we find a number of changes and additions that remained stable features of *Stone Guest* plays and operas throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Retaining the basic outline of the Spanish original, he gave the whole a grotesque colouring. Don Giovanni receives the stone guest with comic civility, while Passarino hides under the table. And when invited to eat, the stone guest replies with what became a recurring maxim in Italian adaptations: 'He who is without mortal life does not need earthly food' (III.5). One fundamental difference between Tirso and Cicognini is that the villain no longer calls for absolution. On the contrary, it is the stone guest that three times urges him to repent ('Pentiti'), which he ignores, simply telling the statue to let go of him until he is swallowed by the ground. The final scene then shows Don Giovanni tormented by the Furies in hell.

The supernatural scenes were repeatedly condemned by critics for their breaches of propriety and verisimilitude and their perpetuation of primitive superstitions. Already Molière's treatment of the supper scenes is parodic: by condensing them to a bare minimum, he exposes the absurdity of the stone guest as a dramatic device. Seventy years later Goldoni objected to the infernal scene where 'the whole audience, alive and healthy, travel to the Devil's abode in the company of the protagonist: mixing terror with laughter, it saddens the most devout and causes the disbelievers to scoff'.⁵⁰ And the prominent Viennese Enlightenment writer Joseph von Sonnenfels, a friend and patron of Mozart, poured ridicule on the 'sausage skins at Don Juan's funeral banquet' that the audience was asked to take for 'asps and snakes, the favourite dish of the dead', and also on the walking statue that assumes the role of a 'spiritual police'.⁵¹

While Da Ponte's version of the stone guest scene contains most of the stock features, a detailed comparison reveals how he diverged from the tradition, toning down the grotesque humour and darkening the mood: unlike previous servant figures, Leporello does not joke that he has lost his appetite when the stone guest enters; and Da Ponte's Don Giovanni does not tell the band to play for the visitor. Yet commentators do not agree on how we should interpret his behaviour. While Rushton maintains that Don Giovanni is 'forced to believe what is happening' when confronted with 'this terrible apparition of divine justice', Gallarati argues, referring to the naturalness of the seducer's musical declamation, that he treats the stone guest as 'a real and living guest', just as he thought the voice in the graveyard belonged to a human prankster.⁵² The latter view accords with Da Ponte's omission of the traditional religious references, a tendency we saw already in the graveyard scene. In fact, the Commendatore's only reference to heaven occurs in Da Ponte's rewriting of the classic dietary maxim, which has become: 'He feeds not on mortal food who feeds on heavenly food' (1334–5). This stands out due to the lack of any mention of the theological heaven or hell at the climax of the action. That the stone guest is not actually divine is also suggested by the way it conceals its real intent behind a false re-invitation, even if this deception is a *contrapasso* for the seducer's various deceptions, as Baker points out.⁵³ Later, whereas Bertati's stone guest urges Don Giovanni with the words: 'Pentiti, e temi il cielo' ('Repent, and fear heaven', scene 24), Da Ponte's tells him: 'Pentiti, cangia vita' ('Repent, change your way of life', 1358), replacing religious piety with an echo of Donna Elvira's exhortation in the previous scene, 'Che vita cangi', which was prompted by equally ambiguous motives. Indeed, echoes of earlier moments in the action suggest that the statue's motive remains personal revenge, as its pedestal announced; hence its 'Pentiti' ('Repent', 1364) is set to a descending octave like the Commendatore's 'battiti' ('fight', 28), as Sisman points out.⁵⁴ That Don Giovanni never acknowledges that his punishment is divine appears from his last lines before he dies:

Da qual tremore insolito
sento assalir gli spiriti?
dove escono quei vortici

di foco pien d'orror?

...

Chi l'anima mi lacera?

chi m'agita le viscere?

che strazio, ohimè, che smania!

che inferno! che terror!

(‘What is this strange tremor that assails my spirit? Wherefrom come these fiery whirlwinds filled with horror? ... Who lacerates my soul? Who shakes my entrails? What torment, alas, what turmoil! What a hell! What terror!’; 1366–9, 1372–5)

Replacing the onstage chorus of Furies, which was a stable feature of Italian *Stone Guest* plays and operas, with a subterranean chorus, Da Ponte and Mozart cast further doubt upon the identity of Don Giovanni’s executioners. He never identifies his torments as those of the theological hell, only as ‘a hell’, the anonymity of his tormentors serving as a *contrapasso* for his own anonymity when he entered Donna Anna’s house: ‘You shall not know who I am’ (15). This undercuts Don Ottavio’s later claim that Don Giovanni’s enemies have been ‘avenged by heaven’ (141). ‘On the eve of the Revolution’, Baker argues, ‘the stone guest does not ring true as a bringer of divine retribution; his supernatural aspect serves rather as a figure of the superior force of the social group over the sum of the individuals who are its members’.⁵⁵

This critical treatment of the stone guest got lost very early on in the opera’s performance and reception history. Already in the Neefe-Schmieder translation, he is described in the stage direction as ‘Don Pedro’s ghost’. A borrowing from Marinelli’s play, this hints that the visitor is a veritable traveller from the undiscovered country of the dead, an embodiment of the protagonist’s guilty conscience on a par with the ghosts in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Indeed, as Goehring has shown, there was a German tradition for associating the stone guest with the ghosts of Shakespearean tragedy.⁵⁶ This ‘spectral’ view of the stone guest was taken over by Rochlitz who, in 1798, had referred specifically to *Don Giovanni* when praising Mozart’s ‘Shakespearean, omnipotent power for the grand, the magnificent, the terrifying, the monstrous, the staggering’.⁵⁷ In his singing translation, the stone guest is described as ‘the Governor’s ghost’, Rochlitz also introducing the theological heaven and hell into the libretto, perhaps partly in an attempt to make the scene more Shakespearean.

Reimagining Don Giovanni as a Shakespearean villain (we have already seen how Kunze’s association of the trio with a scene in *Richard III* is indebted to Rochlitz) meant identifying him with the arrogant blasphemer of the early seventeenth century – in effect, re-mythologising the critical rewriting. When the stone guest enters, Da Ponte’s seducer reacts politely but with surprise: ‘Non l’avrei giammai creduto, / ma farò quel che potrò!’ (‘I’d never have thought that, but I’ll do what I can!’; 1328–9). In Rochlitz, however, he responds ‘scornfully’ with lines that betray no surprise: ‘Nun, so lasst Euch freundlich dienen: / Ihr seid

herzlich gern gesehn' ('Well, then let me kindly serve you: I welcome you most cordially'). After Da Ponte's stone guest has declined to eat and Don Giovanni asks why it has come, it replies equivocally, at no point denying that it seeks revenge: 'Altre cure più grave di queste / altra brama quaggiù mi guidò!' ('I was led down here by graver concerns, by another craving!', 1336–7). Like his Donna Elvira in the preceding scene, however, Rochlitz's ghost immediately makes clear that its craving is purely spiritual: 'Weit, weit, weit führt mich her meine Strasse: / *Heilige Labung* versage mir nicht!' ('My road leads me here from far, far, far away: do not deny me a *sacred refreshment!*'). Rochlitz's most radical departure from the original, however, is his omission of the deceptive re-invitation:

Tu m'invitasti a cena,
il tuo dovere or sai.
Rispondimi: verrai
tu a cenar meco?

('You invited me for supper; you know your duty now. Answer me: will you come to sup with me?', 1344–7)

Since God's emissary cannot be deceitful, Rochlitz instead made the ghost suggest to Don Giovanni that it has come to invite him to heaven in the hour of his death:

Dort von den Sternenhöhen
Stieg ich, vor Dir zu stehen!
Ach, höre mich! Du wirst bald
Mit mir gehen –

('I have descended from yon starry heights to stand before you! Ah, listen! You shall soon come with me...')

In line with this change, the repetition of the stone guest's question, 'Verrai?' ('Will you come?', 1352), has been turned into a summons: 'Bereuen –' ('Repent...'), and Don Giovanni's affirmative, 'Ho fermo il core in petto' ('My heart is firm in my chest', 1353), into a disdainful dismissal of the ghost's spiritual mission: 'Hinweg mit Frömmeleien!' ('Away with those pieties!'). The enormous impact of Rochlitz's radical recreation is best illustrated, perhaps, by the fact that Till, writing in 1992, maintains that Don Giovanni is invited 'to accompany the Statue back to heaven' but refuses when he learns 'that the price is repentance of his sins'.⁵⁸ Da Ponte simply provides no basis for such a reading – but Rochlitz does.

Since Rochlitz's Don Giovanni is aware of talking to a ghost, the handshake is less of a shock than in Da Ponte. In the Italian original, he 'cries out loudly' (1356) when taking the stone guest's icy hand; in Rochlitz he is merely 'shuddering'.⁵⁹ In Da Ponte, the stone guest suddenly commands Don Giovanni to change his ways, 'Pentiti, scellerato!' ('Repent, villain!', 1362), which the latter angrily refuses to

do: 'No, vecchio infatuato!' ('No, old dotard!', 1363). In Rochlitz, however, the ghost stays true to its stated intention, urging Don Giovanni to beg for absolution, 'Nieder in Staub, und bete –' ('Down on your knees and pray...'), the seducer responding with an outbreak of scornful misogyny: 'Die Weiber lehr' Gebete –' ('Teach prayers to women...'). In his dying moments, this Don Giovanni does not describe his torments at the hands of invisible executioners, as he does in Da Ponte, but rather the visual spectacle of hell, and with a direct borrowing from Tirso he then prays to God for final absolution:

Ha! welche Schlünde öffnen sich!
Geister umschwirrn mich fürchterlich!
Wer rettet mich? Wer rettet mich?
Dort gähnt ein offnes Grab!
...
Er fasst, er reisst mich schrecklicher!
Erbarme Dich, Allmächtiger!
Erbarme Dich! Erbarme!
Nur kurze, kurze Frist!

(‘Ah, what abysses open before me! Dreadful ghosts swirl around me! Who’ll save me? Who’ll save me? An open grave is gaping there! ... He seizes and tears me horribly! Have mercy, Almighty One! Have mercy, have mercy! Just a brief, brief respite!’)

The meaning of Leporello’s lines at the end of the scene has also been changed considerably. In Da Ponte, he gives expression to his terror at the sight of the suffering Don Giovanni:

Che ceffo disperato!
che gesti da dannato!
che gridi, che lamenti!
come mi fa terror!

(‘What a despairing face! What gestures like the damned! What cries, what laments! How it fills me with terror!’, 1376–9)

But Rochlitz replaced this sympathetic emotional reaction with moralism:

Wie fasst es ihn aufs Neue!
O – Weh, zu später Reue!
Kommt her und schauet bebend –
Schaut, was Verzweiflung ist!

(‘How it seizes him once more! Alas, he repents too late! Come here and behold with awe – behold what despair is like!’)

Rochlitz's translation of the servant's narration in the final scene also shows that his scenic conception of Don Giovanni's death marked a partial return to the infernal spectacle of the Italian *Stone Guest* tradition, restoring the onstage Furies that Da Ponte and Mozart had placed under the stage floor. In Da Ponte, Leporello's speech ends as follows:

giusto là sotto...
diede il gran botto...
giusto là il diavolo
sel trangugiò.

(‘right down there... there was a mighty crash...
right there the Devil gobbled him up’, 1402–5)

Clearly, in this case, the ‘Devil’ that ‘gobbled him up’ refers to the trapdoor through which Don Giovanni disappears. The gaping mouth of hell is the *contra-passo* for his sexual appetite, the seducer having previously told Leporello that women ‘per me / son necessarie più del pan che mangio, / più dell’aria che spiro!’ (‘are more necessary to me than the bread I eat, than the air I breathe’, 794–6).⁶⁰ This image is lost in the German version:

Schreckliche Larven
Kamen und warfen
Ihn in ein offenes
Glühendes Grab –

(‘dreadful spectres came and tossed him into an open
fiery grave...’)

Hoffmann, who faithfully follows Rochlitz's lead in this scene, leaves no doubt either that the stone guest represents divine judgement. He depicts it as fantastically oversized, taking over Rochlitz's onstage spectres that toss Don Giovanni into the abyss:

to the dreadful chords of the subterranean spirit world enters the enormous marble colossus, next to which Don Giovanni looks like a pygmy. The ground quakes under the giant's thunderous footsteps. – Don Giovanni shouts his dreadful ‘No!’ through the storm, through the thunder, through the howling of the demons. The hour of his doom has come. The statue disappears, dense smoke fills the room, from which dreadful spectres emerge. Don Giovanni, who can be spotted now and then among the demons, is writhing in the torments of hell.⁶¹

Later in the story, Hoffmann's narrator interprets the scene as follows:

the transfigured ghost, who now sees through the fallen man and grieves for him, does not refrain from assuming a fearful guise and exhorting him to

repent. But [Don Giovanni's] mind is so depraved, so torn that even the bliss of heaven throws no ray of hope into his soul that might kindle in him the desire for a better existence!⁶²

In line with the German *Stone Guest* tradition, Hoffmann refers to the visitor as a 'ghost'. The omission of the deceptive re-invitation, however, and the ghost offering divine salvation because it 'grieves for' Don Giovanni are borrowed directly from Rochlitz. From early on, Rochlitz's conception was also projected onto the Italian original, as appears from the 1814 Dresden libretto where the Furies appear on stage, the scene even changing to a 'horrid dungeon with torrents of fire' before the seducer is 'tossed into the fiery cave'. Though Dent had some reservations regarding the prevailing conception of the scene – insisting that 'the figure of the Commendatore is not an intangible ghost, but the actual solid marble statue (minus his horse) out of the cemetery' – even he was unable to liberate himself from the German tradition. 'The devils rise from the depths', he writes, echoing Rochlitz; 'they seize [Don Giovanni], they drag him down as he utters his last cry of agony'.⁶³ The scene is also performed this way in the Czinner-Graf film. Here Don Giovanni drops the candelabrum in horror the moment he sees the stone guest; he looks guilt-ridden when the latter says 'another craving' than mortal food has induced him to come (as if this was the 'sacred refreshment' requested by Rochlitz's ghost), and he is chased around the stage by the Furies who eventually toss him into the pit. The only real change that occurred between Rochlitz and the twentieth century is that the stone guest scene, in line with the new secular worldview, came to be understood more in Nietzschean terms than in those of Romantic Catholicism. Abert, for example, combines a Nietzschean attitude with the Romantic myth of Mozart as fundamentally non-intellectual:

The battle that is fought out in the second-act finale is not between good and evil, but between two sublime realities, the weaker of which is finally overcome. The concept of radical evil is unknown to the wholly unphilosophical Mozart, and so he does not judge his hero and the latter's actions by some moral ideal but feels very clearly that a power as real as Don Giovanni's life force can be defeated only by a more powerful reality: one demon can be conquered only by another. In short, the work is not about guilt and retribution but simply about being and non-being, and the overwhelming tragedy of the conclusion rests on the grandeur and terror of the action as such, not on the triumph of moral laws over the world of appearances. It is the most authentic Renaissance spirit that finds expression here, a spirit that emerges completely logically from Mozart's view of the world, a view that measures reality by its own terms alone, not by any philosophical laws that lie outside it.⁶⁴

To the German modernists in the years after 1945, however, the amoral figure of the Nietzschean superman was too contaminated by Nazi ideology to serve as an acceptable framework for understanding *Don Giovanni*. Studying the opera

in the light of eighteenth-century bourgeois drama rather than of some vague 'Renaissance spirit', Bitter argued that the Commendatore is the 'representative of the divine' just as Donna Elvira is the 'representative of human society', the social order being ultimately the 'silhouette' of the divine order.⁶⁵

But as the Commendatore has accepted the invitation and ... comes to Giovanni as an admonisher, not as an avenger, he offers him the possibility of repentance. He is exempt from eternal damnation if he changes his way of life. He can obtain grace before his time is up. The punishment that inevitably must befall Don Giovanni, since he has placed himself beyond the human and divine order, is suspended once more through the appearance of the Commendatore; it is deferred to him.⁶⁶

Though attempting to dismantle the Romantic interpretation of Mozart's opera, Bitter ended up with a reading of the stone guest scene strongly reminiscent of Rochlitz's translation, as discussed in the introduction. In his eagerness to construe the statue as a bringer of divine and social justice, he was induced to ignore not only its deceitfulness (the false re-invitation) but also its vengefulness (announced on the pedestal). We find the same line of interpretation in Losey's film, though the stone guest does not offer the possibility of repentance here; somewhat anachronistically, he is rather the embodiment of the Revolution that wipes out Don Giovanni as the embodiment of *l'ancien régime*. This is hinted at in the final moments of the film, which has the seducer's enemies rejoice in his death while standing aboard gondolas at sea, evoking the notorious phrase sometimes attributed to King Louis XV: 'Après moi, le déluge'. Bernard Williams gave voice to a similar interpretation a few years later when describing the stone guest as 'a terrible and unforeseen natural consequence of Giovanni's recklessness'.⁶⁷

One of the fundamental problems with this interpretation is that Enlightenment writers saw the stone guest as the most preposterous dramatic device imaginable, and hence as the very opposite of a 'natural consequence'. Kurt Bayertz, who has returned to the issue thirty years after Williams, is more alert to this problem. Situating the opera in the context of the eighteenth-century reception of the *Stone Guest* plays, he rightly dismisses the notion that the walking statue could have been perceived by its original audience as either a Christian symbol or as an emblem of the secular Enlightenment – yet he is unable to come up with a believable alternative. Combining Abert's view of Mozart as 'wholly unphilosophical' with a postmodern refusal to distinguish between high art and popular entertainment, he argues that the decision to retain the walking statue 'was not based on any philosophical, ideological, socio-critical or political motives but on the will to success'.⁶⁸ Whereas commitment to the Enlightenment project had induced Goldoni to get rid of the grotesque device, Da Ponte and Mozart did not really care, Bayertz suggests, 'as for them it was more a question of the punishment itself than of the authority that causes it'.⁶⁹ This image of the creators of *Don Giovanni* as artists operating in a vacuum, oblivious to the cultural significance of their subject matter and indifferent to the concerns of the world

around them, inevitably reduces one of the most complex operas of all time to a piece of shallow entertainment no better than the opera by Bertati and Gazzaniga. Inadvertently, Bayertz's conclusion therefore exposes the contradiction inherent in today's reception of *Don Giovanni*: as Baker points out, taking the stone guest at face value is to disregard the status of the *Stone Guest* plays in the late eighteenth century, and to regard Don Giovanni's punishment as justified by the preceding action is to misconstrue the libretto.

