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THREE

Ersatz Ditties

Adriana Ferrarese's Susanna

In the June 2002 issue of *Opera News*, the British opera producer Jonathan Miller gave an interview that, doubtless to the delight of many, raked through the coals of an old controversy.¹ In 1998 Miller had directed Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Metropolitan, mostly to critical acclaim; but in the *Opera News* interview he confided that he has not been invited back to supervise the past season's revival of the production. He had, he said, been "fired" by the management because of a "set-to" during the original production. This referred to a backstage scandal much reported at the time. The 1998 Susanna, Cecilia Bartoli, had taken it into her mind to alter the "traditional" text of the opera. For a Viennese revival of *Figaro* in 1789, three years after the premiere and around the time he was composing *Così fan tutte*, Mozart accommodated the new Susanna by writing for her two new arias, arias intended to replace "Venite, inginocchiatevi" in Act II and "Deh vieni, non tardar" in Act IV. Bartoli, who is famous for her explorations of little-known repertory, wanted to sing these replacement arias at the Met and sing them she did; Jonathan Miller was not pleased. As he put it in the *Opera News* interview:

I think I behaved fairly reasonably. I expressed my unease about using showy arias that are infinitely less interesting and appropriate

to the drama. These [new arias] are twice as long, and their words have nothing to do with the action. During the first aria, Renée Fleming as the Countess was left dressing Cherubino while Bartoli was down on the front beguiling the audience. . . . I was told by [general manager Joseph] Volpe that I had agreed [to the substitutions], and I said yes, I'd agreed rather in the way that France had agreed in 1939.²

In an interview nearer the time, Miller had been more outspoken still:

To be absolutely honest, I hadn't the faintest idea what to do with these pieces. [The second of them] left poor old Bryn [Bryn Terfel, playing Figaro and thus obliged to be visible on stage, spying on Susanna as she sings her fourth-act aria] kicking the wall. . . . If you don't sing "Deh vieni" in the fourth act of *Figaro*, it's like coitus interruptus. With his genius Mozart wrote the right music for *Figaro* and then, under pressure from a diva, wrote alternative arias.³

Miller's language here was not designed to calm the situation. Bartoli's decision to sing two arias Mozart wrote for *Le nozze di Figaro* in 1789, rather than two arias Mozart wrote for *Le nozze di Figaro* in 1786, is likened—in the first quote—to invasion by Panzer tanks; in the second he suggests that her determination not to sing "Deh vieni" in Act IV threatened to deprive sad operagoing battalions of the release they had (presumably) paid money to experience. Clearly Miller thought he had right on his side: he lined himself up, after all, with none other than W. A. Mozart, both he and the composer suffering "pressure from a diva." Many in the daily press agreed, some with piercing cries against the abuses of singers. Old battles were newly joined; this was, after all, *Mozart* in need of defense.⁴

How can one counter such certainties? To recast these offending arias as prose on the page might seem a poor substitute for Bartoli's experiment, but try we must. We can start by looking at the first and certainly less substantial of them, the one that substituted for "Venite, inginocchiatevi" in Act II. In one of the opera's many actings out of gender ambiguity, the countess and Susanna are dressing already cross-dressed

Cherubino as a woman. The substitute aria is called "Un moto di gioia," and its two-stanza text is disarmingly simple:

Un moto di gioia
Mi sento nel petto,
Che annunzia diletto
In mezzo il timor;
Speriam che in contento
Finisca l'affanno,
Non sempre è tiranno
Il fato ed amor.
Di pianti di pene
Ognor non si pasce,
Talvolta poi nasce
Il ben dal dolor:
E quando si crede
Più grave il periglio,
Brillare si vede
La calma maggior.

[A stirring of joy / I feel in my breast, / That foretells pleasure / In the midst of fear; / Let us hope that in happiness / Worry will end, / Fortune and love / Are not always tyrannous. / Not everyone lives by / Tears and sorrow, / Sometimes good / Is born from sorrow: / And when one thinks / The danger at its worst, / One sees shining forth / The greatest calm.]

The identity of the librettist is not certain, but it was probably Lorenzo Da Ponte, who of course wrote the libretti for both *Figaro* and *Così fan tutte*. The text is clearly intended for a strophic setting and is at best loosely related to the immediate plot situation. The aria it replaces, "Venite, inginocchiatevi," is on the other hand an "action" number, with specific references to the dramatic situation. In "Un moto di gioia" the approach is somewhat antique; the text takes a slightly distant, moralizing tone, commenting on the general situation, standing somewhat apart from the plot. No value judgments should be assumed in this distinction between the two arias: there are wonderfully effective "action"


numbers in Mozart, of course, but there are also wonderfully effective "contemplative/moralizing" numbers; few of us would want to be without either.