It is also to misconstrue the musical expression. In an otherwise insightful study of the second finale, Allanbrook sees the pervasive reminiscences of Baroque music in the scene as proof that the stone guest is a divine emissary. But her argument does not stand up to closer scrutiny:

the elements which are combined [in the stone guest scene], and the new organism which they become, are intended to seem relentlessly 'old.' Thoroughly antique in tone, the section uses the preluding fantasy, the Venetian trombones, and the chaconne bass and cadence, mimics the monoaffective habits of Baroque composition and its solar key scheme, and closes the whole with the *tierce de Picardie*, which in provenance reaches back to the Renaissance theory of ratios. ... Furthermore, many of these antique elements have actual ecclesiastical references – ... and those which have no direct connection with the divine or theological suggest it merely by being old-fashioned (to Classic musicians the *stile antico* was virtually synonymous with the *stile ecclesiastico*). Thus in the archaic musical style of the section lies its meaning: there can be no question that Giovanni's punishment is no mere vendetta, that the 'swift sword' is divine.⁷⁰

Surely, the virtual synonymy of the *stile antico* with the *stile ecclesiastico* rather suggests the opposite of what Allanbrook claims: to eighteenth-century ears, these remnants of traditional church music did not mean 'divine' but rather, as she initially suggests, 'relentlessly "old"'. And 'old', in the dramatic context, means simply reactionary. As she goes on to explain, the old-fashionedness of the stone guest's music was no longer perceived as such in the nineteenth century, whereas the 'Judgment-Day tone and reference' were preserved.⁷¹ This tendency persists, we might add, and helps explain why critics and directors from Bitter onwards have gone as far as interpreting the stone guest as a herald of 'enlightenment' or 'revolution', though this hardly matches the archaism of his music. Steinberg is more to the point when describing the stone guest as 'the personification of a petrified culture': the culture of the Baroque.⁷²

Even if we were to accept that the echoes of church music are meant to create an actual religious mood (something unthinkable in the context of a Josephine *dramma giocoso*, as discussed earlier), seeing the stone guest as a bringer of Christian grace or as a restorer of social harmony is incompatible with another aspect of his music. 'Without denying any of the music's grandeur, I suggest we acknowledge the radical negativity of its emotion', Baker urges, observing that the stone guest's music 'has the very sonority of hatred'.⁷³ This goes well in hand with a characteristic that other writers have pointed to: his music is really

a kind of anti-music. Keefe has described ‘musical strength’ as Don Giovanni’s ‘principal character attribute’, refuting Allanbrook’s famous description of him as a ‘No-Man’, and suggesting that the audience might feel for the ‘musically disempowered’ seducer when he is undone in the second finale.⁷⁴ In contrast, according to Ford, the stone guest is sometimes

announced by massive diminished seventh chords, and at other times by a bare throbbing in the lower strings. Sometimes his lines are grotesquely angular, whilst at others they are reduced to held white notes. Two of his melodies are particularly dissonant.⁷⁵

There are passages, moreover, ‘that are harmonically almost indecipherable, and which, as a consequence, would have been off the edge of what was considered to be “music” in Mozart’s time’.⁷⁶

This goes to the heart of the matter. Combining the antiquated with the transgressive, the composer was able to portray, by musical means, a character that is basically anti-musical. In Mozart’s world, music meant beauty, and the beautiful is good by definition. Since all human beings have beauty and goodness in them, they have music in them. All Mozart’s villains – Elettra, Osmin, Count Almaviva, Vitellia, Monostatos, the Queen of the Night – are musical because they are human. The stone guest is the only exception: he is anti-musical because he is inhuman, because he is made of stone. If we assume that he represents an order – a theological order, a social order – we must therefore assume that this was an order for which Mozart had no sympathy, as it negates music and beauty. Under no circumstances does the statue of the Commendatore offer divine grace to Don Giovanni. Rather, as Pirrotta has observed, his music ‘conveys his icy inflexibility and the horror that emanates from him’.⁷⁷

This was the way the first audiences experienced the scene. When Constanze von Nissen, Mozart’s widow, was interviewed by Vincent and Mary Novello in 1829, she mentioned how the stone guest’s music ‘made one’s hair stand on end’.⁷⁸ Tomaschek described the scene exactly the same way, remembering that ‘my hair stood on end with horror’ in the stone guest scene when he first heard *Don Giovanni* performed by Guardasoni’s company.⁷⁹ And according to Wendt, nothing ‘is more harrowingly spooky’ than the singing of the stone guest.⁸⁰

The effect of horror depends, to a higher extent than is usually recognised, on the tempo. Gallarati has argued that the breve ‘bestows on the declamation of the Commendatore a strange slowness that perfectly expresses the creepy phenomenon of the speaking statue’.⁸¹ Yet the scene is traditionally performed at such an extremely slow pace, unwarranted by *Andante* as a tempo marking, that it affects the musical expression fundamentally. Leibowitz is one of the few modern commentators to have reacted against this trend:

The deficiency of the interpretation of the tempo of this section is absolute, as we can observe in nearly all performances of *Don Giovanni*. Already in the overture, it is customary to turn the tempo marking *Andante* in C into a heavy

Adagio in four beats, and it goes without saying that the same deformation is maintained here. The result is such a stretching of the dialogue that the only trait to shine through is the solemnity of the situation, to the complete detriment of the violence and the terror. Clearly, that is all in absolute contradiction to the forceful accents of the orchestra (characterised by the use of the trombones) ..., and it goes without saying that the Commendatore (due to the slowness of the tempo) is unable to perform, in an authentic manner, the phrasing of a fair number of his statements, which he then often deforms with misplaced breaths.⁸²

If the right tempo is maintained, the Commendatore gives expression to ‘that supernatural force that spreads terror’, and Don Giovanni to ‘growing anguish’; yet many commentators ‘were not and are not quite able to “read” the score of *Don Giovanni*’, and they therefore ‘express their opinions on the basis of performances that we know are often inauthentic’ (i.e. on performances that fail to follow the letter of the score).⁸³ Leibowitz specifically directs this criticism at Dent who refers to the ‘solemnity’, ‘dignity’ and ‘relentless prolixity’ of the stone guest whose ‘very slow’ delivery sometimes results in the audience finding him ‘as much of a bore as Don Giovanni obviously does’.⁸⁴ However, the criticism could just as well be levelled at more recent scholars. Allanbrook, for example, thinks the scene is pervaded by an ‘air of the venerable and the elevated’; Kunze describes the Andante as ‘monumental’; and according to Dieckmann, the stone guest’s music ‘does not sound like sword and not like stone but like eternity, namely the Kantian one that is simultaneously the eternity of the starry heavens and of the moral law’.⁸⁵ The latter comment hints at the dramatic interpretation that, since the early nineteenth century, has justified the slow tempo: the menacing Andante was turned into a solemn Adagio when the hair-raising avenger was turned into a bringer of grace. Tomaschek recorded the metronome numbers 50 for the minim of the Andante and 96 for the minim of the Allegro that accompanies Don Giovanni’s death.⁸⁶ These tempi, which agree with Leibowitz’s analysis and with the horror described by Constanze, Wendt and Tomaschek himself, are faster than those heard on any twentieth-century recording. We had to wait for Jacobs’ recording from 2007 to hear tempi that bring out the horror of the stone guest’s music, Don Giovanni’s shock when he feels the iciness of the stone hand and the violence of his death.

This approach also fits the way Bassi performed the scene, according to Hohenthal:

[Bassi] was always particularly displeased with the way singers and actors of [Don Giovanni] carry themselves when the ghost enters in the second finale. As a rule, namely, they immediately rush quite shocked and appalled back from the opened door, thus depriving themselves of every means for an appropriate escalation. Don Giovanni (according to Bassi’s interpretation, which Mozart himself endorsed) mistakes this odd appearance for the disguise of an earthly avenger, and when it enters he therefore points his sword at it and later circles around it with the utmost caution. Only gradually does

he become a little more uneasy; but its true purpose only dawns on him – and now with full force – when he clasps the cold hand of the stone guest.⁸⁷

While a slow tempo will tend to transport us into the realm of spirits, a more conversational tempo will make it more credible that Don Giovanni initially mistakes the stone guest for a live person. The shock when he realises his error explains both his loud cry in the libretto (omitted by Rochlitz and toned down in the following performance tradition) and the change of tempo from *Andante* to *Più stretto* (the shock effect of which is only felt if the *Andante* is performed faster than usual, as on the Jacobs recording). The use of the sword is particularly intriguing, since the libretto only has Don Giovanni carry a candelabrum when he goes to receive the visitor, as does Rochlitz and most previous versions of the *Stone Guest* plays. It is only in Tirso's play that the seducer carries a sword here.

But how did audiences interpret Bassi's performance of the scene? While his Don Giovanni treated the stone guest with cool restraint because he mistook it for an 'earthly avenger', it is clear that some spectators interpreted that restraint differently. Though the Hamburg Critic never describes specifically how Bassi acted in the second finale, there is no doubt that the singer provided the model against which he measured Woltereck's performance in 1820:

Finally, we cannot commend Herr W[oltereck]'s acting in the last scene with the ghost. Certainly, even the most valiant man must be startled when such a figure enters, but a Don Giovanni quickly composes himself. Pride, anger, defiance and, above all, the devil within soon toughen him with desperate courage. He already feels the torments of hell that await him, but he neither will nor can turn back: he sallies forward until the terrible 'No' by which he is surrendered to the powers of the abyss. Surely, such a startled Don Giovanni as Herr Woltereck, who maintained the same posture, the same facial expression through almost the entire scene, would have accepted the offered mercy and converted straightaway.⁸⁸

Some features of this interpretation, which agree with Hohenthal's story, were probably inspired by Bassi's performance: Don Giovanni remains composed, and his postures and facial expression should change during the scene. But other features, which rather agree with the German translation used in the Hamburg production, show that the critic assumes that Don Giovanni really takes the stone guest for a 'ghost'; the latter offers mercy in return for conversion, and Don Giovanni, who knows that hell awaits him, is prevented by his diabolical defiance from accepting the offer.

When the Hamburg Critic reviewed the singer four years later, Woltereck had clearly acquired a more varied expression, but the critic still found his expression of horror too extreme:

In the final scene with the ghost, he has many poignant and sculpturally beautiful moments, above all in his postures ..., but we cannot approve

of Don Giovanni gulping down three or four glasses of wine in this awful moment. An exalted nature – which Don Giovanni undoubtedly is, for all his wickedness – will not resort to such common anaesthetics. At most, he may pour himself a glass; but if he puts it down unreflectingly at the point of carrying it to his lips, his acting becomes more meaningful, surely, than if he empties it. It is much better if he leaves that to Leporello whom it fits quite well.⁸⁹

Again, the emphasis is on Don Giovanni's composure. It appears from an 1826 review that the critic was displeased with Forti's performance, too, complaining that he 'withdraws to the background with Leporello and leaves the ghost standing down in front'.⁹⁰ This view also agrees with Hohenthal's anecdote: Don Giovanni is less likely to leave the stone guest alone if he takes him for a live avenger. However, the Hamburg Critic does not seem to have associated that feature of Bassi's performance with Don Giovanni mistaking the visitor for a live person.

Tieck's experience of Bassi's performance in the scene seems to have been similar to the Hamburg Critic's. Friesen, according to whom the poet praised Bassi's Don Giovanni for his stateliness, decorum and grace, continues as follows:

Therefore, it has always annoyed me that it has become customary, in the portrayal of Don Giovanni, to display the utmost dismay when the stone guest appears in the last scene. I could never associate the exaggerated acting, the eccentric postures of horror and consternation, this frantic search for a firm footing and the passionate gulping down of a goblet full of wine, which I have often observed and heard praised with admiration, with Don Giovanni's character. If he has invited the Commendatore in the belief that he won't come, then he is a contemptible braggart: a person least likely to have a lasting success with women. But if this challenge – which is much more logical – is only one of many signs of his wicked defiance of the human and the divine, then he will also face the tangible appearance of the stone guest (even if under constraint) with defiantly stately coldness, and only break down when the fatal stone hand clutches him. As Tieck assured me, Bassi played the scene this way and thereby caused the deepest shock.⁹¹

Like Bassi himself, Friesen (and Tieck) puts emphasis on Don Giovanni's gentlemanly composure, describes the handshake as the terrifying climax of the scene and reacts against German singers' initial display of horror. Like the Hamburg Critic, however, he is sure that Don Giovanni takes the visitor for a ghost and that he is deliberately defying the divine order.

It is worth keeping in mind that the opinions of the Hamburg Critic and Tieck were based on a few performances, or a single performance, they had seen in their youth. Börner-Sandrini, who has provided us with the most detailed accounts of Bassi's performance in the stone guest scene, drew on the memoirs of her mother who had performed with him multiple times in the opera. It is therefore significant

that her interpretation of Don Giovanni's behaviour differs, in certain important respects, from those of the two spectators while it agrees with Bassi's own:

[A final] highlight was Bassi's acting in the last scene with the Governor's ghost; here he differed completely from later performances of the scene.

As is well known, Don Giovanni goes off to open the door equipped with the candelabrum and a napkin; with the latter, the Don Giovanni of more recent date normally wipe off their makeup behind the scenes before they plunge half-backwards onto the stage, in front of the ghost, with signs of extreme horror, stumble towards the supper table, repeatedly pour champagne to give themselves Dutch courage(!), wipe the cold sweat from their foreheads, stagger somewhat closer to the ghost every now and then only to withdraw again with a shudder... In short: they depict a dread quite far from the mind of Don Giovanni the atheist, the nonbeliever. How different Bassi was!

In addition to the candelabrum, he picked up his bared sword when exiting. Always clutching the latter and with the candle in the other hand, never letting the figure of the Governor out of his sight, he went cautiously and calmly to the dining table, put candlestick and sword away and stood still here with his arms crossed while issuing his orders to Leporello concerning the new service. In short, he acted like an entirely calm, fearless, composed gentleman who, however, is extremely annoyed by this appearance, surmising an assault on his person or at least a bad joke.

Bassi indicated this mood excellently by means of a sustained, threatening frown and an apprehensive darkening of his noble features. Thus, he remained composed until the moment when he, in brazen foolhardiness, extends his hand to the ghost in pledge. Here – and this marked the triumph of Bassi's dramatic talent – the magnificent escalation of the situation occurred (which the usual approach makes impossible). Despair got to the bold criminal; his hair stood on end; his features and gestures expressed horror; he turned writhingly hither and thither under the ghost's handshake, breaking away after an ineffable exertion and falling to the floor tormented by the Furies of his conscience, collapsing in deadly terror [*Todesangst*]. Back then, there was no question of the jaws of hell and demons chasing Don Giovanni around the stage with serpents and spirit torches along with the obligatory powder stench: Guardasoni would never have tolerated [*geduldet*] such nonsense!

The delightful [*herrliche*] finale (which is always omitted, unfortunately) followed, you see, with the beautiful passages that are so delightfully adapted to the character of each individual role, the great masterpiece receiving a worthy conclusion with the splendid fugue.⁹²

Twelve years after including this description in her memoirs, Börner-Sandrini repeated the anecdote in her newspaper article about Bassi. In both accounts of his portrayal of Don Giovanni, she indicated that the stone guest scene marked the highpoint of his performance:

The representation of the final scene with the Commendatore's ghost was always magnificent. Quite unlike many other holders of the role of Don Giovanni, Bassi never displayed dread and horror at the beginning, or gave himself Dutch courage along with Leporello by drinking champagne, even attempting to threaten the ghost with the dagger and so forth. As Don Giovanni, he still utterly remained the perfect gentleman here, from whose mind fear of the spectre is quite far at first, but who rather suspects an assault on his person and therefore never lets the ghost out of his sight and clearly appears extremely annoyed by the whole scene. Here Bassi was able to darken his features in a perfect manner and splendidly suggest the increasingly eerie situation. This made the escalation magnificent at the moment Don Giovanni gives the ghost his hand, and despair finally descends on the reckless rake due to the icy coldness of the 'stone guest's' hand; his hair literally stood on end, and he writhed in horror, clasped by the ghost's powerful hand. Back then, the tragic scene ended with Don Giovanni falling lifeless to the floor (as if he had suffered a stroke) and disappearing into the ground like the ghost.⁹³

Börner-Sandrini was much less influenced by the Romantic reception than the Hamburg Critic and Friesen: the influence from Rochlitz is limited to her description of the Commendatore as 'the Governor's ghost' in the 1876 version (which she replaced with the more accurate 'the Commendatore's ghost' and 'the stone guest' in the 1888 version) and of Don Giovanni as a 'bold criminal' ridden by guilt (in the 1888 version opting for the less damning 'reckless rake'). Like the others, she puts emphasis on the gentlemanly composure of Bassi's Don Giovanni, his constant focus on the stone guest and the shock effect of the handshake, and she objects to later performers' exaggerated show of horror, singling out the traditional stage business with the wineglass and the dagger (the latter was a detail adopted from Tirso, which we still find in the Czinner-Graf film). But certain important details are shared only with the story Bassi told Hohenthal: Don Giovanni brings his bared sword when going off to receive the visitor; he mistakes the stone guest for a disguised avenger (or prankster); the unknown visitor makes him uneasy (rather than defiant); and the handshake announces a dramatic escalation.

Some correspondences between Hohenthal's and Börner-Sandrini's stories and the productions by Dresden's Italian opera department suggest that Sandrini-Caravoglia and Morlacchi (and possibly other of Bassi's former colleagues) coached the singers of the title role, adopting practices from the original production. Wächter thus carried a sword in the stone guest scene, which he then put away, exactly like Bassi.⁹⁴ Lyser also described how the scene was staged in the 1836 production, featuring Zezi as Don Giovanni. Here, as in Börner-Sandrini's story, the stone guest disappeared through the trapdoor, after which Don Giovanni, 'who had sunk to the floor after his last "No!", stumbles to his feet, his features expressing deadly terror, and star[es] around deliriously'.⁹⁵ Lyser uses the same word, *Todesangst*, as Börner-Sandrini later used to describe Bassi's expression in this moment, which is one indication that her mother's story was his point of

reference as well. He later recalled that ‘a dense darkness descends on the hall’ when the stone guest disappeared, after which

the *invisible* chorus sounds from below the *ground*, a *flaming grave* opens, Don Giovanni plunges down, the grave shuts again, and the stage remains empty a few moments until Ottavio, Anna, Elvira, Masetto and Zerlina rush in accompanied by servants of the Holy Tribunal with torches.⁹⁶

Placing the chorus below the stage floor and including the final scene was unusual in *Don Giovanni* productions in the 1830s, and it clearly reflected an attempt to stay true to Mozart on behalf of Bassi’s old company.