The simplicity of the words is in some ways reflected in the simplicity of the setting (example 7 reports the first thirty-three measures of the aria): the two strophes of poetry are set to identical music, and this folk-song-like gesture is matched by uncomplicated rhythms and melodic contours. But within the strophic exterior there lies challenging detail. This is of course not at all surprising: Mozart's Teutonic brand of Italian opera had always been more crammed with orchestral and harmonic effect than was the homegrown type, a fact that had sometimes got him into trouble. Let's pause for a moment over the accompaniment to the opening vocal phrase, starting on the upbeat of m. 9, particularly coming as it does after the rudimentary (or perhaps "rustic"?) three-octave wind doublings in the orchestral introduction. Over a pedal bass, the violins double the voice and are marked to be played staccato; but the first violins are an octave higher than both the voice and the second violins, giving a kind of "halo" effect much used in late Mozartian chamber music (the string quintets in particular). The cellos and violas start by doubling the voice at the sixth, but at m. 11, coinciding with the word "sento" (I feel), they gain emphasis with a bow change and find their own melodic identity, forming a counterpoint with the voice. The richness of the resulting orchestral sonority is emphasized by the fact that the lower strings are legato against the upper strings' staccato. This combination of staccato and legato is surely tied to the words: "Un moto di gioia / Mi sento nel petto" (A stirring of joy / I feel in my breast); hesitant, mimetic of bodily movement, yet with an inner potential for the lyrical.


The most surprising aspect of the aria, though, is to come. In a piece as direct as this, we would expect the opening eight vocal bars (mm. 9–16) to be "answered" by a further eight-bar period. And so they are, at mm. 17–24; but the answer—which in tonal/rhetorical terms is clearly an "on the other hand," or a "yes, but" reply to mm. 9–16—comes not from the


EXAMPLE 7 (continued)


17


Fl. 


Ob. 


Fag. 


V. I 

V. II 


Va. 


S. 


Vc. 


e. B. 


26


Fl. 


Ob. 


Fag. 


V. I 

V. II 

Va. 

S. 

Vc. 

e. B. 

ten-to fi - ni - sca l'af - fan-no, non sem-pre, non sem-pre è ti - ran - no

crusc. *fp* *p*

vocalist but from a choir of wind instruments, led off by the oboe and bassoon, joined by the flute. As so often in Mozart's later comic operas, this orchestral interlude gives the singer the opportunity (almost the obligation) to indulge in some stage business, to move the visible action along;⁵ but it also sets up a sense of dialogue between the voice and the wind instruments, one that then continues in fragments throughout the aria. A first example of this dialogue comes at mm. 28–31, in which one limb of the descending sequence on “non sempre” is taken up, with a impudent added appoggiatura, by the wind instruments.

Two further small moments in the aria are worth highlighting. The first is the treatment of the word “tiranno” (tyrant), which occurs at mm. 32–33. The crescendo, the *fp* dynamic, the fermata over the high note (in fact the highest vocal note of the aria, and perhaps inviting some added improvisatory roulade of the part of the singer)—all this playfully gestures toward the world of serious opera, broadening the aria's frame of reference by including what we might now describe as something intertextual. The second moment comes at the very end of the aria (example 8). Up to then the melody has remained in comfortable soprano territory (g² to d³); but at mm. 71–73 a descending scale takes the voice down suddenly into mezzo range, to low b and what we now call the “chest” voice. Incidentally, the aria, which Dr. Miller thought “twice as long” as the one it dislodges, has been recorded by Cecilia Bartoli and there lasts three minutes and eighteen seconds. The recording I have to hand of “Venite, inginocchiatevi” lasts two minutes and forty-seven seconds.⁶

There is one further point about “Un moto di gioia” that, for the moment, needs to be flagged and then put to one side. In several ways, this is music not entirely typical of Susanna in *Figaro*. The elaborate wind dialogue, the gestures to *opera seria* practice, perhaps especially that precipitate dive into the chest register at the end: all these aspects gently suggest another Mozart, above all the one we know from *Così fan tutte*. But more of that anon.

EXAMPLE 8. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro*, “Un moto di gioia” (mm. 67–end).