The contrast between the way Bassi and Sandrini-Caravoglia understood the dramatic subtext of the scene and the way the Hamburg Critic and Friesen (and probably Tieck) saw it, tells us a great deal about the early reception of the opera. The *Stone Guest* tradition, condemned by Enlightenment writers, was reassessed by the young Romantics who included the story in their store of cherished folktales and literary fairy tales. And this determined how they interpreted the opera when they saw Guardasoni’s production in Leipzig in the 1790s. Not noticing that the title hero mistook the stone guest for a man in disguise, they saw his composure as a sign of defiance, as in the traditional interpretation of the myth. It is remarkable that even Philippi and Lyser barely discuss how Don Giovanni behaved towards the stone guest, though both of them seem to have heard about Bassi’s portrayal from Sandrini-Caravoglia who attached such importance to his performance in that scene. While putting emphasis on Don Giovanni’s ‘unwavering defiance’ and insisting that Leporello must ‘forsake his trivialities’ in order to bring out ‘the force of the most harrowing tragedy’, Philippi offers a highly romanticised interpretation, Mozart showing us ‘hell and heaven at once’ and out-doing the scene with the ghost in *Hamlet* as regards ‘the dark, mysterious horror of the eternal primal forces’.⁹⁷

Sandrini-Caravoglia’s story clearly made a stronger impression on Lyser, though it seems he too was unsure what to make of it. In both the 1838 fairy tale and the 1845 singing translation, the seducer carries his sword in addition to the candelabrum when going off to open the door.⁹⁸ In the 1847 essay, hinting at Don Giovanni’s mistaking the stone guest for a live person, Lyser has Bassi say that he ‘doesn’t suspect the Devil is hiding among the flowers, and nor would he be afraid of the Devil, for which reason the latter finally comes to fetch him’.⁹⁹ And in the 1833 essay Lyser describes Bassi’s conception of the role as ‘highly tragic’ and declares that ‘the last, long-held “No” in the stone guest scene, drowning out the trombones and the timpani, struck all listeners with horror’.¹⁰⁰ The most obvious echo of Sandrini-Caravoglia occurs in the 1837 novella, which has Mozart rehearsing the opera with Guardasoni’s company. ‘He let the chorus of Furies sing *below* the stage, finally, and would not tolerate Don Giovanni to be hauled into the abyss by spectres visible to the audience’, the rehearsal ending ‘with the delightful concluding fugue’.¹⁰¹ Here the wording is remarkably similar to Börner-Sandrini’s anecdote forty years later. According to the latter, it was

Guardasoni who ‘would never have tolerated’ demons on stage, and she also mentions that the opera originally ended with the ‘delightful’ final scene, both writers using the adjective *herrlich* and referring to the concluding ensemble as a ‘fugue’. In his 1847 essay, finally, Lyser repeats that the chorus of Furies, in the original production, ‘sounded from the trapdoor through which Don Giovanni precipitated’,¹⁰² and ‘the comical characters, Leporello, Zerlina, Masetto, counterbalance the three sad ones’ in the final scene.¹⁰³ This observation might well have derived from Sandrini-Caravoglia, too, her daughter mentioning that the music in the final scene is ‘adapted to the character of each individual role’.

Although Lyser eagerly collected and retold anecdotes about Bassi’s portrayal and the premiere of *Don Giovanni*, his interpretation of the opera was just as rooted in the German bourgeois culture of the *Vormärz* era as was that of the other German writers. One recurring theme in his essays is his insistence that Mozart saw the opera as a fairy-tale comedy with a clear-cut moral, whereas Hoffmann turned it into a Faustian nocturne with appeal to the young Romantics, potentially endangering public morality. ‘Nobody wants to be a plain seducer of women’, one of Lyser’s narrators explains, ‘but every dull good-for-nothing who isn’t ugly would love to count for such a poetic Don Giovanni as Hoffmann depicts him, and scores of knaveries committed against credulous girls may be poetically euphemised as the pursuit of an ideal’.¹⁰⁴ While Lyser’s critique of Hoffmann shows that today’s commentators are not the first ones to denounce his reading of *Don Giovanni* as the romanticising of an abusive form of male sexuality, it also shows that the only solution Lyser saw to this problem was a certain spectatorial detachment, guaranteed by the ‘fairy-tale’ moral of the final scene, which he insisted should be taken at face value. In reality, the initial failure of Bassi’s Don Giovanni to recognise the stone guest’s supernaturalness might have led the audience to doubt whether it really represents Mozart’s moral point of view – but such a subversive interpretation did not fit into Lyser’s Biedermeier template.

It does fit what happens in the graveyard scene, however. If Don Giovanni mistakes the stone guest for a live avenger, he is likely to assume that this is not just any avenger, but Masetto in disguise. Since he is aware that the offended peasant, whom he chastised and humiliated for his murder attempt earlier in the evening, now knows who the presumed Leporello really was, it may seem logical to him that Masetto should come to retaliate, and also that he should come disguised, using Don Giovanni’s own trick against him. That might be the reason why Bassi’s Don Giovanni anticipated ‘an assault on his person or at least a bad joke’. There is a deep irony here, moreover. After their last encounter, the grumbling Masetto told Zerlina he was beaten up by ‘Leporello or some devil who looks like him’ (963–4). It was neither one nor the other, obviously, but the statement is characteristic of the superstitious worldview of Don Giovanni’s enemies. In contrast, the seducer himself is a ‘nonbeliever’, as Börner-Sandrini says, at least when it comes to devils and walking statues. At the arrival of the stone guest *who sings with the same voice as Masetto*, he might feel constrained by the code of hospitality to serve as a guest the graveyard prankster he invited for supper, though he finds his bizarre appearance and threatening attitude unsettling. It is

only when he gives the visitor his hand in pledge that he realises that this is not Masetto but ‘some devil who looks like him’ – the devil, in fact, who has come to ‘gobble him up’, as Leporello says in the following scene.

Indeed, if we agree to behold the scene from such a critical perspective, it emerges that there are many connections between Masetto and the stone guest. The latter’s demand that Don Giovanni repent is the *contrapasso* for Don Giovanni warning Masetto that he might repent if refusing to leave him alone with Zerlina (‘Masetto guarda ben, ti pentirai’), Marshall Brown even pointing out that the earlier recitative ‘traces a simplified version of the sequence between the statue and Giovanni: F-sharp rising to C, G, C-sharp, D, A’.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the handshake with which the stone guest fixates Don Giovanni who refuses to repent (‘No no ch’io non mi pento’, 1360) is the *contrapasso* for Leporello’s fixation of Masetto who refused to dance (‘No no, ballar non voglio’, 725). But the handshake is also Don Giovanni’s moment of tragic recognition. It is here that the enlightened hero realises, too late, that he is trapped in an unenlightened ‘Spanish’ world where cultural myths are so powerful they can kill.

Börner-Sandrini’s assertion that Guardasoni never would have tolerated later productions’ ‘jaws of hell’ and ‘demons chasing Don Giovanni around the stage with serpents and spirit torches’ most likely reflects her mother’s experience of singing Donna Anna in the German-language production that premiered at the Estates Theatre on 8 November 1807.¹⁰⁶ Less than two years after Guardasoni’s death and the last Italian performance of the opera, the contrast must have been striking, as this review suggests:

A surprise at the end of the opera was the fire-spitting mountain shown in the background of the last set, into which the Furies throw Don Giovanni for his just deserts after a somewhat excited dance interlaced with fire-spitting serpents, one of which first carries him high up into the air. More than the speaking monument in the churchyard and the stone guest sinking into the ground during the supper, this turned the opera into a *Zauberoper*. The fiery execution delighted the children and the large crowd, as a loud bravo proved each time.¹⁰⁷

The critic’s mocking tone shows that views on the ending were divided in Prague. Thus, in a 1796 review of the theatre’s previous German production, one critic declared his preference for the ‘moral final chorus’ of the Italian production over the German version ‘where Don Giovanni is dragged off to hell’, which reminded him of the ‘once famous *Faust* plays where people didn’t tire of applauding the devils when they, in proper hell-style, seized poor Faust in his grandest despairing posture and carried him off triumphantly’.¹⁰⁸ Yet in 1800 another review accused Guardasoni for ‘always leav[ing] the *ripieno* singers behind the scenes’ due to his alleged parsimoniousness, ‘since a man only costs him 10 kreuzer there, while he would have to pay him 20 kreuzer if he were to dress up and go on stage’.¹⁰⁹ This practice is not associated with any specific opera, but since Niemetschek (probably the author of this review) was always particularly concerned with

the performance of Mozart's operas, he may have had the second finale of *Don Giovanni* in mind, mistaking the artistic decision of placing the chorus below the stage for managerial thrift. Tomaschek, comparing Guardasoni's production to the German-language production he saw in Vienna in 1814, was certainly in favour of suppressing the 'dull, moralising ending' that 'entirely annihilates the preceding drastically-heightened effect', and he felt convinced that Mozart and Da Ponte would have changed their minds at some point, ultimately preferring 'the catastrophe where Don Giovanni is fetched by the devils', although he objected to 'the ill-fitting set representing the infernal jaws of Vesuvius, into which the devils hurl a dummy representing Don Giovanni instead of himself'.¹¹⁰

The distaste of some Prague operagoers for the subterranean chorus and the final scene parallels the inability of the Hamburg Critic, Tieck and Friesen to accept that Don Giovanni mistakes the stone guest for a live person. In both cases, Romanticism's positive reassessment of the German *Stone Guest* tradition prevailed over the Enlightenment's ironic stance on popular superstitions. Originally a highly complex work for the connoisseurs, as I shall argue in the postscript, *Don Giovanni* was eventually appropriated by 'the large crowd' who wanted the infernal spectacle that the old Italian production had denied them. In Prague, that appropriation occurred with the 1807 production, which finally showed the general public what they had always longed to see: the actual infernal apparitions that torment Don Giovanni.¹¹¹

But what were these exactly? According to Börner-Sandrini, Bassi's Don Giovanni was 'tormented by the Furies of his conscience'; but since it was Rochlitz who first made Don Giovanni remorseful, it is reasonable to assume that he was simply tormented by invisible Furies originally. And, as it happens, the 1807 review and Börner-Sandrini's memoir may give us a hint about how these were imagined in Guardasoni's production, since both of them mention that visible Furies later chased Don Giovanni around with 'serpents'. The inclusion of serpents in the infernal scene of *Don Giovanni* seems to have been unique to Prague; and so, it seems likely that when Bassi sang his last lines in the opera, he used his postures and gestures, writhing hither and thither while his features expressed deadly terror, to represent a struggle against *invisible serpents*. These serpents then materialised in the 1807 production.

Eighteenth-century connoisseurs might have recognised the model of that theatrical image: the famous Greek sculpture group 'Laocoön and His Sons', which stands in the Vatican but was known throughout Europe from descriptions, prints and plaster copies (see Figure 7.1). The story of Poseidon's priest, who warns the Trojans against bringing the wooden horse of the Greeks, ostensibly an offering to Minerva, into Troy, is best known from Virgil's *Aeneid*. Here Aeneas describes how Minerva took revenge on Laocoön by letting two serpents emerge from the sea and kill him and his two young sons in front of the stunned onlookers who generally felt, however, that the priest deserved to die for his impiety, blinded as they were by gods determined to see the city destroyed. As the serpents seize him, 'twice encircling his waist, twice winding their scaly backs around his throat', Laocoön 'lifts to heaven hideous cries, like the bellowings of a wounded bull that



Figure 7.1 Hagesandros, Athenedoros and Polydoros: 'Laocoön and His Sons'. Marble. Ca. 200 BC. Pio Clementino Museum, Vatican Museums. Wikimedia Commons.

has fled from the altar and shaken from its neck the ill-aimed axe'.¹¹² In Prague's National Theatre in 1787, the scenic reference would not only have reminded connoisseurs of the ancient sculpture and Virgil's epic; they would also have been reminded of Lessing's *Laocoön: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* from 1766, a classic of German criticism and aesthetic theory. That connection would have been the more obvious since the theatre itself had been inaugurated on 21 April 1783 with a performance of Lessing's tragedy *Emilia Galotti*, and since the proscenium frame was adorned with a golden half-length portrait of the playwright in relief.¹¹³ The fact that Lessing's presence dominated the theatrical space for which *Don Giovanni* was written invites us to reflect on the deeper meaning of the invisible serpents and of Don Giovanni's death scream.

Observing that the Greek sculptor shows Laocoön sighing rather than crying hideously as in Virgil, Lessing argues that the law of beauty makes different demands on the visual arts and on poetry. Whereas Virgil arouses the listener's pity through the verbal image of the wounded bull, the sculptor who depicted a moment frozen in time was subject to other constraints:

The master was striving to attain the greatest beauty under the given conditions of bodily pain. Pain, in its disfiguring extreme, was not compatible with beauty, and must therefore be softened. Screams must be reduced to sighs, not because screams would betray weakness, but because they would deform the countenance to a repulsive degree. Imagine Laocoön's mouth open, and judge. Let him scream, and see. It was before, a figure to inspire compassion in its beauty and suffering. Now it is ugly, abhorrent, and we gladly avert our eyes from a painful spectacle, destitute of the beauty which alone could turn our pain into the sweet feeling of pity for the suffering object.¹¹⁴

Yet another challenge faces the dramatic poet, since the scream is not merely imagined when emitted on stage, as in the case of sculpture and epic poetry, but is actually heard by the spectator. 'The more nearly the actor approaches nature, the more sensibly must our eyes and ears be offended, as in nature they undoubtedly are when we hear such loud and violent expressions of pain', Lessing argues; and since 'the actor can rarely or never carry the representation of bodily pain to the point of illusion', modern dramatic poets are perhaps 'rather to be praised than blamed for either avoiding this danger altogether or skirting it at a safe distance'.¹¹⁵ And yet, such extreme expressions were available to the ancients. Lessing cites Sophocles' *Philoctetes* as the prime example of a tragedy in which the dramatic poet 'contrived wonderfully to intensify and ennoble the idea of physical pain'.¹¹⁶ He did so partly by letting the compassion aroused in the bystanders change their view on the suffering hero, and partly by focusing on Philoctetes' solitude and helplessness, presenting the audience with an image of 'despair in its most dreadful shape', no compassion being 'stronger or more melting than that connected with the idea of despair'.¹¹⁷ Moreover, while we would otherwise tend to despise a character who cries out violently on stage, we do not despise him

when we know him to be otherwise a man of resolution; still less when we see him giving proof of firmness in the midst of suffering; when we see that pain, though it extort a cry, can extort nothing further; that he submits to a continuance of the anguish rather than yield a jot of his opinions or resolves, although such a concession would end his woes.¹¹⁸

But are these tragic effects also possible on the modern stage? Lessing's analysis ends with a question mark:

That an actor can imitate the cries and convulsions of pain so closely as to produce illusion, I neither deny nor confirm. If our actors cannot, I should

want to know whether Garrick found it equally impossible; and, if he could not succeed, I should still have the right to assume a degree of perfection in the acting and declamation of the ancients of which we to-day can form no idea.¹¹⁹

It is as if Mozart and Da Ponte, with Don Giovanni's death scene, set out to prove that it was indeed possible for the modern stage to 'imitate the cries and convulsions of pain' in a way that aroused compassion. Lessing's description of the Greek hero's combination of firm resolve and abject despair could just as well be a description of Bassi's Don Giovanni in the moment of his death, while Lessing's emphasis on the bystanders' mixture of compassion and self-interest could just as well apply to Leporello who, from being the comic servant, now fears for his dying master in an entirely serious manner. As Don Giovanni dies without certitude as an object of blind hatred, tortured to death by nameless, invisible enemies, we hear the libretto's only two occurrences of the word 'terror': it is the last word uttered by both master and servant before Don Giovanni's death scream. This alerts us to the programmatic significance of this moment, when the *dramma giocoso* gives way to the arousal of terror and pity highlighted by Aristotle as the principal aim of tragedy.¹²⁰ Don Giovanni's hair literally stood on end with terror, said Börner-Sandrini, and the same did the hair of Constanze Mozart and the young Tomaschek who watched from the auditorium. Drawing on his own experience, the Hamburg Critic compares the effect on the audience caused by the deaths of Don Giovanni and of Kaspar in *Der Freischütz*, both of whom are punished by the Powers of Darkness.

Only, all sympathy, all concern for [Kaspar] disappear, while the latter do accompany Don Giovanni down to his gruesome death. The last impression is always: 'What a shame with all that vigour and charm!' instead of everyone rejoicing over being rid of the fiendish Kaspar.¹²¹

It is, of course, the use of music that allows the modern stage to recreate that extreme aspect of ancient tragedy and to 'carry the representation of bodily pain to the point of illusion'. Musical beauty mitigates the representation of physical pain, allowing the actor to arouse 'the sweet feeling of pity for the suffering object' in spectators who would have turned their faces away in disgust had they seen the same scene performed in a spoken play. Don Giovanni does not sigh like the sculpture of Laocoön; he really 'lifts to heaven hideous cries' like Virgil's Laocoön, but these are musicalised cries that we may find shocking but not abhorrent. As Mozart himself said, echoing Lessing, 'the passions, intense or not, must never be expressed to the point of arousing disgust, and music, even in the most sinister situation, must never offend the ear but must delight even then, and thus always remain music'.¹²² The stone guest's music may have been the closest he ever came to writing actual 'anti-music', but it serves the purpose of enhancing the spectators' compassion for Don Giovanni by letting us feel his pain.

Don Giovanni's death scream is, of course, a *contrapasso* for all the cries he has caused others to emit: Donna Anna's cries in her dark apartment when she realised he was not Don Ottavio; Donna Elvira's cries when she complained about his attempted seduction of Zerlina; Zerlina's cries when he tried to seduce or assault her; Masetto's cries when he struck him with the flat of his sword; and the cries of the unknown young woman in the dark street when she realised he was not Leporello. Apart from Masetto's, these were all cries of protest rather than pain, however, and none of them quite warrants Don Giovanni's scream of extreme pain and terror in the moment of his death. This scream has been carefully prepared, moreover, by the 'horrible scream' of Donna Elvira and the 'frenzied scream' of Leporello when they beheld the walking statue as well as by Don Giovanni's own loud cry when he felt the iciness of the statue's hand, and it is reflected in Leporello's simultaneous and sympathetic scream of terror. Michel Poizat has recognised the radicalness of Mozart's strategy, suggesting that it was the first time in the history of opera that a composer deliberately took recourse to 'that supreme transgression of speech which is the cry, which occurs here as an upsurge of the voice at the edges of this gap in meaning'.¹²³ Indeed, with his death scream, Don Giovanni gives voice to what Jacques Rancière has described as the central principle of the aesthetic revolution of the late eighteenth century: 'the destruction of what lies at the heart of the representative logic – namely the organic model of the whole, with its proportions and symmetries'.¹²⁴

The final scene

It was not only spectators in Prague who had doubts about the final scene of the opera. It is well known that Mozart himself at least considered cutting it for the 1788 Vienna premiere, thus ending the opera with Don Giovanni's death. As Michael F. Robinson has argued, the shortened ending, concentrating on the loneliness of the dying protagonist, was, in eighteenth-century terms, 'tragic and not comic', as it would have aroused 'extra sympathy for Don Giovanni as a human being'.¹²⁵ That his death was experienced as tragic without the final scene does not mean, though, that Da Ponte and Mozart wanted to make his death any less tragic by including it. The dramatic function of the final scene is rather to set the terrifying reality of Don Giovanni's suffering and death off against the hypocrisy of the other characters. Whereas the non-superstitious Don Giovanni mistook the stone guest for a live person till it was too late, the others immediately and unblinkingly accept Leporello's fantastical tale about a walking stone colossus and his master being swallowed by the ground amid fire and smoke – only to turn their attention towards the more interesting topic of their own future prospects as soon as possible. This adds a glow of unreality to the whole situation.