The musical score for Example 8, "Un moto di gioia" from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, shows the vocal line and the orchestral accompaniment. The vocal part (Soprano) begins with the lyrics "fa-to ed a-mor, il fa-to ed a-mor, il fa-to ed a-mor". The wind instruments (Flute, Oboe, Bassoon, Clarinet) and strings (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, Double Bass) provide a complex accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano), *f* (forte), and *cresc.* (crescendo). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 67, 76, and 82 indicated. The vocal part ends with a fermata over the final note.

At this point, I hope merely to have suggested that "Un moto di gioia" may be worth listening to and also worth thinking about: that it is, in short, worthy of the attention Mozart's mature music habitually receives. The fact is, though, that even during a period such as ours, in which the composer's slightest juvenilia can be performed in contexts of bizarre seriousness, the aria was relatively little known until Bartoli took it up. What is more, her performances brought down, on it and on her, a stream of abuse. The critic John W. Freeman, for example, again writing in *Opera News*, called it an "ersatz ditty . . . a bit of fluff that leaves a dramatic hole where 'Venite, inginocchiatevi' is supposed to be."⁷ Such easy condemnations were repeated endlessly. Beside testifying to the fact that the world of *Tageskritik* can sometimes be depressingly thought-free, they are, I think, a glum reflection of the restrictive power of the work-concept in our culture. In his *Opera News* interview, Miller articulated the attitude perfectly: "With his genius Mozart wrote the right music for *Figaro*." It's a comforting thought, above all because it tells us that what we know, our reified version of the opera, is and always will be sufficient unto the day. But was Mozart's genius really so well behaved? Did he bottle it up, reserve it only for those situations in which it can now descend to us neatly packaged? in forms that can be accommodated within our present musical institutions?

The composer's evident penchant for writing substitute arias is in some ways the most apt argument against any complacency we might harbor over "our" text. The Neue Mozart Ausgabe has four volumes (more than 700 pages' worth) of such pieces, most of them rarely performed.⁸ Just from the period under discussion, the second half of 1789, he wrote (in addition to the two new *Figaro* arias, instrumental trifles such as the Clarinet Quintet and, of course, *Così fan tutte*) three outstanding operatic arias for soprano and orchestra. Each of them flamboyantly violates the notion of the operatic work-concept, the idea that a late eighteenth-century composer might create "the right music" for an opera, music that must then be repeated at all subsequent revivals, no

matter what the changes in performance conditions. The first, K. 578, is an insert aria Mozart wrote for a revival of Cimarosa's opera buffa *I due baroni di Rocca Azzurra* in Vienna and is remarkable both for its high tone and its experimentation with contrapuntal effects (distinctly un-Cimarosa-like, one might add, but an evident Mozartian enthusiasm of the period). The other two, K. 582 and K. 583, were inserts for another opera then on the boards in Vienna, Martín y Soler's *Il barbero di buon cuore*. The second, K. 583, "Yado, ma dove? Oh Dei!" has a slow movement, a kind of pastoral minuet, that resembles little else in Mozart. It is yet another of those elaborate dialogues between voice and a chorus of wind instruments, in this case with the richness enhanced by an almost constant juxtaposition of quarter notes in the winds and triplet accompaniment in the strings. The singer mediates between these two rhythmic worlds. To listen to this aria is to understand in a new way what a very *different* composer Mozart was becoming in the last two or three years of his life. But, to repeat the earlier question, how could he be so profligate? How could he squander such music on such an ephemeral context?

There are of course many answers to such questions. The obvious historical one is that, for Mozart, *all* operatic contexts were ephemeral; he had no certainty that his music would survive any longer than that of Cimarosa or Martín y Soler, both of whom were at the time more widely popular than he was. As discussed in chapter 1, the very idea of an "operatic repertory" had as yet little purchase. However, and partly for this reason, the late eighteenth century was conspicuously more generous than we are today in accommodating such occasional inspirations. We now feel ourselves at a great historical distance from the time when "works of genius" could be thrown off with such abandon, when some amalgam of personal and cultural faith assured everyone that more would arrive, if not tomorrow, then next season; that such works were not worth loving so jealously. We are now invaded by cultural pessimism about music and opera, perhaps about all art: a mood that makes us miserly and grasping,

fearful of loss. We attach fanatical reverence to the works precisely because we doubt that what is to come will ever be as good.