First, Don Ottavio tries to pressure Donna Anna to marry him right away, as he has done, directly or indirectly, ever since they found her father's dead body. Donna Anna asks for one year's postponement of the wedding. It has often been argued that this is a realistic trait that reflects eighteenth-century social mores and that we

cannot deduce from this that Donna Anna's love for Don Ottavio is insincere. At the end of Tirso's play, however, which was written for a far more conservative society than *Don Giovanni*, Doña Ana marries Marquis de la Mota at the same time as Doña Isabela marries Duke Octavio and Aminta marries Batricio. Da Ponte borrowed the postponement of the wedding from Corneille's *Le Cid*, in which Chimène is constrained by the code of honour to pursue the death of her beloved Don Rodrigue after he kills her father in a duel. When they are finally allowed to marry, the king suggests she take a year to dry her tears first. The main difference is, of course, that Donna Anna's father was not killed by her fiancé, Da Ponte implying that the Commendatore's daughter is even more 'Spanish' than Chimène, the most decorous lover in the dramatic repertoire. Whether she truly desires the marriage or is put off by Don Ottavio's consistently patronising treatment is left for the audience to imagine, though. In either case, their short duet leaves a distinctly joyless impression, at least if performed in the very languid tempo recorded for it by Tomaschek who gave the crotchet of the Largetto the metronome number 60.¹²⁶

After Donna Elvira has announced that she will retire to a convent, Zerlina and Masetto tell the others they will go home 'a cenar in compagnia' ('have supper together', 1421), echoing the stone guest's recent supper invitation to Don Giovanni: 'verrai / tu a cenar meco?' The quick-change act of Lolli, who had no more than a minute for exchanging the stone guest's costume for Masetto's, might have directed the spectators' attention to the Baroque theatricality of the dénouement, the 'stone guest' having apparently regained his appetite for 'mortal food' and Zerlina replacing Don Giovanni at the supper he is now unfortunately unable to attend. The turnabout of Leporello, who sympathised with his dying master a few moments ago but who now plans to find a better one at the inn, indicates that emotions as well as identities have been reduced to pure make-believe, the characters censoring their memories of Don Giovanni 'into a collective, moralizing posture'.¹²⁷ 'Resti dunque quel birbon / con Proserpina e Pluton' ('Then let that scoundrel remain with Proserpina and Pluto', 1424–5), the three comic characters implore to the sound of what Allanbrook describes as 'mock-tragic *alla breve* flourishes', Ford recognising 'an old-fashioned, French overture quality' here that fits the classical reference.¹²⁸ The hell into which Don Giovanni descended was not the theological hell of Christian belief but the mythological underworld of the seventeenth-century stage. To the sound of 'a prim and ticking gavotte', the lower-class characters then invite the noble characters to join in 'the most ancient song' (1428), which, as Allanbrook points out, is set to a parody of church music, first as 'a phony fugue in D major' and then in 'the eighteenth-century version of motet style':¹²⁹ 'Questo è il fin di chi fa mal: / e de' perfidi la morte / alla vita è sempre equal' ('This is the end of evildoers, and the deaths of traitors are always equal to their lives', 1429–31). 'The shallow self-satisfaction of that dictum does not conceal its wishful over-optimism', says Baker; 'everyone knows that evildoers do not always get their just deserts'.¹³⁰ Shallowness defines the characters as well. It is 'alarming', Henze-Döhring notes, that Donna Elvira, with her close association with Don Giovanni, should suddenly join in this 'chorus of rejoicing'.¹³¹ Yet the final scene in general, and the concluding

moral in particular, is pure parody: a parody of the *Stone Guest* tradition with its dramaturgical absurdities and facile, superstitious morality. Indeed, we can trace the ‘most ancient song’ back to Cicognini’s most ancient play, in which Don Giovanni hears the following lines sung during the supper in the graveyard: ‘ch’è detto vero del Sommo Motore, / che alla fin, chi mal vive mal si muore’ (‘for as the Supreme Mover’s dictum goes, he who lives abominably dies abominably in the end’, III.8).

It is no surprise that the German Romantics, to whom Mozart’s opera was the Don Juan myth’s supreme artistic manifestation rather than its supreme critical rewriting, were puzzled by this ironic conclusion. Rochlitz’s solution was to turn it into a conventional happy ending, suppressing all subversive jokes and inconsistencies. Donna Anna accepts Don Ottavio’s hand right on the spot, and when Donna Elvira heads off for the convent the loving couple ‘detain her and draw her into their embrace’.¹³² Leporello’s grotesque ‘Ed io vado all’osteria / a trovar padron miglior’ (‘And I’ll go to the inn to find a better master’, 1422–3) has given way to moralism, exactly like his comments when Don Giovanni died: ‘Nie vergess’ ich dieser Stunden! / Nun will ich ein Muster sein!’ (‘I’ll never forget these hours! From now on I’ll be a paragon of virtue!’). And the reference to Proserpina and Pluto, which already Neefe and Schmieder replaced with a reference to ‘the Devil’, has now given way to an unadulterated Christian moral: ‘Dort im Abgrund schmachtet er, / Büsst der Sünden Laster schwer’ (‘Now he’s rotting in the pit, atoning for his grave sins’).

Hoffmann was clearly unconvinced by these rectifications, at least regarding Donna Anna; he saw proof in her postponement of the wedding that she loves Don Giovanni and found her duet with Don Ottavio ‘heartrending’.¹³³ It was against this conception that Lyser reacted when he insisted that

he who would like to search for anything other in the concluding Presto fugue than the usual moral that the Spanish comedy writers attach even to their most comic plays [*sic*] would have to be very bent on a melancholy of which there is no trace in our great Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.¹³⁴

And yet, he describes all three noble characters as ‘sad’, which may in fact be what Sandrini-Caravoglia had said.

For all their differences, the readings of Rochlitz, Hoffmann and Lyser have one thing in common: they all fail to recognise the parodic nature of the final scene. And though later scholars have often remarked on the ironic tone of the stylistic borrowings and the concluding maxim, the nineteenth century’s unwillingness to regard the entire scene as a parody prevails. Here we may distinguish, however, between a predominantly British tradition for regarding it as a simple bow to convention, which serves a theatrical rather than a dramatic purpose, and a predominantly German tradition for regarding it as an organic part of the work, which means the moral should be taken seriously. As a representative of the former view, we may cite Dent, who thinks the epilogue allows the audience to ‘disperse to their supper-parties edified, but not so much as to forget that they have

been thoroughly well amused'.¹³⁵ This view is still echoed in Williams' conviction that Da Ponte 'attached no very great weight' to the inclusion of Proserpina and Pluto.¹³⁶ As a representative of the latter view we may cite Abert who discerns, in the concluding moral, 'something approaching a celebration of everyday life, causing hearts to beat faster at the thought of divine retribution'.¹³⁷ This view is still echoed by Dieckmann who finds a celebration of 'divine nemesis, the divinely decreed unity of deed and destiny' in the scene, which is characterised by 'dignity and elevation'.¹³⁸

If there is a moral to be drawn from the last scene of *Don Giovanni*, however, it is hardly the one the characters on stage want us to draw. The scene's comic incongruities are a metaphor for their bigotry, while the violent clash between this scene and the horrors of what went before invites us to adopt a critical stance and trust our own eyes and ears, our own intellectual, emotional and aesthetic responses rather than the banal stereotypes and self-righteous moralism perpetuated by the Don Juan story in its traditional guise.

Interestingly, according to Lyser, Don Giovanni's enemies were accompanied by 'servants of the Holy Tribunal with torches' when they entered in the final scene in the 1836 Dresden production. We cannot know whether this trait was adopted from Guardasoni's production, though the possibility is certainly intriguing to consider. If we can trust Lyser, these were not the generic 'bailiffs' found both in Da Ponte's libretto and in Rochlitz's translation, but specifically bailiffs of the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, detested by Enlightenment writers throughout Europe as the ultimate symbol of religious fanaticism and social oppression. The torches would then have alluded to the infamous autos-da-fé where heretics were burnt alive but also to the 'flaming grave' that has just devoured Don Giovanni. Just as the vindictive stone guest, in the original production, was now transformed into Masetto, his human alter ego, the subterranean chorus of torturing, punishing Furies was now transformed into the bailiffs of the Spanish Inquisition who accompany the human Furies, Donna Anna, Don Ottavio and Donna Elvira.¹³⁹ The punitive flames of hell and of the stake are, of course, the *contrapasso* for the flames of desire, which have been appropriately extinguished in those who wanted the seducer dead. Don Giovanni's death marked the end of desire as it marked the end of grace, gallantry, laughter and music, the final scene urging us to decide whose side we are really on.

Notes

- 1 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 89.
- 2 Imiola and Roland 1991: 56.
- 3 Allanbrook 1983: 291; Mila 1988: 237.
- 4 Volek 1987: 78.
- 5 Bitter 1961: 29; Volek 1987: 69.
- 6 Lyser 1845b: 322, in Waidelich 2001: 192–3.
- 7 'Übrigens ist diese Tafelszene (vom Schluss der Fanfare an, mit welcher *Don Juan* eintritt, bis zum Eintreten der Elvira) wie *Bassi* ... mir erzählte, ein *improvisirter*

Scherz Mozarts, auf der *Hauptprobe* vor der ersten Vorstellung in Prag entstanden. Ursprünglich – (wie auch da Pontes Originaltext nachweist) trat gleich nach *Don Juans* “*Gia la mensa è preparata!*” und nachdem er sich zur Tafel gesetzt hatte, Elvira ein, da aber Mozart bei der Hauptprobe fand: dass das Finale im Vergleich zum ersten all zu kurz sei, so *improvisirte* er diesen musikalischen Spass als *Intermezzo*. / Als *improvisirtes Intermezzo* wurde nach *Bassis* Versicherung von ihm und *Pozziani* [*sic*] (Leporello) diese Rolle auch immer genommen, und fast bei *jeder* Vorstellung machten sie *neue* Spässe und banden sich keineswegs streng an Mozarts Vorschrift, sondern hielten nur *Tact* und *Melodie* fest; Mozart hatte es ausdrücklich so von ihnen verlangt’; Lyser 1845c: 550.

- 8 ‘Wie Bassi mir erzählte, rührt die ergötzliche Tafelszene im zweiten Finale des *Don Giovanni* bis zum Eintritt Elvira’s *durchaus* von *Mozart* her; denn der Vorschrift *da Ponte*’s gemäss hätte Elvira gleich nachdem Don Juan sein “*Già la mensa embandita*” beendigt und im Begriff sich zu Tisch zu setzen, eintreten sollen. Allein Mozart wollte uns den Schwelger noch einmal wirklich schwelgend vorführen und sich nebenbei über zwei damals beliebte Operncomponisten lustig machen, so erfand er denn das köstliche *Intermezzo*. Leider dass es heutzutage nicht mehr in Mozarts *Sinne* ausgeführt wird, denn unsere heutigen Don Giovanni’s und Leporello’s sind eben keine *Bassi*’s und *Lolli*’s. Diese behandelten die Scene bei jeder neuen Vorstellung auf neue Weise, indem sie ein ununterbrochenes Kreuzfeuer von improvisirten Witzworten, drolligen Einfällen und *Lazzi*’s unterhielten, so dass das Publikum in dieselbe heitere Stimmung versetzt wurde, in welche, Mozart’s Absicht nach, Herr und Diener auf der Bühne erscheinen sollen’; Lyser 1856: I, 88.
- 9 See Hertz 1990: 172; Woodfield 2010: 27.
- 10 ‘Unter allen Darstellern, die ich sah, erreichte nur der verstorbene *Benincasa* in Dresden als Leporello hier das Ideal; unter den Don Juan-Spielern versuchte nur der wackere *Wächter* (ebenfalls in Dresden) Ähnliches. Beide aber ohne Erfolg, denn für *Benincasa*-Leporello fehlte der rechte Don Juan und für *Wächter*-Don Juan fehlte wieder ein gewandter, geistreicher Leporello, der es vermocht hätte auf diese Idee einzugehen’; Lyser 1845b: 322.
- 11 ‘diesen gutmüthigen, genussüchtigen und genussfähigen Schalks-Tropf’; Lyser 1833: 126. ‘einen feigen, aber durchgetriebenen Burschen’; Lyser 1838: 117. ‘mit welcher artigen Schalkheit Mozart hier den Leporello sich wegen des gestohlenen “*Kapaunerls*” entschuldigen lässt’; Lyser 1845a: 154.
- 12 ‘Leporello’s ächt komische Muthlosigkeit bei aller seiner schalkhaften Gewandtheit’; *Abend-Zeitung*, 24 May 1817. ‘Hr. Benincasa als Leporello verschmähte die gemeinen Spässe, die andre Leporello’s sich erlauben’; *AmZ*, 4 April 1827: 235. ‘Herr Benincasa ... sieht denn nun ganz so aus, wie der Bediente eines *solchen* Herrn aussehen müsste, nämlich jovial – denn was ist lustiger, als solch ein Leben? Wohlgenährt – denn D. Giovanni ist ein Schmecker auch in Beziehung auf Tafel und Wein und Ehren-Leporello wird wohl diesen soliden Genüssen auch nicht abhold gewesen seyn’; *Abend-Zeitung*, 15 February 1828, Einheimisches no. 2: 8.
- 13 Hertz 1990: 169.
- 14 Woodfield 2012a: 74; Keefe 2017: 378–9.
- 15 Hertz 1990: 170.
- 16 Schneider 2008: 202; Woodfield 2012a: 75, 223. The playbill for a 1792 performance of *Una cosa rara* by Guardasoni company has Isabella and Lubino sung by Antonia Campi and Luigi Bassi: like Saporiti, Campi was the *prima donna seria* of the company.
- 17 See Volek 1987: 74; Woodfield 2012a: 43. The young Karl Ludwig Costenoble, who saw Teresa Saporiti and Caterina Bondini in Leipzig in 1786, found their singing ‘lovely’, and ‘both of them seemed most charming to me’ (‘Madame Bondini und Demoiselle Saporiti entzückten die Leipziger und mich ganz besonders; denn ihr Gesang war anmuthig, und Beide kamen mir höchst reizend vor’); Lewald 1837: 32.

- 18 Volek 1987: 78–82; Woodfield 2012a: 119
- 19 ‘in den Signor Amadeo könnt’ ich mich verlieben, denn er ist ein grosser Mann, und da lass ich mich nicht durch seine unansehnliche Gestalt irre machen’; Lyser 1837: 37.
- 20 ‘Dieser Herr Mozart ist wahrlich en grosser Mann, trotz seiner kleinen unansehnlichen Gestalt’; Lyser 1856: I, 85.
- 21 ‘His unprepossessing [*Unansehnliche*] appearance, the small stature of his body derived from the early strain of his spirit’; Niemetschek 2005: 60.
- 22 Stendhal, *La Vie de Rossini*, Paris, 1824, in Eisen 1997: 88–9. Stendhal claims that he met Bassi in Dresden in 1813; but Bassi did not go to Dresden before 1815, so they must have met when Stendhal was in Vienna together with Napoleon’s army in 1809. In a letter to his sister, Pauline Périer-Lagrange, of 6 August he mentions attending a performance of *Il matrimonio segreto* at the Kärntnertortheater; see Stendhal 1997. In the performance of that opera on 6 August Bassi sang Count Robinson: <http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=wtz&datum=18090806&seite=1&zoom=33> (accessed on 12 June 2020).
- 23 Schneider 2008: 202; Woodfield 2012a: 70, 74, 222.
- 24 Bitter 1961: 48. Cf. Woodfield 2012a: 59–61, 64.
- 25 Niemetschek 2005: 41.
- 26 Štěpánek 2012: 16 (my translation).
- 27 Volek 1987: 74–8.
- 28 Cf. Herwitz 2006: 131–2.
- 29 Allanbrook 1983: 289; Noiray 1996: 108.
- 30 Dent 1947: 172.
- 31 Jahn 2013: 195.
- 32 Jahn 2013: 196.
- 33 Abert 2007: 1049.
- 34 Abert 2007: 1101.
- 35 Allanbrook 1983: 255.
- 36 Allanbrook 1983: 255–6.
- 37 Raffaelli 2006: 91; Brown-Montesano 2007: 57.
- 38 Allanbrook 1983: 256; Mila 1988: 240; Kerman 1990: 122–3; Gallarati 1994: 214.
- 39 Willaschek 1996: 240.
- 40 Woodfield 2010: 96.
- 41 Lyser 1833: 128–30, in Schneider 2016: 408n.
- 42 Štěpánek 2012: 15.
- 43 For earlier discussions of this anecdote, see Schneider 2008: 235–6; Woodfield 2012a: 101.
- 44 Štěpánek 2012: 15.
- 45 Woodfield 2012a: 86.
- 46 Caterina Bondini retired from the stage in 1788; see Woodfield 2012a: 112. Micelli was listed as a member of Guardasoni’s company for several years; for the last reference to her, see Verti 1996: 1285–6.
- 47 On Bondini’s possible assumption of Zerlina, see Woodfield 2012a: 103–4.
- 48 Allanbrook 1983: 291.
- 49 ‘welches wahrlich mehr grausenerregend, als komisch ist, und nur durch das hawsurstmässige Herabziehen der gewöhnlichen Leporello’s lächerlich wird, aber höre und sehe man einmal den trefflichen *Benicasi* [*sic*] in Dresden bei dieser Stelle’; *Der Komet: Beilage für Literatur und Kunst, Mode*, no. 21, 1834: 166–7.
- 50 Goldoni 1960: 216.
- 51 Joseph von Sonnenfels, *Der Mann ohne Vorurtheil*, Vienna, 1765, vol. 1, in Eisendle 2006: 683.
- 52 Rushton 1981: 24; Gallarati 1994: 220.
- 53 Baker 2005: 92.