In this mood of tenacious, unthinking conservation, we miss much. "Vado, ma dove?" was written for a singer called Luise Villeneuve, who was a little later to create the role of Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*; it has even been suggested that Mozart wrote the aria as a way of testing out Villeneuve's vocal skills prior to constructing her operatic character.⁹ Not coincidentally, then, the piece bears unusual similarities to Dorabella's first-act aria in *Così*, "Smanie implacabili." Both are in the key of E_b, both feature prominent modal mixtures for pathos, both involve a beleaguered heroine; with tiny adjustments to the words, an adventurous soprano could substitute one for the other, thus extending the emotional range of Dorabella in *Così*, and giving us a chance to hear in a theatrical context that almost Brahmsian pastoral minuet, in some ways so suited to *Così*'s musical world. But who would dare do such a thing? Imagine the outcry. "With his genius [we would be told] Mozart wrote the right music for *Così fan tutte*."

Talk of singers, though, can lead us back to those two replacement arias for *Figaro*, the ones that so rattled Jonathan Miller's cage. As mentioned at the start, both were written because the Vienna 1789 revival of *Figaro* boasted a notable new Susanna. This was Adriana Ferrarese, who had arrived in Vienna during 1788 and had established herself as one of the most successful singers of comic opera at the Burgtheater, in spite of having been more famous previously in *opera seria*.¹⁰ She had by all accounts a voice of impressive extension, with a powerful low register and unusual flexibility (large leaps and trills were particular specialties). Mozart would, famously, exploit these qualities when he created Fiordiligi for her in *Così fan tutte*; but, as he did with Luise Villeneuve (Ferrarese's sister both in real life and in *Così fan tutte*), he first tested the boundaries, tried her vocal range on for size. The result was this pair of arias for the Vienna *Figaro*. Miller (to quote him one last time) tells us that they were written "under pressure from a diva"; a degree of coercion is sometimes also hinted at in the musicological literature but has never—

so far as I know—been convincingly documented (another case, perhaps, of an attitude to historical evidence best summed up by the Italian motto *se non è vero, è ben trovato*).¹¹

Pressure or not, we can probably see hints of Ferrarese's distinctive vocal character in "Un moto di gioia," particularly in that unexpected, spectacular dive below the stave reported in example 8. But it is in the second replacement aria, the one that substitutes for Susanna's "Deh vieni" in Act IV, that her vocal presence seems to press more obviously on the very shape and tone of the music. We should recall the dramatic situation in *Figaro*'s last act, then at its most complex: Susanna and the countess have exchanged clothes in order to expose the count in his pursuit of Susanna. Susanna is left alone in the garden. Figaro is suspicious and lurks in the obscurity. His suspicions seem confirmed when he hears Susanna sing in eager anticipation of an amorous encounter (he cannot see her and so does not know she is in disguise). "Deh vieni," the aria she sings in the original version, is a character piece—a simple serenade in 6/8, which in general shape and tone suits the style of Susanna's music elsewhere in the opera.

Curiously, though, the aria also makes gestures toward a more elevated style, in particular in its text, where the invocation of the sultry night is highly poetic for a buffo character, even bordering on the Metastasian:

Finché non splende in ciel notturna face,
Finché l'aria è ancor bruna, e il mondo tace.
Qui mormora il ruscel, qui scherza l'aura.

[While the torch of night does not shine in the sky, / While the air is still dark, and the world silent. / Here murmurs the brook, here sports the breeze.]

What is more, Mozart clearly responded to this shift in tone by supplying an opening ritornello and relatively independent wind parts (both musical features more likely to accompany highborn characters).¹² Why Susanna's musical and poetic style should here bear traces of her cos-

turne, of the fact that she is disguised as the countess, is a question we shall return to; but for now it is enough merely to register the oddness. What is in no doubt is that the aria that substituted for "Deh vieni" underlines the confusion insistently from a musical point of view: it is a classic example of the two-movement *rondo*, the grandest (and longest and most aristocratic) aria type then in vogue. As is clear from the words, the sentiments—though physical and intense—are of the most general and elevated imaginable:

Al desio di chi t'adora,
Vieni, vola, oh mia speranza!
Morirò, se indarno ancora
Tu mi lasci sospirar.
Le promesse, i giuramenti,
Deh! rammenta, oh mio tesoro!
E i momenti di ristoro,
Che mi fece Amor sperar!
Ah ch'omai più non resisto
All'ardor che in sen m'accende.
Chi d'amor gli affetti intende
Compatisca il mio penar.