- 54 Sisman 2019: 307–8.
 55 Baker 2005: 91.
 56 Gottlieb Stephanie's 1772 adaptation of *Macbeth*, advertised as *Das neue steinerne Gastmahl*, features Duncan's ghost in the form of a talking statue. This play was performed annually in Vienna on All Souls' Day, replacing an earlier *Stone Guest* play, until it was supplanted by Marinelli's *Dom Juan* in 1783. See Goehring 2012: 239.
 57 *AmZ*, 5 December 1798, quoted from Solomon 1991: 33.
 58 Till 1992: 224–5.
 59 'Schauernd, indem ihn der Geist fest fast'; Rochlitz 1801: 53.
 60 The gluttonous attitude towards sex was too much for the nineteenth-century censor. In the 1814 Dresden libretto, Don Giovanni instead tells his servant that women 'per la mia anima sono il pane / che mangio, sono l'aria che respiro!' ('to my soul, are the bread I eat, the air I breathe').
 61 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 89–90.
 62 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 94.
 63 Dent 1947: 173.
 64 Abert 2007: 1050.
 65 Bitter 1961: 42.
 66 Bitter 1961: 40.
 67 Williams 2006: 114.
 68 Bayertz 2011: 158.
 69 Bayertz 2011: 164.
 70 Allanbrook 1983: 318.
 71 Allanbrook 1983: 319.
 72 Steinberg 2004: 36.
 73 Baker 1986: 130.
 74 Keefe 2016: 368–9.
 75 Ford 2012: 200.
 76 Ford 2012: 199.
 77 Pirrotta 1994: 160.
 78 Hughes 1955: 94.
 79 'Mit jedem Moment steigerte sich nun mein Interesse für das Ganze, und bei der Scene, wo der Geist des Gouverneurs eintritt, sträubte sich vor Schauer mein Haar'; Tomaschek 1845: 365.
 80 'Was ist graunvoll geisterhafter, als des Geistes Gesang im Finale?' Wendt 1818: 660.
 81 Gallarati 1994: 219.
 82 Leibowitz 1969: 645.
 83 Leibowitz 1969: 646–7.
 84 Dent 1947: 173.
 85 Allanbrook 1983: 305; Kunze 1984: 369; Dieckmann 1991: 349–50.
 86 Fink 1839: 481.
 87 Heinse 1837: 211–2, in Schneider 2016: 411n.
 88 'Endlich können wir das Spiel des Hrn. W. in der letzten Scene mit dem Geist nicht loben. Allerdings muss auch der Beherztteste bei dem Eintritt einer solchen Erscheinung erschrecken, aber ein Don Juan fass[t] sich schnell. Stolz, Zorn, Trotz, und vor allen Dingen den Teufel im Innern stählen ihn bald mit verzweifelnden Muthe. Er fühlt bereits die Qualen der Hölle, die ihn erwartet, aber umkehren will und kann er nicht, vorwärts stürmt er bis zu dem entsetzlichen "Nein," welchen ihn den unterirdischen Mächten Preis giebt. Ein so zusammengeschrackter Don Juan, wie Herr Woltereck, der fast in der ganzen Scene in derselben Stellung, demselben Mienspiel verblieb, hätte sicherlich die dargebotene Gnade angenommen, und sich schleunigst bekehr't'; *Originalien*, 1820, no. 93: 755.
 89 'In der Schlusscene mit dem Geist hat er viele ergreifende und plastisch schöne Momente, vorzüglich in den Stellungen. ... aber dass der Don Juan in diesem schreck-

lichen Moment drei bis vier Gläser Wein hinunterstürzt, können wir nicht billigen. Eine höhere Natur, und eine solche ist Don Juan trotz aller Verruchtheit unbezweifelt, wird nicht zu solchen gewöhnlichen Betäubungsmitteln ihre Zuflucht nehmen; höchstens mag er ein Glas einschenken, aber wenn er es, im Begriff es an den Mund zu bringen, gedankenlos niedersetzt, wird sein Spiel gewiss bedeutungsvoller, als wenn er es ausleert; dieses überlässt er viel besser dem Leporello, für den es recht gut passt'; *Originalien*, 1824, no. 114: 912.

- 90 'endlich konnten wir es nicht billigen, dass Don Juan in den letzten ... Szenen mit dem Geist, sich mit dem Leporello in den Hintergrund zurückzieht, und den Geist voran stehen lässt'; *Originalien*, 1826, no. 12: 96.
- 91 'So war es mir immer anstössig, dass es bei der Darstellung des Don Juan gewissermassen herkömmlich geworden ist, in der letzten Scene, wo der steinerne Gast wirklich auftritt, die äusserste Bestürzung an den Tag zu legen. Das übertriebene Spiel in verschrobenen Stellungen des Grausens und Entsetzens, dieses krampfhaft Haschen nach einem festen Halt, das leidenschaftliche Hinunterstürzen eines Bechers voll Wein, wie ich es oft beobachtet und mit Bewunderung habe preisen hören, wollte mir nie zum Wesen Don Juan's passen. Hat er den Commandeur mit dem Bewusstsein eingeladen, dass er nicht kommen werde, so ist er ein verächtlicher Prahler, ein Charakter, der am wenigsten geeignet ist, bei Weibern ein dauerndes Glück zu machen. Ist dagegen diese Herausforderung – was weit näher liegt – nur eine von den vielen Äusserungen seines frevelhaften Trotzes gegen Menschliches und Göttliches, so wird er auch der leibhaftigen Erscheinung des steinernen Gastes (und sei es auch gezwungen) mit trotzig vornehmer Kälte begegnen und nur dann erst zusammenbrechen, wenn die steinerne Rechte ihn unwiderruflich festhält. So soll, wie mir Tieck versicherte, Bassi diese Scene gespielt und damit die tiefste Erschütterung hervorgerufen haben'; Friesen 1871: 243–4.
- 92 Börner-Sandrini 1876: 215–16, in Schneider 2016: 412–3n.
- 93 Börner-Sandrini 1888: 18, in Waidelich 2001: 195.
- 94 *Abend-Zeitung*, 15 February 1828, Einheimisches no. 2: 7.
- 95 'der nach dem letzten No! zu Boden gesunkene Don Giovanni taumelt auf, Todesangst in den Zügen, wahnsinnig um sich starrend'; Lyser 1836: 112.
- 96 'Wenn der Geist versinkt, lagert sich dichte Finsterniss über den Saal, der *unsichtbare* Chor tönt aus der *Erde* heraus, ein *Flammengrab* öffnet sich, Don Juan stürzt hinein, das Grab schliesst sich wieder, und die Bühne bleibt einige Augenblicke leer, bis Ottavio, Anna, Elvira, Masseto [*sic*] und Zerline in Begleitung der Diener des heiligen Gerichtes mit Fackeln hereinstürzen'; Lyser 1849: 66.
- 97 'Das höchste Verdienst einer wahren Charakteristik wird aber immer der felsenfeste Trotz bleiben, mit welchem Don Juan aller Gefahren, aller Warnungen und endlich selbst der höllischen Mächte spottet. Es ist das die Seite seiner grössten poetischen Schönheit, ... Mozart hat durch die Krisis seiner wunderbaren Töne Hölle, und Himmel zugleich geöffnet. Wenn die Scene mit dem Geiste recht gegeben wird, wozu denn doch gehört, dass Leporello seinen Trivialitäten entsagt, so muss sie den ähnlichen Moment im Hamlet noch überbieten, denn wo es auf die dunklen, geheimnissvollen Schauer der ewigen Urkräfte ankommt, da kann sich die Poesie mit der Musik nicht messen'; Philippi 1825: 80.
- 98 Lyser 1838: 138; Lyser 1845a: 155.
- 99 Lyser 1847: 95, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 100 'das letzte langgehaltene Nó in der Geisterscene, Posaumentöne und Paukendonner überhallend, erfüllte alle Hörer mit Entsetzen'; Lyser 1833: 127.
- 101 'Den Furien-Chor zuletzt liess er *unter* der Scene singen und duldeten es nicht, dass dem Zuschauer sichtbare Larven den Don Juan in den Abgrund zerrten ... / Mit der herrlichen Schlussfuge endete die Probe'; Lyser 1837: 47.

- 102 ‘Furien erschienen *nicht* auf der Bühne, der Chor derselben ertönte aus der Versenkung in welche Don Giovanni hinabstürzte’; Lyser 1847: 96.
- 103 Lyser 1847: 96, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 104 ‘Keiner wird ein förmlicher Weiberverführer seyn wollen, aber einen so poetischen Don Juan, wie ihn Hoffmann schildert, möchte gern jeder fade Mensch, der nicht hässlich ist und zu sonst nichts taugt, vorstellen, und mit dem Suchen nach einem Ideal lassen sich eine Menge Schurkenstreiche, an leichtgläubigen Mädchen begangen, poetisch beschönigen’; Lyser 1838: 141.
- 105 Brown 2010: 282.
- 106 Woodfield speculates whether the final scene was cut in Guardasoni’s company just as it may have been cut by Mozart in Vienna in 1788; see Woodfield 2010: 109–10. In addition to Börner-Sandrini and the evidence to the contrary that Woodfield himself cites, we may cite Karl Theodor von Küstner who, as a child, had seen the company perform the scene in Leipzig in 1793 or 1794; see Küstner 1853: 114.
- 107 ‘Etwas Überraschendes war am Schlusse der Oper der feuerspeiende Berg, den die letzte Dekorazion im Hintergrunde zeigte, und in welchen die Furien den Don Juan, nach einem etwas echauffanten, wie feuerspeienden Schlangen durchflochtenen Tanze, indem ihn eine derselben erst hoch in die Luft führt, zur wohlverdienten Strafe hineinwerfen. Diess machte die Oper noch mehr als das sprechende Grabmal auf dem Kirchhofe und der sich beim Souper einsinkende steinerne Gast zur Zauberoper. Die feurige Exekuzion ergötzte den kleinen und den grossen Haufen, was jedesmal ein lautes Bravo bewies’; *ZeW*, 22 December 1807: 1629–30.
- 108 *AeJ*, November 1796: 190, in Volek 2016: 221–2.
- 109 *AmZ*, 30 April 1800: 540, in Angermüller and Geffray 1995: 51.
- 110 ‘Dass die letzten drei Nummern wegbleiben und die Oper mit der Katastrophe, wo Don Juan von Teufeln geholt wird, schliesst, ist wohl und gut, und Dichter wie auch Tonsetzer, wenn sie noch lebten, würden sich über eine so glückliche Änderung sehr freuen. Ich kann überhaupt nicht begreifen, wie es Mozart’s sonst so feinem und richtigem Taktsinn für ästhetische Wahrheit unbemerkt blieb, dass durch ein so mattes moralisirendes Ende der vorhergehende drastisch-gesteigerte Effekt ganz vernichtet wird; er wird aber auch itzt noch durch die übel angebrachte Decoration, den höllischen Rachen des Vesuv vorstellend, in welchen statt des Don Juan eine ihm nachgebildete Puppe von den Teufeln geschleudert wird, sehr geschwächt’; Tomaschek 1846: 356.
- 111 The final scene was also omitted in the first Czech-language production, which premiered at the theatre in 1825, but it was included two years later due to the complaint of a local critic who argued that a Czech production ought to be truer to Mozart’s original work than the distorting German productions; see Nedbal 2018: 189–91.
- 112 *Aeneis*, II.218–19, 222–4, in Virgil 1916.
- 113 A coloured engraving from 1791 that depicts the proscenium frame, clearly showing Lessing’s portrait above the stage, is reproduced in Robbins Landon 1989: 218–9.
- 114 Lessing 2005: 13–4.
- 115 Lessing 2005: 22.
- 116 Lessing 2005: 23.
- 117 Lessing 2005: 25.
- 118 Lessing 2005: 27.
- 119 Lessing 2005: 32.
- 120 For an insightful analysis of the libretto’s representation of pity, especially in the two death scenes and with reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theory of pity, see the chapter ‘Don Giovanni’s Good Nature’ in Baker 2021.
- 121 ‘Nur fällt bei ihm jede Theilnahme weg, jedes Interesse, welches doch den Don Juan noch bis zu dem schauerlichen Ende begleitet. Der letzte Eindruck ist immer:

“Schade um so viel Kraft und Liebenswürdigkeit!” anstatt dass bei dem Caspar män-
niglich sich freuet, des Unholds los zu seyn’; *Originalien*, 1826, no. 15: 120.

- 122 Elsewhere, I have argued that Mozart is likely to have been familiar with Lessing’s
analysis of terror and pity, and that it also informed his next opera for Prague, *La*
clemenza di Tito; see Schneider 2018b: 64–6.
- 123 Poizat 1992: 143.
- 124 Rancière 2019: 7.
- 125 Robinson 1997: 284–5. For a thorough philological study of the issue, see Woodfield
2010: 95–6, 103–10.
- 126 Fink 1839: 481.
- 127 Steinberg 2004: 26.
- 128 Allanbrook 1983: 323; Ford 2012: 201.
- 129 Allanbrook 1983: 323–4.
- 130 Baker 2005: 91.
- 131 Henze-Döhring 1986: 253.
- 132 ‘Sie will fort. Anna und Oktavio halten sie auf und ziehen sie in ihre Umarmung’;
Rochlitz 1801: 56.
- 133 Hoffmann 1993: II/1, 90.
- 134 Lyser 1847: 96, in Schneider 2016: 410n.
- 135 Dent 1947: 174.
- 136 Williams 2006: 115.
- 137 Abert 2007: 1107.
- 138 Dieckmann 1991: 350.
- 139 We have already referred to Donna Anna in the opening scene and to the three maskers
in the ballroom scene as ‘Furies’. In addition, Kunze has pointed out that the repeated
‘No!’ of Don Giovanni’s pursuers in the sextet (1032), which they yell in response to
Donna Elvira when she begs them to spare the life of her ‘husband’, is a parody of
the infernal scene in Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), with Don Giovanni’s enemies
cast as the tyrannical Furies and Donna Elvira as Orfeo begging for Euridice’s life;
see Kunze 1984: 365. In the final scene, however, Donna Elvira has become one of
the Furies herself once more.

Postscript

In defence of the operatic work

Students should know how Don Giovanni is being portrayed on stage. In scholarship, criticism, and some textbooks, tributes to his defiant masculinity have begun losing ground to discussions of the murder, attempted rape, and repeated humiliation he visits on his fellow characters. In the theater, depictions of his offenses have become more forthright, but with an emphasis on social and psychological causes that attenuate the responsibility of the perpetrator.¹

This is the beginning of an article with the title ‘*Don Giovanni* and the Resilience of Rape Culture’ by Richard Will, based on a paper read at the 2016 meeting of the American Musicological Society, in the context of a colloquy centring on sexual violence in opera. Claiming that Mozart’s opera has both undermined and reinforced rape culture through its performance history, depending on how the title character was portrayed, Will asserts that a ‘predatory Don Giovanni is a natural vehicle for social critique’, whereas productions that throw doubt on Donna Anna’s claim that he tried to rape her are ‘upending the moral compass of the entire story’.² Though stating that he wants his students to encounter ‘both vicious predators and hapless neurotics, virtuous fiancées and conniving lovers, morality tales and bacchanals’ when studying filmed version of the opera, he leaves us in no doubt that he considers productions that portray Don Giovanni as a criminal predator the most socially useful and also the ones most faithful to the work.³

While Will’s paper traces, with approval, a tendency within opera films and stage productions to make Don Giovanni increasingly violent, his paper is itself an example of a related tendency – especially prominent among American opera scholars during the last quarter-century – to adopt a moralistic approach to *Don Giovanni*. This tendency reflects the so-called ethical turn in politics and the arts, which has been criticised by French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Summing up some of Rancière’s arguments appears relevant in a critical examination of today’s reception of Mozart’s opera.

Whereas the ethical turn appears to ‘submit politics and art to moral judgments about the validity of their principles and the consequences of their practices’, Rancière argues, in reality, it

signifies the constitution of an indistinct sphere in which not only is the specificity of political and artistic practices dissolved, but so also is that which formed the very core of ‘old morality’: the distinction between fact and law, between what is and what ought to be.⁴

In other words, the ethical turn has instituted the last decades’ increasing aestheticisation of politics and politicisation of art, in which moral norms are conflated with, or overrule, factual evidence and aesthetic judgements, respectively. Within the sphere of politics, that is what the recent tumultuous years have taught us to call ‘post-truth’, which denotes a deterioration in evidence-based argumentation. Within the sphere of art, that is what makes scholars and directors refrain from asking what has happened in Donna Anna’s apartment; since it is generally agreed that Don Giovanni is a rapist, even raising the issue of alternative interpretations of the textual evidence is considered unethical.

In the words of Rancière, such restrictions on hermeneutic inquiry result from the fact that the governing principle of the ethical community is *consensus*, which marks the suppression of the division between law and fact, whereas the governing principle of the old political community was *dissensus*, the differing views on how facts should be interpreted and acted upon. That indistinction between law and fact has led to ‘an unprecedented dramaturgy of infinite evil, justice and reparation’.⁵ Within politics, it has given rise to what he calls the fight for ‘infinite justice’, which is ‘a preventative justice’ that attacks ‘anything that threatens the social bond holding the community together’, in effect stripping the human rights of their universality.⁶ Within the arts, infinite justice has emerged as the only appropriate response to Don Giovanni’s actions. Notably, Will objects to productions that depict his alleged sexual violence ‘as a symptom, rather than a cause, of a social dysfunction imposed from without’, because that means ‘raising questions as to who bears responsibility for his crimes’.⁷ Questions about Don Giovanni’s guilt should not be raised, Will implies, because there is no question: his evil is infinite, and the social utility of the opera consists in displaying that evil for the instruction of the audience. Thus, whereas the arts used to have an emancipatory role that ‘aimed at bringing about a radical political and/or aesthetic change’, as Rancière writes, now their role is more often to ‘restore lost meaning to a common world or repair the cracks of the social bond’; they are used either for mourning a catastrophic past or for community-building.⁸ A performance of *Don Giovanni* may thus contribute to the endless work of mourning the atrocities of a misogynist past, which is simultaneously a celebration of the moral superiority of today’s ethical consensus, or it may be used to teach American undergraduate students about rape culture.

Although the ethical turn is a global phenomenon, it does resonate particularly with American theories of performance. Whereas the concept of performance promoted by German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte, for example, looks to ‘a deeper experience of being in the world and of becoming newly conscious of that being’, Marvin Carlson writes,

American performance theory, with its close historical ties to the social sciences, to Deweyesque pragmatism, and to the tradition of rhetoric and communication, has in general looked for the utility of performance in its ability to alter or at least alter the spectator's thinking about general and specific social situations.⁹

A keyword in the pragmatic view of performance is 'negotiation', he observes. This implies that a production of *Don Giovanni* always 'negotiates' with the socio-cultural reality and the expectations of the audience, as maintained by Alessandra Campana who is concerned with what it 'does' to the public in terms of gender politics.¹⁰ But what Rancière calls the '*pedagogical* model of the efficacy of art', which presumes 'a direct relation running from the performance of bodies on stage to its effects on the minds of spectators and its consequences for their behaviour outside the theatre', was disputed already in the Age of Enlightenment.¹¹ The survival of that model in American theatre and performance theory, which tends to focus on the negotiation of values, on ethical lessons we might derive from performances, seems related to the fact that theatre basically is regarded as a form of entertainment in America, as Carlson argues; German scholars, who regard theatre as a major cultural form, tend to focus more on its aesthetic dimension.¹² The late Enlightenment model of art that forms the basis of the latter view of performance involved what Rancière calls 'the re-framing of the "real"', the audience developing the ability to see and listen with new eyes and ears.¹³ This holds revolutionary potential.