[To the desire of she who adores you, / Come, fly, oh my hope! / I shall die if, still in vain, / You leave me sighing: / Your promises, your oaths, / Oh, remember, my treasure! / And the moments of pleasure, / That Love made me hope for! / Ah, I can no longer resist / The ardor that enflames my breast. / Those who know the effects of love / Understand my pain.]

"Al desio" is too long to describe in great detail (lasting around six minutes, it is indeed nearly twice the length of "Deh vieni"). It follows the general pattern of *rondos* of the period: split into two movements, the first slow, the second fast, both of them involving large-scale thematic repetition (hence the term *rondo*), it features elaborate vocal coloratura and, in dialogue with this, equally elaborate contributions from an unusual group of wind instruments, in this case two basset horns, two bassoons, and two French horns. Merely from the opening measures

(example 9), we can see that the levels of expressive variety are extraordinary. The singer's opening triadic statement, with its expressive lean on the middle syllable of "desio," is accompanied only by the wind "band"; but the disposition of parts within the winds' generally dark sonority is constantly shifting (with the character's vagrant desire?), the upper part moving from first horn to first basset horn, the bass shifting from second basset horn to bassoon and back. Then, on the *opera seria* outburst of "morirò" (m. 5), the strings appear with a rhetorical gesture; but the violins are muted, softening much of their gestural effect and instead becoming an indistinct haze of sound. The second quatrain is launched at m. 11. Those "promesse" and "giuramenti" are initially stated by the wind band in a rather stilted, banal manner: first basset horn and bassoon in parallel thirds, second basset horn chugging away in the bass.¹³ But then, at m. 18, a remarkable transformation begins. With daring virtuosity, the second basset horn and first horn take on the pleading role, in an insistent counterpoint. A more serious, more seductive tone takes over; and the change has its effect on the voice, which fades momentarily into the background, perhaps sensible of the pleading instruments.

Even this much description may suggest that the aria has layers of meaning and complexity that could certainly be related to the dramatic situation for which it was intended; Mozart was certainly capable of writing routinely, even at this stage of his career, but did not do so here. It is sad to report, though, that among Mozartians, a group not famous for coolness of aesthetic judgment when their hero's music is involved, "Al desio" has had a startlingly poor press. Hardly any commentator has a good word for it. For Hermann Abert, "the piece remains an entity foreign to the opera, a concession Mozart made to a singer to whom he was not close on the artistic level."¹⁴ For Stefan Kunze it is "sentimentalizing, in spite of its ambitious musical conception. It demonstrates that in the choice of cast [for the Vienna *Figaro*] there had been an error, and that Mozart, following the trend of the time, had to make the best of a bad job."¹⁵ In the process of an impressively detailed analysis of Mozart's

EXAMPLE 9. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro*, "Al desio" (mm. 1-23).

Larghetto

Como di Bassetto I in Fa *p*

Como di Bassetto II in Fa *p*

Fagotto I, II *p*

Corno I, II in Fa *p*

Violino I *p*

Violino II *p*

Viola *p*

Violoncello e Basso *p*

Susanna

Al de - si - o di chi t'a - do - ra, vie - ni, vo - la, oh mia spe - ran - za! mo - ri -

Cor. di B. I (in Fa)

Cor. di B. II (in Fa)

Fag. *p*

V. I. *p*

V. II. *p*

Va. *p*

S. *p*

Vc. e B. *p*

mo - ri - rò, se in - dar - no an -

EXAMPLE 9 (continued)

Cor. di B. I (in Fa)

Cor. di B. II (in Fa)

Fag. *p*

V. I. *p*

V. II. *p*

Va. *p*

S. *p*

Vc. e B. *p*

Le pro - mes - se, i giu - ra - men - ti,

(cont)

EXAMPLE 9 (continued)

14

Cor. di
B. I
(in Fa)

Cor. di
B. II
(in Fa)

Fag.

1

V. I

V. II

Va.

S.

Vc.
e B.

delh-ram-men-ta, oh mio te-so-ro! ei mo-men-ti di ri-sto-ro, che mi fe-ce A-

17

Cor. di
B. I
(in Fa)

Cor. di
B. II
(in Fa)

Cor. (in Fa)

V. I

V. II

Va.

S.

Vc.
e B.

-mor spe-rar! Le pro-mes-se, i giu-ra-

f

EXAMPLE 9 (continued)

20

Cor. di
B. I
(in Fa)

Cor. di
B. II
(in Fa)

Fag.