We recognise the connection between the popular and the ethical, including the pragmatic emphasis on negotiation, in Richard Taruskin's writings on Mozart. In an essay from 1990 with the title 'A Mozart Wholly Ours', Taruskin described the composer as an equivalent of modern pop or jazz musicians, asserting that the artist of Mozart's time would have 'valued spontaneity, wit, and non-chalance' rather than 'perfection and profundity', while also maintaining that a good Mozart performance is one that holds up a mirror in which we see ourselves and 'all our values' reflected 'with blinding clarity'.¹⁴ But Taruskin's notion of popularity is that of late-twentieth-century America, not that of late-eighteenth-century Central Europe where wit and profundity often coincided, and it might well be argued that a good Mozart performance is one that reframes the 'real' rather than one that simply mirrors our values. Taruskin's bias ultimately impedes his attempt to situate *Don Giovanni* in its historical context. In the sections he devotes to the opera in *The Oxford History of Western Music*, and in which he purports to place its 'morality' in historical perspective, he ends up reproducing the old Rochlitzian image of the seducer as a horrible rapist and murderer, exactly like Will.¹⁵ Indeed, this image has gained new prominence with the ethical turn of which Taruskin, too, is a staunch advocate, having once attacked 'the indiscriminateness of what is now considered enlightened taste, and in particular the abandonment of any ethical dimension to artistic judgment'.¹⁶ Hence he finds that *Don Giovanni* represents the female characters as mere 'sexual "objects"' without agency who are 'mocked and negated in varying degrees', since this was

‘the cynical “gender politics” of Mozart’s time, and it would not be reasonable to expect to find them transcended in a work that aspired to popular success’.¹⁷ This explains why a Mozart performance, in Taruskin’s view, should mirror *our* values rather than those of a less civilised past. As Catherine Coppola has recently argued, however, with reference to stage directors’ similarly condescending treatments of *Die Zauberflöte*, it is not only wrong to assume that we have progressed so far in the struggle for women’s rights that we have nothing to learn from the old stage works; ‘the notion of progress implies a complete lack of awareness of Mozart’s time’.¹⁸

Indeed, as I have argued in this book, Da Ponte and Mozart dealt with gender roles in a much more sophisticated and critical way than Taruskin and Will are aware or are willing to allow. Moreover, *Don Giovanni* was not experienced by its first audiences as a piece of entertainment that ‘aspired to popular success’ by reflecting their values. In order to examine that issue further, however, we must take a closer look at the concepts of the operatic work of art, classical music, the written interpretation and the performer’s ‘fidelity’, in the generation of all of which *Don Giovanni* itself played an important role. Behind them stands the concept of the autonomy of art which, as Rancière reminds us, ‘is the autonomy of the experience, not of the work of art’.¹⁹ With the ethical turn, all these concepts have lost terrain within opera studies, and with detrimental effects on both the art form and the way we think about opera.

There is evidence that *Don Giovanni* was both conceived and received as a complex work that presented major difficulties to its first performers and audiences, appealing above all to connoisseurs who were able to appreciate its depths. In one of the anecdotes about Mozart that Friedrich Rochlitz published in 1798, we find the following: ‘Concerning *Don Giovanni* he said: “This opera was not written for the Viennese, but rather for Prague [*die Prager*], and most of all for myself and my friends”’.²⁰ We find a similar anecdote in Franz Xaver Niemetschek’s Mozart biography, which appeared in the same year:

The Bohemians are proud that [Mozart], with a music so sublime and created from the depth of his genius, recognised and honoured their good taste in this art form. ‘*Don Giovanni* is written for Prague [*Prag*]’ – one need not say more to prove what a high opinion Mozart had of the musical sense of the Bohemians.²¹

It has been suggested that Rochlitz based his anecdote on Niemetschek’s, but this theory does not persuade me.²² Taking the latter’s Bohemian patriotism and social conservatism into account, it seems more likely that it was Niemetschek who ignored elements of Mozart’s statement that did not fit into his preferred narrative. Indeed, it was typical of Mozart to address audience groups with different degrees of connoisseurship within the same work: when his father had worried that there was too little of ‘the so-called popular’ in *Idomeneo*, the composer assured him that ‘there is music for all kinds of people in my opera – just not for the long-eared’.²³ And after describing two of his piano concertos (presumably Nos. 11 and 13) as

being neither too difficult nor too light, as brilliant and pleasant without being hollow, he added: 'here and there only connoisseurs can gain gratification, but in such a way that the non-connoisseurs must be pleased without knowing why'.²⁴ He probably thought of *Don Giovanni* in similar terms. Rochlitz's claim that it was not written for the Viennese brings to mind the words of Joseph II after its lukewarm reception in Vienna in 1788. 'The opera is divine; it's perhaps more beautiful than *Figaro*', Da Ponte remembered him saying, 'but it's not food for the teeth of my Viennese'.²⁵ And we know what Mozart thought of the teeth of the Viennese. 'The chief thing must be the comical', he wrote when planning his first *opera buffa* for Vienna, 'for I know the Viennese taste'.²⁶ If Rochlitz's anecdote is authentic, Mozart probably meant that the Viennese would not appreciate the tragic dimension of *Don Giovanni*, and therefore it was not written for them. This does not necessarily mean, though, that the tragic dimension would have been better understood by the Prague audience, as Tomislav Volek maintains, following Niemetschek.²⁷ That the opera was rather written for Prague might also be a reference to the virtuosic orchestral writing, which may have been conceived with the Prague orchestra and music connoisseurs in mind. The sexual innuendos, the references to Casanova, the subversion of the moral perspective of the *Stone Guest* plays, including the incursion of the tragic into the comic mood, may only have been appreciated by 'myself and my friends'.

No doubt, the latter group consisted of people who understood Italian and who shared the composer's worldview: his fellow Freemasons, his aristocratic patrons and other enlightened people, such as his local musician friends Franz Xaver and Josepha Duschek. That Niemetschek distanced himself from this group appears from his 1828 autobiography where we learn that his wife Therese had been a frequent visitor to the Duschek household before their marriage. Here 'she was presented with many excellent things in the sphere of art, but also with many bad things in the sphere of views and morals', Niemetschek opines, adding that her

world of ideas was indisputably expanded, her sense for the beautiful sharpened and cultivated, and her insight into human nature developed; but she was immediately concerned by the danger of being tainted by the frivolity in regard to the sacred and the divine, which characterised that age and which governed the tone of educated circles.²⁸

According to Rochlitz, these were the people for whom *Don Giovanni* was written 'most of all', which thought Niemetschek would hardly have cherished. It must have felt more reassuring to imagine that Mozart had simply written it 'for Prague', especially as this supported one of his recurring claims: that the Bohemians were the first ones truly to understand Mozart.

Such a multi-layered form of communication is as far removed from the serious classical music culture of the twentieth century as from today's pop culture, which Taruskin puts forward as an appropriate framework for understanding *Don Giovanni*. It is quite in line with what we know about eighteenth-century opera audiences, however, Pierpaolo Polzonetti showing that

the period thought more in terms of varying degrees of connoisseurship than of the social class divisions we tend to focus on today.²⁹ Though *Don Giovanni* was no doubt a success in 1787 – Mozart telling one of his Viennese friends that it was received ‘with the loudest acclaim’, and Guardasoni reportedly observing that ‘no manager shall know distress’ with Mozart and Da Ponte writing for his theatre – some sources suggest that the audience response was more complex.³⁰ According to a contemporary newspaper report, *Don Giovanni* was ‘extremely difficult to perform’; it was the ‘connoisseurs and musicians’ (rather than the regular operagoers) who said that ‘Prague had never yet heard the like’, while it was the ‘unusually large attendance’ (rather than their reaction) that testified to the ‘unanimous approbation’ at the premiere.³¹ That implies that the opera was really a *succès d’estime*, which fits Bassi’s memoir of the first audience listening ‘quite coldly and, as it were, with astonishment and their mouths agape’ to the quartet, the trio and the sextet, though they received the duettino, the champagne aria, the Act I finale and the canzonetta with ‘enthusiastic warmth’. According to a local critic writing in 1807, Mozart had even told his friends in Prague that he would be ‘inconsolable if this opera *pleased generally* at its first performance’, which the writer saw as proof that ‘the most beautiful flowers’ of musical composition ‘only unfurl slowly and gradually before finally yielding the richest enjoyment’.³² Niemetschek himself, who may have been behind this anecdote, made similar observations in his Mozart biography. Having heard Guardasoni’s company perform *Don Giovanni* multiple times during the 1790s, he reported that it was ‘the favourite opera of the best audience in Prague’, people with a less refined taste preferring the trivial Viennese singspiels.³³ Later in the book he introduced – apparently, as the first writer ever – the concept of classical music, in response to the singular fact that Mozart’s operas not only continued to attract an audience after ten years in the repertoire, but that operagoers continued to find new sources of enjoyment in them:³⁴

Usually, one only perceives [the] beauty [of Mozart’s works] really vividly after frequent hearings or very keen examination. Or have *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *La clemenza di Tito* indeed ever caused us boredom during the many years we heard them performed? ... That is the true touchstone of classical worth! The masterpieces of the Romans and the Greeks always please more and more with continued reading and the more one’s taste matures – and the same happens to connoisseurs and non-connoisseurs alike when listening to Mozart’s music, especially to his dramatic works. This was our experience at the first performance of *Don Giovanni* ...!

The attentive admirer of his works observes here a certain subtle expression, which captures the character of each person, situation and sentiment with the utmost accuracy:

reddere convenientia cuique.

That quality marked his true vocation as a dramatic composer, and it helps explain both the enchantment and the great effect of his works. Therefore, each of his compositions has a certain unique character, which even the choice of key does not negate.³⁵

To Niemetschek, ‘classical’ meant that Mozart’s works were ‘immortal’ like the classics of ancient poetry. Not identical with their physical copies, these are ideal structures that await realisation, since poetry, ultimately, is a performing art on a par with drama and music: whether it is declaimed from a stage, read aloud to a small audience or read silently with an inner voice, poetry must be realised temporally and sonically. The notion of classical music also depends on the idea that the meaning of a musical work can never be exhausted because it possesses a certain ‘unique character’ that transcends the individual performance or production. The latter idea, which Niemetschek sees as a key to understanding the continued fascination of Mozart’s operas, can be traced back to Gluck’s and Calzabigi’s opera reform in the 1760s.³⁶ This conception of the operatic work was closely linked both to the silent, attentively listening audience, which emerged in response to Gluck’s operas, and to the requirement that performers strive to communicate the unique character of the work.³⁷ ‘The more that truth and perfection are sought, the more necessary are precision and exactness’, wrote Gluck (or Calzabigi) in 1770 in the preface to the printed score of *Paride ed Elena*, thus establishing the connection between the unique dramatic conception and the flawless performance:

One note held or shortened, a neglected increase in speed, a misplaced appoggiatura in the voice, or a trill, passage-work, or roulade can ruin a whole scene in ... an opera [like *Orfeo ed Euridice*], though it does nothing to, or does nothing but improve, an opera of the common sort. The presence of the composer is therefore as important to the performance of this kind of music as, so to say, the presence of the sun to the works of nature. [The sun] is absolutely the spirit and the life, and without it everything remains in chaos and darkness.³⁸

Though we have no similar statement from the hand of Mozart, the tenor Michael Kelly, who created the double role of Basilio and Don Curzio in *Le nozze di Figaro* in 1786, described the rehearsals preceding the world premiere of that opera in strikingly similar terms, even down to the solar imagery, when he recalled the process forty years later:

Of all the performers in this opera at that time, but one survives, – myself. It was allowed that never was opera stronger cast. I have seen it performed at different periods in other countries, and well too, but no more to compare with its original performance than light is to darkness. All the original performers had the advantage of the instruction of the composer, who transfused into their minds his inspired meaning. I never shall forget his little animated countenance, when lighted up with the glowing rays of genius; – it is as impossible to describe it, as it would be to paint sun-beams.³⁹

Like Gluck's operas, Mozart's operas ultimately required the composer's presence during rehearsals. In this regard, Niemetschek was privileged in a way that no later writer on Mozart's operas has been: whenever he wanted, he could hear them played by the company for which *Don Giovanni* and *La clemenza di Tito* (1791) had been written, and in which the stage director and many of the performers were still active. He was in a position to take the unified performance more or less for granted, therefore, which may explain why his concern with the interpretation of the works was limited to his insistence that Mozart's music must be performed 'punctually and with passion' and in 'his spirit', without an overabundance of ornaments.⁴⁰

That inevitably changed in the nineteenth century. Gluck's and Mozart's operas, which had become available in print editions that reinforced their status as works of art, were now generally regarded as classics, and there was still a strong awareness of their appeal depending on their unique character, and of the demands that this put on the performers. However, there was no longer any possibility of consulting the composers or of hearing the original singers. The solution of the Romantic generation to this problem was to replace the inspiring composer-instructor with the inspiring interpretation. It became the task of the critic and of the conductor to identify the unique character of the work and to illuminate performers with their vision.

This helps us situate E. T. A. Hoffmann's contribution in its historical context. A few months after his appointment as Kapellmeister in Bamberg, Hoffmann launched his literary career with the novella *Ritter Gluck*, which appeared in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1809, and which reads as an attempt to address the problem of performing the classical masterpieces without having access to the composer's stated intentions. In Berlin two decades after Gluck's death, Hoffmann's narrator, a musical connoisseur, encounters the composer's ghost searching desperately for a kindred spirit as he is condemned to suffer the torment of hearing his operas – and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* – carelessly performed at the local opera house. No doubt alluding to the actual 1808 Berlin revival of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779), his ghost complains that the overture has been substituted with that for his *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774), whereby 'the entire effect, the entire well-calculated exposition of the tragedy is lost'.⁴¹ At the end of the story, the narrator hears the ghost play all of Gluck's *Armide* (1777) on the piano from a score consisting of blank pages, taking extraordinary but inspired liberties in his performance of the overture. In the opera's moving final scene, the ghost also 'deviated markedly from the actual original, but his changed music was so to speak Gluck's scene in higher potency'.⁴² While permeated by a wistful longing for the lost immediacy and contemporaneity of a performance led by the composer himself, Hoffmann's novella also reads as a call for fidelity to the 'spirit' of Gluck's works.

In his novella *Don Juan*, which appeared four years later, Hoffmann went one step further, since he not only called for a unifying vision but even put one into words himself, thereby founding the interpretation of operatic works as a genre of writing. 'Only the poet understands the poet', Hoffmann's narrator

states before explaining how he sees the opera's general theme and the motivations of the characters; 'only a Romantic mind can enter into the Romantic; only the poetically exalted spirit who received his ordination in the heart of the temple can understand what the ordained expresses in his enthusiasm'.⁴³ A quarter-century after its premiere, it took an artistic genius rather than an enlightened connoisseur to gauge the depths of *Don Giovanni*, apparently; but this difference reflected a change of practical circumstances as well as philosophical outlook: during the composer's lifetime, nobody else had needed to formulate an interpretation of the opera, let alone put it into writing. Hoffmann, whose narrator communes with the spirit of Donna Anna just as his other narrator communes with the spirit of Gluck, simply took it on himself to divine and communicate Mozart's intentions (he had, incidentally, added 'Amadeus' to his name already in 1805). This was made explicit in his 1815 review of a Berlin *Don Giovanni* in which he called for 'the *faithful* performance of a masterpiece', effectively introducing the concept of 'fidelity' to the work into music criticism.⁴⁴ 'Each of the marvellous sounds in *Don Giovanni* is mysteriously intertwined with the whole like rays reflecting in one focus', Hoffmann wrote, echoing the solar imagery of the preface to *Paride ed Elena* but replacing the composer with the work as the light source.⁴⁵ What the Romantic critic required, like Gluck and Niemetschek before him, was fidelity to the spirit of the composer rather than to the letter of the score, his concept of fidelity obviously differing from the literalist concept of *Werktreue* that arose in the early twentieth century.⁴⁶ This meant that he, on the one hand, criticised the use of spoken dialogue in place of recitatives and of the inserted music by other composers in the concluding infernal scene, while he, on the other hand, approved of certain departures from the printed text, such as the inclusion of the chorus in the Act I finale and of mute supper guests in the Act II finale (both features we recognise from the 1813 novella), while also commending the Donna Anna for ornamenting her arias in the spirit of her dramatic character and Mozart's composition. Because Hoffmann couched both his interpretation of the work and his insistence on fidelity to that work in Romantic-religious imagery, it is easy to lose sight of the facts that he was seeking solutions to very real problems posed by works inherited from the eighteenth century, and that the striving for unity in the performance was not in itself a Romantic invention.⁴⁷

That striving reflected the Enlightenment concept of art's autonomy. Danish philosopher Dorthe Jørgensen reminds us that already Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who founded aesthetics as a branch of philosophy in the middle of the eighteenth century, was concerned with the true in our experience of the beautiful, thus conceiving of the aesthetic experience as a form of true cognition.⁴⁸ With its free, creative and questioning mode of thinking, the aesthetic experience is autonomous, its autonomy enabling the autonomy of the subject. Jørgensen paraphrases Kant and Schiller when arguing that beauty is the symbol of the morally good; aesthetics is the domain of judgement, which is a prerequisite for acting morally; and so, ethics is based on aesthetics.⁴⁹ Therein lies art's democratic, emancipatory potential.

In the later stages of the Enlightenment, aesthetics began to focus more specifically on the experience of art as a form of true cognition, and this generated a crisis in the conception of the work. Jørgensen defines that crisis as a conflict between the classical work-concept, which reflected the ancient Greek understanding of beauty as organic unity and harmonious proportions, and the new hermeneutic work-concept, which reflected a philosophical understanding of beauty as the experience of something having value in itself.⁵⁰ This crisis led to a new focus on the relation between the physical object or event (the score or the performance) and the work of art as a metaphysical entity that enables true cognition.

No doubt, Mozart's contemporaries found *Don Giovanni* so difficult to appreciate because it announced that crisis, dramatically and musically. It breaks with the classical concept of beauty because it centres on the disharmony between the mode of seduction and the mode of vengeance, on the disproportion between transgression and punishment; and that conflict could not be embodied truthfully by means of harmonious proportions. In other words, the classical idea of organic unity as a property of the work is opposed to a new focus on hermeneutic unity, which is only accessible through the aesthetic experience, and which is a property both of the work and of the spectator-listener's interpretation.⁵¹ Each of us must try to make sense in our own way of the unity we experience, and this calls for a philosophical inquiry into our aesthetic responses. Though the work cannot mean everything, it is open to endless interpretations, which explains why the Prague connoisseurs kept coming back to the opera.