1

V. I

V. II

Va.

S.

Vc.
e B.

-men-ti delh-ram-men-ta, oh mio te-so-ro! ei no-

p

22

Cor. di
B. I
(in Fa)

Fag.

V. I

V. II

Va.

S.

Vc.
e B.

-men-ti di ri-sto-ro, che

aria's forms, James Webster pronounces "Deh vieni" a key to Susanna's character and gets rather agitated about certain details of the aria; perhaps small wonder, then, that in a severe footnote he mentions "Al desio" only to remark on "the falseness of tone which all modern commentators find in [it]."¹⁶ Many of the journalists at those Met performances in 1998, some of them perhaps emboldened by this overwhelmingly negative "expert" reception, were even less guarded. Anthony Tommasini, in a *New York Times* article remarkable for its intemperance of language, stated:

The original, "Deh vieni non tardar," is utterly moving, a miracle of an aria, while "Al desio," the rondo that replaces it, is an unabashed display piece. It begins reflectively, with a simple melody, but soon evolves into a frilly, trilly, filigreed thing, like Rossini at his most bumptious.¹⁷

For most of these commentators, whether musicological or journalistic, the very existence of what they pronounce poor music—by the mature Mozart—is *so* extraordinary, *so* against nature, that it immediately solicits a narrative explanation; there needs, and that urgently, to be a villain in the tale. And of course, as Abert and Kunze both made plain, a stock operatic figure stands ready at hand, in the person of the diva Ferrarese. The fact that the composer made two disparaging remarks about her in his letters adds further welcome ammunition. Quoted almost invariably is a comment to his wife, Constanze, about "Un moto di gioia": "The arietta, which I've composed for Madame Ferrarese, ought, I think, to please, if she is capable of singing it in an artless manner, which I very much doubt."¹⁸ The fact that the latter stages of "Al desio" involve, as do all rondòs, a great deal of florid singing is yet further proof: never trust a trilling soprano (and this whether she steps out of history or interrupts the Met at their Mozartian prayer—the similarity between musicological treatments of Ferrarese and journalistic treatments of Bartoli is gloomily obvious). More than this, and to tie a pink ribbon around the stereotype, there's the rou-

tinely repeated assertion that Ferrarese was at the time Lorenzo Da Ponte's mistress (he boasts of it in his memoirs, as he does of the fact that, some years after their falling out, he managed to damage her career by making negative remarks about her in high places).¹⁹

This mighty chorus of disapproval is unlikely to be stilled, supported as it is by such an orchestra of easy assumptions, of attitudes that would hardly be tolerated if stated baldly, but that are none the less handy when a "work" needs protection. Let me list a few of the more obvious: that first versions are likely to be better than revisions when the latter are known to have been stimulated by practical necessity rather than "artistic" reasons (as if one can ever neatly distinguish between the two); that when performers are suspected of having influence over composers, it is likely to be unwelcome and can be assumed to have taken place under duress; that elaborate vocal virtuosity is to be regarded with suspicion, perhaps especially when the purveyor of such heady delights is female; that long arias in which the stage action is frozen are less "operatic" or less "dramatic" than those that feature dialogue and/or plenty of stage movement. And so on and on. Indeed, writers have been so sure they want to keep "Al desio" out of *Figaro* that (to my knowledge) no one has felt obliged to look at it with a view to what it might create within the opera, what new contexts might emerge from its inclusion. This is a pity, because such contexts can, I think, potentially be important for the way we think about the ending of Mozart's opera.

Let me start with a point about "Al desio" so obvious that it comes as a surprise to find no mention of it in the Mozart literature: while the aria is clearly very different in proportion, form, and gesture from "Deh vieni," there exist important similarities between them. They are in the same key (a point those arguing for elaborate tonal plans in the opera always remark on with relieved approval), and of course they share the same preceding recitative, "Giunse alfin il momento." More than this, though, they have in many places a distinctly similar melodic stamp, in particular a tendency for simple diatonic language and arpeggiated cadential figures. These similarities might encourage us to think of the

arias as (at least potentially) part of the same dramatic project: they can both, for example, be thought tied to a distinctive nocturnal-pastoral ambience. But it is also true that they articulate that ambience in sharply different ways: as already mentioned, "Deh vieni" evokes the night through its rich, "high-toned" poetic imagery and simple accompaniment; "Al desio," in contrast, makes the nocturnal atmosphere musically manifest in quite other fashion, those basset horns in particular suggesting that here the night is more tenebrous, the moon more veiled.

This is important because it involves a famous crux in *Figaro*, one on which the substitution of "Al desio" has a potentially important effect. Recall the scene: Susanna and the countess have exchanged clothes; Susanna is now on her own, overheard but unseen by Figaro; she sings the aria as part of a performance—to trick Figaro into thinking that she is eager for a liaison with the count. So, although dressed as another, she should be singing in "her own" voice. But not really "her own," as the sentiments she articulates are feigned (a liaison with the count is, of course, what she has spent the entire opera avoiding). Some of this ambiguity can be heard in "Deh vieni," which has musical and poetic elements that are markedly "elevated" for Susanna. The aria nevertheless remains—as music, and in the voice it commands—broadly in the *buffo* world proper to her character. Indeed, it has been suggested, by James Webster most enthusiastically, that Susanna "reveals her true self" during the course of the aria, specifically with those "liquid, undulating violin motifs" near the end.²⁰ In this context, "Al desio" is much more obviously a musical *travestimento*. There are now mere traces of *buffo* character; in general Susanna sings with tones that are unambiguously elevated.

I would be the first to agree that "Deh vieni," with its artful simplicity, is an astonishing Mozartian moment; but I would nevertheless question whether its solution is so obviously better, so *permanently* better, than that of "Al desio." The libretto's establishment of a kinship, an emotional equality even, between Susanna and the countess, something made iconic when they exchange clothes in the final act, is after all one

of the central issues of the drama. What is more, we also know that, probably for practical reasons that emerged during rehearsal, Mozart changed his mind about the vocal disposition of his two sopranos, particularly about who should take the upper part in ensembles.²¹ In other words, these two characters continually weave in and out of each other's vocal personality: as musical presences, they have already been con-founded. At an early stage, Mozart even sketched a rondo for the first Susanna, Nancy Storace—and to judge by the highly strenuous two-tempo concert aria he wrote for her in 1786, she would have been fully up to the task.²² What is more, Storace was well known for her ability to imitate others, and, famously, just a little after "Al desio" Susanna indeed disguises her voice, trying to fool Figaro into thinking she is the countess.²³ In all this concatenation of confused identities, it would be a brave critic who insisted, insisted so rigidly and with so little room for equivocation, that a particular vocal identity is *necessary* for Susanna in her nocturnal aria, at this moment alone. But when scholars believe that Mozart's original intentions are marching behind them, many become brave.

There is, though, another confusion of voices caused by "Al desio," one that could take us through a long line of rondos and through some of Mozart's most imposing vocal music, most obviously those for Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, for Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, and for Sesto in *La clemenza di Tito*. If we believe John Rice, we can witness Mozart in this series of pieces engaged in a fascinating emulative tussle with Antonio Salieri.²⁴ But of course the principal connection in this case is to the part that Adriana Ferrarese would soon create, to Fiordiligi in *Così*, an opera with which—as I mentioned earlier—Mozart was in all likelihood already engaged at the time he was writing "Al desio." Fiordiligi's great rondo in Act II of *Così*, "Per pietà, ben mio, perdona," has much in common with "Al desio," the latter seeming almost like a trial run for the former. Some of these similarities are of course generic, reflecting the formal conventions of the rondo: the two-tempo form, the prominent use of wind instruments, the florid writing in the second section. But

others are more personal, almost certainly inspired by placing the same singer in dramatic situations that have much in common. A glance at the verses of "Per pietà" will make the similarities plain:

Per pietà, ben mio, perdona
 All'error d'un'alma amante;
 Fra quest'ombre e queste piante
 Sempre ascoso, o Dio, sarà.
 Svererà quest'empia voglia
 L'ardir mio, la mia costanza,
 Perderà la rimembranza
 Che vergogna e orror mi fa.
 A chi mai mancò di fede
 Questo vano ingrato cor!
 Sì dovea miglior mercede
 Caro bene, al tuo candor!

[Have pity, my love, forgive / The fault of a loving soul; / Among these shadowy groves / It will, oh God, always be hidden. / My courage, my passion, / Will empty my veins of this wicked desire, / Will drive out the memory / Which gives me shame and horror. / Whom did it betray, / This worthless, empty heart! / You deserved a better reward / My beloved, for your sincerity!]