In her study of the musical work-concept, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* from 1994 (reissued in 2007), Lydia Goehr makes no distinction between the classical and the hermeneutic work-concepts, however, which leads to an inadequate account of the changes that occurred around 1800. According to Goehr, it was at this point that 'theorists began to describe a work of fine art as having its own internal unity', which would give it 'the kind of self-sufficiency it needed to be an object of aesthetic contemplation'.⁵² Moreover, art was cut off from science and morality, which meant that the beautiful, the true and the good 'were to be grasped by distinct mental faculties', the fine arts being severed 'from anything associated with the transient, contingent world of mere mortals'.⁵³ Aiming to dismantle what she considers the continued and oppressive force of the musical work-concept, Goehr thus sets work and experience in opposition to each other. In reality, though, the type of internal unity she refers to is the one already described by Aristotle; the concept of the work's hermeneutic unity that emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, on the other hand, is directly dependent on the interpretation of the spectator-listener, which is always a creative act that we perform on the basis of the clues, ideas and perspectives that the work offers to the imagination.⁵⁴ Being true to a work of art means interpreting it, and we can only interpret it if we conceive of it as possessing hermeneutic unity, Jørgensen argues; in other words, if we conceive of it as a work. When we abandon the work-concept we abandon interpretation, therefore, and so we give up on the possibility of achieving intellectual autonomy through the experience of art.

Taruskin explains in his foreword to the second edition of Goehr's book that her dismantling of the musical work-concept is nothing less than the 'liberation from the tyranny of aesthetic autonomy'.⁵⁵ But as Rancière and Jørgensen emphasise, the autonomy of art is the autonomy of the aesthetic experience, not of the work of art, and a 'liberation' from art's autonomy will therefore inevitably undermine the autonomy of the spectating and listening subject. Indeed, it appears from *The Don Giovanni Moment*, the collection of essays Goehr edited together with Daniel Herwitz in 2006, that she is keen to place the aesthetic experience within a moral framework, fearing that the audience might otherwise be seduced by dangerous passions to become subject to some authoritarian control. In their introduction, the editors even suggest that 'perhaps this opera teaches us about our ability to resist and transcend its power to seduce in the move towards moral consciousness'.⁵⁶ And according to Goehr's essay in the volume, *Don Giovanni* demonstrates that 'all our optimism associated with improving our lives by aesthetic means' cannot function 'without consideration also of the moral or social character of the aesthetic *Erlebnis* we construct'.⁵⁷ What she calls the opera's 'drive of the absolutely musical', which is the drive of seduction embodied by the title character, 'constructs an aesthetic space into which an audience enters', but that drive is ultimately treacherous:

The drive is constructed as a drive toward freedom or liberation. Yet, at the same time, the drive fails to fully control the audience it claims to liberate. Accordingly, we are forced to ask: what freedom does music unleash? Freedom in what form? Freedom at what cost? Does not the drive toward freedom too easily transform itself into one toward absolute control precisely to keep the 'madness' of its audience in check?⁵⁸

As readers, we are left wondering how the drive might be expected to 'control' and 'liberate' the audience simultaneously in the first place. In *Don Giovanni*, in any case, the audience is rescued from their own 'madness', the dangerous seduction, Goehr posits, because the opera's aesthetic drive 'is never brought to conclusion and is rather interrupted *where it should be*, with the entrance of the moral voice', which she identifies with the stone guest and the final scene that offers 'the new beginning of a balanced and harmonious song' when the surviving characters return 'to live with more wisdom in worlds again of their own making' (author's emphasis).⁵⁹ If it had not been for this ending, with its supposedly clear-cut message, the opera would have been just as troubling, Goehr suggests, as the music dramas of Richard Wagner, which 'lay themselves open to ideological appropriation' because they 'refuse conclusively to articulate their messages'.⁶⁰ Although 'the indeterminacy or openness' of works of art contains 'the *promise* of a freedom from ideological control and the *possibility* also to expose the latter for what it is', it also contains a '*curse*', which is 'the easy appropriation of purely musical expression by the sometimes hideous bare word'.⁶¹ The less conclusive a work's 'message', in other words, the greater the risk of its ideological appropriation. Here it becomes clear how Goehr's critique of the work-concept differs

from the ‘death of the Author’ announced by poststructuralist critics in the 1960s. Whereas Roland Barthes celebrated the Author’s death as the precondition for the liberating ‘birth of the reader’, the open text allowing for numberless interpretations and endless creative exploration, Goehr is concerned that such hermeneutic openness might enable unethical interpretations, and so she concludes her essay by criticising Peter Konwitschny’s 2003 Berlin production for not making the opera’s supposed moral message sufficiently clear.⁶² Although distancing herself from ‘puritanical or censorious’ productions, she insists on the importance of a moral framework for the opera – on the subjection of beauty to morality, of aesthetics to ethics – but without, significantly, contemplating who creates that moral framework, and with what authority. As a consequence, she ends up with a moralistic conception of *Don Giovanni* after all.

It is ironic that Taruskin and Goehr, the two writers on musical aesthetics who have fought most vigorously against the stifling effect of ideological biases derived from nineteenth-century German theorists, end up elevating a nineteenth-century German interpretation of *Don Giovanni* to the status of an objective moral truth. A moral truth, that is, which has been sanctioned by the consensus of the ethical community, and which is therefore unchallengeable, unexaminable. How, we might ask, is this a liberation?

‘Breaking with today’s ethical configuration, and returning the inventions of politics and art to their difference, entails rejecting the fantasy of their purity’, Rancière maintains.⁶³ Insisting on the autonomy of art is not to turn the classics of the dramatic and operatic repertoire into dead monuments but, on the contrary, to participate in their continued life by interpreting them again and again, reflecting philosophically on our own aesthetic responses. The ethical turn subjects beauty to morality instead of seeing aesthetics as the foundation of ethics; but instrumentalising art for political or didactic purposes, as so many stage directors and scholars do nowadays, are infringements on the right of the audience to make judgements and imagine that the world might be different; ultimately, it is an infringement on the democratic sensibility and subjectivity of the spectator, which is imperilled enough as it is.

Notes

- 1 Will 2018: 218.
- 2 Will 2018: 218, 221.
- 3 Will 2018: 222.
- 4 Rancière 2010: 184.
- 5 Rancière 2010: 185.
- 6 Rancière 2010: 188.
- 7 Will 2018: 221.
- 8 Rancière 2010: 194, 201.
- 9 Carlson 2008: 6.
- 10 Campana 2009: 149, 152.
- 11 For an examination of Rousseau’s objection to the pedagogical model of theatre, specifically in the *Lettre à d’Alembert* (1758), see Chapter 3 in Gullstam 2020.
- 12 Carlson 2008: 5.

- 13 Rancière 2010: 141.
- 14 Taruskin 1995: 273, 281, 289.
- 15 Taruskin 2005: 496.
- 16 Taruskin 1995: 268.
- 17 Taruskin 2005: 495.
- 18 Coppola 2020: 9.
- 19 Rancière 2010: 117.
- 20 *AmZ*, 24 October 1798: 51–2, quoted from Solomon 1991: 14.
- 21 Niemetschek 2005: 44.
- 22 Maynard Solomon, who argues that Rochlitz made up most of his anecdotes, claims that he had merely expanded the Niemetschek anecdote; see Solomon 1991: 14. However, Rochlitz's anecdote was printed in the *AmZ* on 24 October; and in an addendum on 19 December he explained that he had only seen Niemetschek's biography after a part of his anecdotes had appeared in print, adding a short review of the book. I am not convinced that he was deliberately deceiving his readers here and that he had read the book much earlier, plundering it for information, as Solomon claims. First, if Rochlitz was really indebted to Niemetschek for his anecdotes, it is far from clear why he would then refer to his book at all. Second, the two anecdotes are worded quite differently, which makes it unlikely that one was based on the other. And finally, Solomon seems so determined to discredit Rochlitz that he ends up putting too much faith in Niemetschek due to the latter's connection with Constanze Mozart.
- 23 Letter to his father of 16 December 1780: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=1129&cat=3> (accessed on 19 March 2021).
- 24 Letter to his father of 28 December 1782: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=1282&cat=3> (accessed on 19 March 2021).
- 25 Da Ponte 1976: 129.
- 26 Letter to his father of 21 May 1783: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=1315&cat=3> (accessed on 2 April 2021).
- 27 Volek 2016: 341.
- 28 Quoted in Brauneis 1993: 493.
- 29 Polzonetti 2009: 4–5.
- 30 Letter to Gottfried von Jacquin of 4 November 1787: <https://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=1642&cat=3> (accessed on 23 March 2021); Da Ponte 1999: 62.
- 31 *Prager Oberpostamtszeitung*, 3 November 1787, quoted from Deutsch 1990: 303–4.
- 32 'Mozart äusserte gegen seine hiesigen Freunde vor der ersten Produktion des *Don Juan*: Ich würde untröstlich seyn, wenn diese Oper bey der ersten Aufführung *allgemein gefiele*. Ein glänzender Beweis, aus welchem richtigen Standpunkte Mozart seine Kunst anschaute, deren schönste Blüthen sich nur langsam und allmählich entfalten und dann erst den reichsten Genuss darbieten'; *AmZ*, 16 December 1807: 189.
- 33 Niemetschek 2005: 44.
- 34 On the emergence of the concept of classical music, though without mention of Niemetschek's biography, see the introduction to Rushton 1986, 'Classicism and Its Background'.
- 35 Niemetschek 2005: 63. The Latin line is an abbreviated version of 'reddere personæ scit convenientia cuique' ('he knows how to give to each character what is proper to him'), from Horace, *Ars poetica*: 316.
- 36 The preface to *Paride ed Elena* describes a type of internal unity that anticipates the one Niemetschek finds in Mozart's operas; see Howard 1995: 98. Goehr's claim that the musical work-concept emerged around 1800, and that music produced before this time 'was seen to fall under concepts other than that of a work' (Goehr 2007: 114), has been rejected by music historians who point out that composers conceived of their music as works much earlier than that; see Strohm 2000.
- 37 In his ground-breaking study of Parisian audience culture, James Johnson traces the development from superficial to engaged listening back to the arrival of Gluck's operas

- in the 1770s; see the chapter ‘Tears and the New Attentiveness’ in Johnson 1995. In Vienna, it may have begun already in the 1760s, with the premieres of Gluck’s Italian operas. That early audiences responded the same way to *Don Giovanni* is suggested by Tomaschek who remembered his first encounter with the opera, in Prague in 1791, as follows: ‘The overture begins: its magnificent ideas and rapid progression with the rich instrumentation, the whole noble life of the organic work of art moved me to such an extent that I sat there like a dreamer, barely breathing, and saw a sun rise on my blissful sky, heating my entire soul by magical force and illuminating what I had but dimly felt. My interest in the whole increased moment by moment’. ‘Die Ouverture beginnt, ihre grossartigen Ideen, und ihr rascher bedingter Fortgang mit der reichen Instrumentirung, überhaupt das edle Leben des organischen Kunstwerkes, ergriff mich dermassen, dass ich wie ein Träumer und kaum athmend da sass, und in meinem Freudenhimmel eine Sonne aufgehen sah, die, mir dunkel Geahntes erhellend, meine ganze Seele mit Zaubergewalt erwärmte. Mit jedem Moment steigerte sich nun mein Interesse für das Ganze’; Tomaschek 1845: 365.
- 38 Quoted from Howard 1995: 98.
- 39 Kelly 1968: I, 255.
- 40 Niemetschek 2005: 67. As Ian Woodfield has shown, printed librettos and performance materials from the Prague productions of *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786) and *Così fan tutte* (1791), partly conformed to a notion of fidelity to the work; see Woodfield 2012b: 262.
- 41 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 27.
- 42 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 30.
- 43 Hoffmann 1993: II/I, 92.
- 44 Hoffmann 1988: II/II, 432.
- 45 Hoffmann 1988: II/II, 428.
- 46 Cf. Taruskin 1995: 12.
- 47 It is not correct that Hoffmann’s concept of unity was a departure from Mozart to whom ‘[t]he score functioned merely as a guide for the production of an opera’; Markx 2005: 377. Certainly, both Gluck and Mozart were happy to revise their operas when they were revived in new contexts and with new performers, Mozart substituting several numbers for the Vienna production of *Don Giovanni*. However, such revisions did not disturb what Niemetschek calls the ‘unique character’ of the operas.
- 48 Jørgensen 2006: 27.
- 49 Jørgensen 2021: 43, 70, 128.
- 50 Jørgensen 2006: 11–12, 73–9.
- 51 Jørgensen 2006: 151–4.
- 52 Goehr 2007: 171–2.
- 53 Goehr 2007: 146, 157.
- 54 Jørgensen 2006: 61, 153.
- 55 Richard Taruskin, ‘Foreword’, in Goehr 2007: viii.
- 56 Goehr and Herwitz 2006: xviii.
- 57 Goehr 2006: 150.
- 58 Goehr 2006: 155.
- 59 Goehr 2006: 150–1.
- 60 Goehr 2006: 152.
- 61 Goehr 2006: 152.
- 62 Barthes 1977: 148.
- 63 Rancière 2010: 202.

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<i>NZM</i>	<i>Neue Zeitschrift für Musik</i>
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Index

- Abert, Hermann 56, 82–3, 110, 113,
134–5, 144–5, 152, 177, 187, 206
- Albertini, Gioacchino *see* *convitato di
pietra, Il* (Albertini/Porta)
- Alceste* (Gluck/Calzabigi) 161
- Alighieri, Dante *see* *Don Giovanni:
contrapasso* structure
- Allanbrook, Wye Jamison 60, 100,
113–14, 144, 147, 174, 177–8, 180,
189–91, 204
- Ambrogetti, Giuseppe 162
- amor marinaro, L'* (Weigl/De Gamerra) 31
- Anfossi, Pasquale *see* *Isabella e Rodrigo
(Anfossi/Bertati); Zenobia in Palmira
(Anfossi/Sertor)*
- Angrisani, Carlo 162–3
- Angrisani, Felice 162
- Anheisser, Siegfried 10–11
- Ariosto, Ludovico 29, 123
- Aristotle 15, 202, 222
- ateista fulminato, L'* 122
- aus dem Winckel, Therese 171
- Axur re d'Ormus* (Salieri/Da Ponte) 23,
29, 39
- Baglioni, Antonio 46n38
- Baker, Felicity 2–4, 55, 60, 76–7, 81–2,
87, 92–3n17, 107, 118, 122, 133, 142,
149–50, 156, 158, 164, 182–3, 189, 204
- Bassi, Luigi 27–32, 44n11, 46n41, 81,
92n6, 94n49, 154n59, 207n16, 208n22;
directing *Don Giovanni* 38–42, 132;
as *Don Giovanni* 1, 8, 9, 17–18, 20,
23, 33–5, 37, 43–4, 45n26, 61–4,
66n15, 72–4, 77–8, 80, 83–8, 101–3,
110, 116–17, 124, 126, 131, 138, 140,
142, 144, 146–9, 153n37, 161, 165,
169–72, 174, 178–9, 191–7, 199, 202;
and Mozart 15–16, 104, 173; sources to
his portrayal 19, 21–7, 45n32, 71, 82,
94n57, 115, 159
- Bauman, Thomas 61
- Baumgart, Ernst Friedrich 6
- Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb 221
- Bayertz, Kurt 188–9
- Beaumarchais, Pierre 91
- Benedetti, Michele 162
- Benelli, Antonio 38–9
- Benincasa, Gioacchino 38, 42, 132, 171, 181
- Benucci, Francesco 32–3, 77
- Berganza, Teresa 80, 106–7
- Bertati, Giovanni *see* *capriccio
drammatico, Il* (Bertati); *Don Giovanni
(Gazzaniga/Bertati); Isabella e Rodrigo
(Anfossi/Bertati); matrimonio segreto, Il
(Cimarosa/Bertati); trionfo del bel sesso,
Il* (Winter/Bertati)
- Bertini, Antonio 162
- Bethmann-Unzelmann, Friederike 89
- Biedenfeld, Eugenia von 38
- Bitter, Christof 7, 11–12, 16, 27, 69, 150,
169, 174, 187–8
- Böhm, Karl 75, 101, 106, 145
- Bolt, Johann Friedrich *see* Kinninger,
Vinzencz Georg
- Bondini, Caterina 81, 93n36, 94n49, 116,
179–80, 207n17, 208n46
- Borchmeyer, Dieter 8, 150, 160
- Börner-Sandrini, Marie 1, 22–5, 29, 33,
35, 39, 43–4, 61–2, 72–3, 77, 79, 87–8,
90–1, 116, 161, 179, 193–9; *see also*
Sandrini-Caravoglia, Luigia
- Brophy, Bridgid 91
- Brown, Marshall 132, 198
- Brown-Montesano, Kristi 74, 80, 107–9,
135, 178
- burbero di buon cuore, Il* (Martín y Soler/
Da Ponte) 32–3

- Burnham, Scott 35, 60
 Bussani, Francesco 162, 166–7n29
- Callegari, Giuseppe *see* *convitato di pietra, Il* (Callegari)
 Calzabigi, Ranieri 219; *see also* *Alceste* (Gluck/Calzabigi); *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Gluck/Calzabigi)
 Campana, Alessandra 56, 60–1, 215
 Campi, Antonia 207n16
 Campi, Gaetano 148, 153n54
capriccio drammatico, Il (Bertati) 163
 Caravoglia, Luigia *see* Sandrini-Caravoglia, Luigia
 Carlson, Marvin 214–15
 Casanova, Giacomo 77–9, 83, 111–12, 121–2, 217
 Castelvechi, Stefano 135
 Casti, Giovanni Battista 33; *see also* *Prima la musica e poi le parole* (Salieri/Casti); *re Teodoro in Venezia, Il* (Paisiello/Casti)
 Castil-Blaze 16, 94n49
 Cetti, Giovanni Battista 8–9, 37
 Cicognini, Giacinto Andrea 2, 111, 155–6, 181, 205
 Cimarosa, Domenico 40; *see also* *matrimonio segreto, Il* (Cimarosa/Bertati)
clemezza di Tito, La (Mozart/Metastasio/Mazzola) 13n14, 37, 190, 212n122, 218, 220
convitato di pietra, Il (Albertini/Porta) 3, 13n7
convitato di pietra, Il (Callegari) 163
convitato di pietra, Il (Righini/Porta) 2, 156
 Coppola, Catherine 216
 Corneille, Pierre 91, 204
cosa rara, Una (Martín y Soler/Da Ponte) 81, 91, 94n49, 94n51, 172–4, 207n16
Così fan tutte (Mozart/Da Ponte) 29, 33, 37, 92n6, 120, 134, 226n40
 Costa, Gioachino 16, 148, 154n59
 Costenoble, Karl Ludwig 17, 207n17
 Currentzis, Teodor 63, 82, 85
 Czinner, Paul 9, 14n34, 56, 60, 64, 104, 124, 150, 177, 187, 195
- Dalle Aste, Franz 162–3
 D'Andrade, Francisco 9–10, 99, 100, 101
 Dante *see* *Don Giovanni: contrapasso* structure
- Da Ponte, Lorenzo 2–3, 15, 18, 33, 77–8, 114, 128n53, 129n93, 146, 172, 174, 217; *see also* *Axur re d'Ormus* (Salieri/Da Ponte); *burbero di buon cuore, Il* (Martín y Soler/Da Ponte); *cosa rara, Una* (Martín y Soler/Da Ponte); *Così fan tutte* (Mozart/Da Ponte); *Don Giovanni* (Mozart/Da Ponte); *equivoci, Gli* (Storace/Da Ponte); *nozze di Figaro, Le* (Mozart/Da Ponte)
 della Casa, Lisa 177
 Dent, Edward 104, 114–15, 135, 161, 176, 187, 191, 205
 Dieckmann, Friedrich 69, 191, 206
Don Giovanni (Gazzaniga/Bertati) 3, 56, 84, 95n67, 98, 156–7, 163, 182
Don Giovanni (Mozart/Da Ponte) and censorship 6–7, 38, 70, 81, 83, 90, 94n51, 94n54, 96–7n90, 112–14, 119–21, 127n26, 129n82–3, 133, 174, 209n60; *contrapasso* structure of 3–4, 76, 109, 149, 164, 165n6, 180–3, 186, 198, 203, 206; costumes in 9–10, 38, 54–5, 63–5, 67n33, 67n37, 99, 131, 133–4, 143, 162–3, 166–7n29, 204; in Dresden 1, 21–2, 24, 32, 37–44, 80, 88, 150, 159, 161, 169–71, 187, 195–6, 206; at Eisenberg 18, 45n26, 162; film versions of *see* Czinner, Paul; Losey, Joseph; genesis of 2–3, 15–18, 142–3, 169–72, 178; genre of 5, 8, 30, 33–4, 57, 61–2, 69–70, 90–1, 92n9, 121–2, 132, 134–5, 138, 143, 152, 158, 160, 163–5, 168, 181, 183, 189, 196–8, 201–3, 205, 217; and National Socialism 10–12, 187; at Raudnitz 18, 23, 45n26, 116; in Leipzig 7, 16–22, 32–4, 61, 110, 131, 148, 154n59, 158, 196, 211n106; lighting in 70, 156; in Prague 1, 5–7, 16–17, 19–23, 32–3, 35, 37–9, 45n32, 70, 77, 83, 92n6, 110–15, 117, 131, 140–2, 160–4, 166n29, 179–80, 190, 194, 198–200, 216–18; revisions of 41, 92n6, 148–9, 166–7n29, 173, 203, 217, 226n47; 'Spanishness' in 1, 34–5, 42, 65, 69, 91, 102–3, 121–2, 163–4, 198, 204, 206; stage design in 45n32, 69–70, 131–2, 140, 162, 164, 169; tempi in 21, 24, 38–41, 51n132, 63, 76, 81–4, 88, 92n9, 94–5n57–8, 99–104, 117, 126n22, 144, 161, 165, 190–2, 204; title of 11; translations of *see*

- Anheisser, Siegfried; Levi, Hermann;
Lippert, Friedrich Karl; Neefe,
Christian Gottlob; Rochlitz, Friedrich;
Schmieder, Christian Gottlieb; in
Vienna 2, 6–7, 18, 37, 91, 113–14, 120,
124, 126n3, 146, 161–2, 199; vocal
ornamentation in 74, 82, 220–1; in
Warsaw 3, 13n7, 17, 37
- Durante, Sergio 7, 143
- Duschek, Franz Xaver and Josepha 217
- Eisendle, Reinhard 143
- Entführung aus dem Serail, Die* (Mozart/
Stephanie) 135, 190
- equivoci, Gli* (Storace/Da Ponte) 163
- Fedderson, Friedrich 33, 80
- Fischer, Anton Joseph 41
- Fischer-Dieskau, Dietrich 75, 101,
106, 147–8
- flauto magico, Il* see *Zauberflöte, Die*
- Flavis, Geltrude 163
- Ford, Charles 107, 190, 204
- Forti, Anton 33–5, 41, 63, 73, 80, 86,
124–5, 193
- Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode* (Sarti/
Goldoni) 172, 174
- Frederick Augustus I, king of Saxony 37
- Freisauff, Rudolf von 4–6
- Freischütz, Der* (Weber/Kind) 47n76, 202
- Freytag, Gustav 131
- Friesen, Hermann von 22, 33, 43, 193,
196, 199
- Gallarati, Paolo 60, 86, 107, 132, 160, 178,
182, 190
- Gansch, Christina 82
- García, Manuel 129n93
- gare generose, Le* (Paisiello/Palomba) 17
- Gazzaniga, Giuseppe see *Don Giovanni*
(Gazzaniga/Bertati)
- Genast, Eduard 28, 41, 89
- Gielen, Michael 82
- Gluck, Christoph Willibald 219–20,
225–6n36–7, 226n47; see also *Alceste*
(Gluck/Calzabigi); *Orfeo ed Euridice*
(Gluck/Calzabigi)
- Goehr, Lydia 222–4, 225n36
- Goehring, Edmund J. 7, 95n67, 135,
160, 183
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 2, 8, 35
- Goldoni, Carlo 2, 30, 33, 54–5, 57,
75–7, 84, 95n67, 122, 155–6, 182, 188;
see also *Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode*
(Sarti/Goldoni)
- Graf, Herbert see Czinner, Paul
- Grist, Reri 106
- Grünbaum, Therese 38, 93n18
- Guardasoni, Domenico 2–3, 5, 18–19, 22,
32, 45n26, 45n32, 51n132, 110, 148,
162, 169–70, 173, 194, 196–9, 218
- Gugler, Bernhard 115
- Guglielmi, Pietro Carlo see *scelta dello*
sposo, La (Guglielmi/Farinelli)
- Hägelin, Franz Karl see *Don Giovanni*:
censorship in
‘Hamburg Critic’, the 21, 30, 33–4, 46n38,
74, 77, 80, 86, 110, 124–6, 126n22, 138,
165, 192–3, 202
- Handel, George Frideric 145
- Hansen, Jørgen Christian 37, 50n124,
57, 107
- Haydn, Joseph 40
- Hazlitt, William 163
- Heartz, Daniel 117, 172
- Heinse, Friedrich see Hohenthal, Peter
Wilhelm von
- Henze-Döhring, Sabine 75, 115, 204
- Herwitz, Daniel 12, 142, 174, 223
- Hoffmann, Ernst Theodor Amadeus 4,
7–11, 14n28, 19, 25–6, 29, 33–4, 42,
54, 56, 80, 82–3, 88–90, 99–101, 106,
123–4, 140, 152, 160, 169, 186–7, 197,
205, 220–1, 226n47
- Hohenthal, Peter Wilhelm von 1, 8, 12n1,
16–7, 19, 22, 25, 28–9, 39–43, 80, 83,
101–3, 110, 124, 142, 153n37, 191, 195
- Horace 218, 225n35
- Höslinger, Clemens 114
- Idomeneo* (Mozart/Varesco) 161, 190, 216
- Isabella e Rodrigo* (Anfossi/Bertati) 163
- Jacobs, René 101, 107, 191–2
- Jahn, Otto 132, 134, 152, 177
- Johnson, James 225–6n37
- Jonášová, Milada 116
- Jørgensen, Dorte 221–3
- Joseph II, emperor 5, 60, 71, 91, 114,
128n53, 217
- Kainz, Josef Wolfgang 33
- Kant, Immanuel 12, 191, 221
- Karajan, Herbert von 9–10
- Keefe, Simon 167n30, 172, 190

- Kelly, Michael 219
 Kerman, Joseph 93n23, 100–1, 104, 106–7, 145, 178
 Kierkegaard, Søren 10, 37
 Kind, Johann Friedrich 21–2, 25–6, 34, 159; *see also Freischütz, Der* (Weber/Kind)
 Kinninger, Vinzenz Georg 64, 65, 169
 Konwitschny, Peter 224
 Kramer, Richard 87
 Kucharz, Johann Baptist 94n57, 174
 Kunze, Stefan 115, 117, 135, 161, 191, 212n139
 Küstner, Karl Theodor von 211n106
 Küstner, Konrad 153n37
- Laclos, Pierre Choderlos de 177
 Laschi, Filippo 30
 Leibowitz, René 61, 76, 100, 190–1
 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim 11, 32, 200–2, 212n122
 Levi, Hermann 10–11
 Lippert, Friedrich Karl 102, 126n3, 158
 Lobe, Johann Christian 144
 Lobkowitz, Joseph Franz 18, 45n26, 94n57, 115–16, 148, 162
 Lolli, Giuseppe 16, 162, 164, 166n29, 204
 Losey, Joseph 12, 56–7, 61, 80, 85–6, 106–7, 113, 124, 132, 150, 157, 188
 Loy, Christof 1, 9–10
 Lyser, Johann Peter 8, 17, 24–7, 34–5, 39, 41–3, 57, 62–4, 69, 73, 82, 87, 90–1, 103–4, 105, 110, 113, 116–17, 126, 128n67, 138, 139, 140, 143, 146, 148–9, 161–3, 165, 166n27, 169–74, 178–9, 181, 195–7, 205–6
- Mandini, Stefano 15
 Mannstein, Heinrich Ferdinand 38–9
 Maria Theresa, Austrian archduchess 5
 Marinelli, Karl von 2, 6, 55, 111, 120, 156, 183, 209n56
 Markx, Francien 226n47
 Marstrand, Wilhelm 37, 50n125, 57, 58, 107, 108
 Martín y Soler, Vicente *see burbero di buon cuore, Il* (Martín y Soler/Da Ponte); *cosa rara, Una* (Martín y Soler/Da Ponte) *matrimonio segreto, Il* (Cimarosa/Bertati) 22, 31, 46n41, 208n22
 Meyerbeer, Giacomo 40
 Micelli, Caterina 93n36, 180, 208n46
 Miksch, Johann Aloys 9, 19, 24–6, 38–9, 43, 102–4, 171
- Mila, Massimo 83, 106, 145–6, 160–1, 178
 Molière 2, 64, 70–2, 75–6, 79, 83, 85, 95n67, 155–6, 168–9, 175–7, 182
 Morlacchi, Francesco 37, 39–40, 42, 195
 Mozart, Constanze 128n53, 128n67, 190, 225n22
 Mozart, Franz Xaver Wolfgang 25
 Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus 2, 40, 102–3, 113–14, 116, 128n53, 128n67, 146, 161, 172–4, 179–80, 191, 225n22; aesthetics of 35, 135, 142–4, 183, 187–9, 201–3, 215–22, 226n47; *see also clemenza di Tito, La* (Mozart/Metastasio/Mazzolà); *Così fan tutte* (Mozart/Da Ponte); *Don Giovanni* (Mozart/Da Ponte); *Entführung aus dem Serail, Die* (Mozart/Stephanie); *Idomeneo* (Mozart/Varesco); *nozze di Figaro, Le* (Mozart/Da Ponte); *Zauberflöte, Die* (Mozart/Schikaneder)
 Müller, Jakob 33
- Näke, Karl 19, 102–4
 Nedbal, Martin 120, 129n82
 Neefe, Christian Gottlob 5, 61, 72, 79, 85–6, 112, 118, 158, 183, 205
 Niemetschek, Franz Xaver 27–8, 31–2, 35, 39, 128n53, 147–9, 173–4, 198–9, 216–20, 225n22, 226n47
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 9, 11, 187
 Nissen, Constanze von *see* Mozart, Constanze
 Noiray, Michel 143, 147, 174
 Novello, Mary and Vincent 128n53, 190
nozze di Figaro, Le (Mozart/Da Ponte) 15, 29, 31, 33–4, 37, 44, 91, 117, 120, 134–5, 146, 163–4, 172, 174, 180, 190, 217–19, 226n40
- Oehlenschläger, Adam 8–9, 157
 ‘Old Actor’, the 22, 46n38, 64
 Ong, Walter J. 37
Orfeo ed Euridice (Gluck/Calzabigi) 212n139, 219
- Paer, Ferdinando *see Sargino* (Paer/Foppa)
 Paisiello, Giovanni 40; *see also gare generose, Le* (Paisiello/Palomba); *re Teodoro in Venezia, Il* (Paisiello/Casti)
 Patti, Adelina 95n58
 Perrucci, Andrea 111
 Philippi, Karl Ferdinand 24, 35, 40–1, 63–4, 73, 77, 86, 118, 144, 161, 196
 Pichler, Caroline 32–3
 Pinza, Ezio 107, 147–8

- Pirrotta, Nino 61, 85, 101, 135–6, 190
 Platzer, Josef 45n32
 Poizat, Michel 203
 Polzonetti, Pierpaolo 217–18
 Ponziani, Felice 37, 62, 66n23, 117,
 153n54, 163, 170, 172, 174
 Porta, Nunziato *see convitato di pietra, Il*
 (Albertini/Porta); *convitato di pietra, Il*
 (Righini/Porta)
Prima la musica e poi le parole
 (Salieri/Casti) 77
- Quintilian 77
- Raffaelli, Renato 109, 122, 164, 178
 Raimondi, Ruggero 57, 74
 Rancière, Jacques 203, 213–16, 224
 Rastrelli, Joseph 24, 26, 34, 62, 90; *see*
also Velleda (Rastrelli/Montucci)
 Reichard, Heinrich August Ottokar 27–8,
 30–1
 Reichardt, Johann Friedrich 28
 Reinhold, Karl Wilhelm 22, 34, 83
re Teodoro in Venezia, Il (Paisiello/Casti) 29
 Riccoboni, Antoine-François 85
 Righini, Vincenzo *see convitato di pietra,*
Il (Righini/Porta)
rivale di se stesso, Il (Weigl/Romanelli) 31
 Robinson, Michael F. 203
 Rochlitz, Friedrich 22, 40, 46n38, 216–17,
 225n22; as opera translator 4, 6–12,
 13n14, 25–6, 37–8, 56–7, 61–3, 72, 75,
 79–80, 84–6, 98–9, 106–7, 112–13,
 118–19, 123–4, 126n3, 132, 136–8,
 149–52, 159–60, 169, 176–7, 183–8,
 192, 195, 205–6, 215
 Röckel, Joseph August 33
 Rosselli, John 55
 Rossini, Gioachino 40, 44
 Rushton, Julian 15, 57, 60, 122, 124,
 129n71, 146–7, 182
 Ruskin, John 10, 12
 Russell, Charles C. 129n93
- Salieri, Antonio *see Axur re d'Ormus*
 (Salieri/Da Ponte); *Prima la musica e*
poi le parole (Salieri/Casti)
 Salvatori, Celestino 42, 44
 Sandrini-Caravoglia, Luigia 1, 22–6, 34–5,
 38, 42, 62–3, 87–91, 118, 140, 161,
 171, 178, 195–7, 205; *see also Börner-*
Sandrini, Marie
 Saporiti, Teresa 93n36, 173–4,
 207nn16–17
- Sargino* (Paer/Foppa) 142
 Sarti, Giuseppe *see Fra i due litiganti il*
terzo gode (Sarti/Goldoni)
 Sauter, Willmar 27
scelta dello sposo, La (Guglielmi/
 Farinelli) 29
 Schiller, Friedrich 6–7, 11–12, 35–6, 78,
 91, 221
 Schmid, Manfred Hermann 94n57,
 101, 132
 Schmid, Otto 19, 23, 27
 Schmidt, Ricarda 7–8, 54, 80
 Schmieder, Christian Gottlieb 5, 176;
see also Neefe, Christian Gottlob
 Schröder-Devrient, Wilhelmine 88–91
 Shakespeare, William 2, 7, 11–12, 134–5,
 138, 163, 183, 196, 209n56
 Shaw, George Bernard 10
 Siboni, Giuseppe 37, 50n124, 107
 Siebert, Franz 153n54
 Siepi, Cesare 56, 60, 74, 177
 Sisman, Elaine 71, 119, 145, 165n6, 182
 Slevogt, Max 9, 57, 59, 64, 99, 100, 104,
 118, 119–21, 124, 125, 138–40, 141,
 150, 151, 169
 Solomon, Maynard 7, 225n22
 Sonnenfels, Joseph von 182
 Sophocles 201
 Spontini, Gasparo 40
 Steinberg, Michael P. 91, 189
 Stendhal 173, 208n22
 Stephanie, Gottlieb 209n56; *see also*
Entführung aus dem Serail, Die
(Mozart/Stephanie)
 Stiepanek, Johann Nepomuk 174, 179–80
 Storace, Stephen *see equivoci, Gli*
(Storace/Da Ponte)
 Strauss, Richard 41, 82
 Strinasacchi, Teresa 46n38, 162
 Strobach, Franz 162
- Taruskin, Richard 215–17, 223–4
 Thönert, Medard 19, 20, 28, 45n32, 64–5,
 140, 144
 Tieck, Ludwig 22, 33, 42–3, 46n41, 83,
 193, 196, 199
 Tiliakos, Dimitris 85
 Till, Nicholas 86, 124, 150, 184
 Tirso de Molina 2, 54–5, 57, 65, 75–6,
 109, 111, 155–7, 164, 168, 181, 185,
 192, 195, 204
 Tomaschek, Johann Wenzel 21, 33, 190, 199,
 226n37; *see also Don Giovanni: tempi*
trionfo del bel sesso, Il (Winter/Bertati) 142

- Unzelmann, Karl Wolfgang 34, 41, 89, 159
- Velleda* (Rastrelli/Montucci) 24
- Vestris, Gaétan 128n67
- Virgil 199–202
- Volek, Tomislav 113–14, 169, 173–4, 217
- Wächter, Johann Michael 42–3, 62, 80, 171, 195
- Wackenroder, Wilhelm Heinrich 7, 46n41
- Wagner, Richard 9–11, 41, 223
- Wallnig, Josef 21, 95n58
- Weber, Carl Maria von 1, 18–19, 39–41, 88, 159; *see also Freischütz, Der* (Weber/Kind)
- Weber, Max Maria von 39, 41
- Weidinger, Hans Ernst 114, 129n82
- Weigl, Joseph *see amor marinaro, L' Il* (Weigl/Romanelli)
- Weisser, Johannes 101, 107
- Wendt, Amadeus 22, 101, 165, 190
- Wenzel, Johann 116
- Will, Richard 213–16
- Willaschek, Wolfgang 75, 82, 86, 146, 150, 156, 178
- Williams, Bernard 188, 206
- Winter, Peter *see trionfo del bel sesso, Il* (Winter/Bertati)
- Woltreck, Friedrich 33, 86, 126n22, 138, 192–3
- Wolzogen, Alfred von 89
- Woodfield, Ian 16, 148, 172–3, 178, 180, 211n106, 226n40
- Zappi, Francesco 46n38
- Zauberflöte, Die* (Mozart/Schikaneder) 140, 190
- Zenobia in Palmira* (Anfossi/Sertor) 46n38
- Zezi, Alfonso 43–4, 80, 195
- Zinzendorf, Karl von 81
- Žižek, Slavoj 12



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