Both "Al desio" and "Per pietà" take place in a garden, a place that provides shadows and seclusion and thus allows secret thoughts to emerge, thoughts of illicit desire, of amorous feelings that need to be hidden from the world. In both cases this sense of the thing that must remain hidden is partly evoked by the voice, which makes prominent show of the lower register in quiet contexts. Most obviously, though, it emerges in the shared use of the solo horn, a horn that betrays its usual orchestral nature by duetting with the soloist, by invading the realm of the lyrical. There is probably a gesture here to the old pun, the horn, the *corno*, signifying the cuckold's horns, as it will so violently in Figaro's jealousy aria "Aprite un po' quegli'occhi," the aria that follows immediately on "Al desio" in the fourth act of *Figaro*. In these two rondos for Ferrarese, though, the horns are anything but brazen and mocking.

Their proximity to, their merging with, vocal expression make us aware, with an economy of which music is uniquely capable, of a famous ambiguity at the heart of *Così fan tutte*: of the fact that "illicit" emotions, ones that flourish in the shadows, are not always neatly separated from others, more socially acceptable; that the cuckold's horn can sometimes bring forth sounds of painful beauty.

What can we gain from pondering these similarities? Just as those gypsies danced into Verdi's *La traviata*, so a breath of *Così fan tutte* has strayed into the last act of *Figaro*, ushered in by the distinctive voice of Adriana Ferrarese. Fiordiligi, Mozart's most ambivalent character, is now part of *Figaro*, leaving her mark on a Susanna dressed as the countess, changing the landscape. Inserting "Al desio" into *Figaro*, in other words, gives us a glimpse of another Mozartian operatic world, not just in the technical sense (shared by "Un moto di gioia") of introducing a richness of wind writing that is typical of *Così* but rare in *Figaro*, but also, more important, one in which the business of sexual jealousy is approached very differently, where the denouement that sets everything "right" carries less weight. The extent to which the *Figaro* landscape changes when it embraces "Al desio" will of course depend on performers' choices. But the possibilities are enticing. The presence of the aria might, for example, encourage Susanna to be a little more taken by the count than either the libretto or her protestations allow: to use Carolyn Abbate's now-famous term, "voice Count" is, after all, disturbingly likeable. What then haunts "Al desio" is the forbidden possibility—of female attraction to the wrong, or subversive, or dramatically illogical object of desire.

In this sense, far from dispersing the tension of that moment in the garden, "Al desio" meaningfully darkens *Figaro*. But there is more. Its presence, its difference, its moment of excess, may cause us to reassess the terms of the vocal contracts we have wrapped around this and other Mozart operas. The countess, Susanna, Fiordiligi: we tend to understand these characters, make them "ours," in part by means of a rigid classification of vocal types. Mozart, though, was writing for real voices, for individual women and men. Rhetorically, we often forget this:

Mozart wrote music, not words, not characters, not libretto. The influence of a singular voice and individual is not a matter of reproach, but something positive for the formation of *his* work (music), a something perhaps more positive than we want to imagine. To put this one last way, Adriana Ferrarese's "Al desio" can usefully confuse us, make us aware that Susanna does not have to remain locked in one particular vocal mold. She can, in this fourth act of *Le nozze di Figaro*, vocally become the countess, assume more forcefully a position we thought could not be hers. And she can, by means of a horn solo and certain low notes, vocally become Fiordiligi, bringing with her an ambiguity that can add further layers of complexity to Mozart's ever-mutable opera.

FOUR

In Search of Verdi

My main port of call in this chapter is Verdi's *Falstaff*, and that choice, together with the title and several other matters, has brought with it an obligation: I find myself constrained to trail a hand in the shark-infested waters that surround themes such as modernity and late style, not least as these dark topics have been presented to a mostly bewildered world by Theodor W. Adorno.¹ Before embarkation a confession had better be made. I don't much like Adorno; or, better, I dislike what Adorno has come to stand for in the musicological community; and my attitude, which has been unbending for about twenty years, hardly changed when, quite recently, I got around to reading closely some of his copious and dense writings on music. My lame, inadequate excuse for ignoring him had always been that my central interests are with Italian music, while Adorno's musical world was almost exclusively and unapologetically peopled by Austro-German composers; his book *In Search of Wagner*, for example (which has frequent references to august Wagnerian predecessors such as Mozart and Beethoven, and august followers, such as Schoenberg and Berg), has, so far as I've been able to find, just one reference to the Italian operatic tradition from which Wagner learned so much, and it's a fairly contemptuous aside about Rossini.² True, Adorno is also pretty tough on Wagner. But at least he wrote a book to ventilate