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W. A. Mozart

Così fan tutte

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in the ensemble, which are easily overlooked, are significant: confused and ashamed, she admits to having been fooled, and in effect, to having missed seeing Alfonso's larger goal. Just as well, she muses; she has fooled many a person herself.

31.15 (Tutti: *Fortunato l'uom che prende*; C major, Allegro molto ♩)

All six characters now join to sing the 'philosophical' moral of the opera. Da Ponte and Mozart chose not the misogynist creed represented by the motto 'così fan tutte' (which had been given sufficient exposure), but rather a more generous message of reconciliation. 'Happy is he who looks on the bright side of things, and in all cases lets himself be guided by reason. May that which makes others weep be for him a cause to laugh, and amidst the storms of this world he will find perfect calm.' Thus (in *Orlando furioso*) had Ilocondo and Astolfo, after suffering untold torments on account of their wives' infidelities, rationally decided that since 'both are as virtuous as the best, / Let us return and live with them at rest.'

4 *The sources of an 'original' libretto*

For more than two centuries, Mozartians of various stripes have sought to discover a source for Da Ponte's libretto for *Così fan tutte* – in part because the origins of his texts for *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* were, by comparison, so clear. Their motivations have varied greatly, but there has generally been an assumption that there was indeed a source to be found, and that its identification would reveal something about Mozart's attitude towards the text he set. Da Ponte himself was acutely sensitive on the question of originality. In his memoirs, the librettist recounts his rival Giambattista Casti's grudging praise of his texts for Martín y Soler's *Il burbero di buon cuore* (after Goldoni) and for *Le nozze di Figaro* (after Beaumarchais), in each case accompanied by the disclaimer '... but it's only a translation'.¹ Even when there was no obvious model – and already during Da Ponte's lifetime – some critics were sifting through his librettos for evidence of literary larceny. In the pamphlet *Anti-da Ponte* of 1791 the librettist is said to merit harsh justice, for crimes which included 'the many learned thefts he has committed since the beginning of his career as a theatre-poet'.² Later in the same brochure, in a mock trial before a host of aggrieved parties (Mozart included), Da Ponte freely admits to having 'mercilessly plundered' 'the masterworks of Metastasio', and defends his theft of the plot of *Una cosa rara* by claiming that Martín's music was no less plagiarized.³

The evidence Da Ponte provides, thirty years after the fact, of his feud with Casti is hardly more admissible than the imaginary testimony in the pamphlet, but there is some truth in both sources. Casti disparaged Da Ponte's 'translations' in order to emphasize the originality of his own librettos, in a genre then mired in clichés. Italian comic operas rarely explored original subject matter; thus it was perfectly normal for Mozart to '[look] through easily a hundred librettos' when setting out to write an opera buffa of his own. In

adapting and translating various plays and librettos, Da Ponte was only fulfilling duties expected of him as house poet for the Italian opera company – a position to which Casti aspired. As for literary theft, Casti was hardly any less guilty than his rival. He made a point of parading his literary learning in his opera texts, whether in outright quotations, Dantesque or Petrarchan locutions, or in ‘reminiscences’ of recent operas.⁴ Early in *Così*, when Da Ponte has Ferrando and Guglielmo characterize Alfonso’s quotation of Metastasio as ‘poetic nonsense’ and ‘old men’s foolishness’, he is probably mocking Casti’s as much as his own erudition.

If Da Ponte’s contemporaries questioned his originality largely out of malice, later generations’ interest in the sources of *Così* sprang from a desire to distance Mozart from a plot generally seen as unworthy of his genius. Recent scholars have approached the search most fruitfully when they have allowed for the possibility of multiple sources. Da Ponte’s epicurean approach is illustrated by his 1789 pasticcio *L’ape musicale* (The musical bee), in which the future Fiordiligi sang a retexted cavatina from Salieri’s *Axur* (III/5) which explained the premise:

Com’ Ape ingegnosa
Sui lucidi albori
Dai teneri fiori
Sa il mele succhiare.
Così da un tesoro
Di musiche note
Coll’arte si puote
Il meglio cavar.

(As the ingenious bee sucks the honey from tender flowers upon bright trees, so can one artfully extract the best from a treasury of musical notes.)

One does well also to distinguish between proximate sources, and more peripheral themes or opinions that were simply ‘in the air’. Date is not necessarily a deciding factor: the works of Virgil, Dante or Petrarch would have been more proximate, in terms of Da Ponte’s knowledge and interests, than many a contemporary German play.

Myths and morals

That mythology was a fundamental source for *Così fan tutte* is suggested by the frequency with which the opera’s characters invoke the

pantheon of ancient deities and their stories, from Alfonso’s scoffing reference to the officers’ ‘Penelopes’ in the first scene through Guglielmo’s talk of Charon’s boat, shortly before the second-act finale. In a short study published in 1954, Ernst Gombrich proposed the myth of Cephalus and Procris as an archetype for *Così*, and this has stimulated much further research.⁵ The Cephalus story, as related in the seventh book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,⁶ concerns an Athenian prince who is goaded into testing the fidelity of his wife. An important difference from *Così* is the fact that Cephalus is the first to stray – though he later protests that ‘Procris was in my heart, Procris was ever on my lips.’ But the similarities, too, are striking. Cephalus is able to woo his own spouse because his seductress, the goddess Aurora, had changed his features; Ferrando and Guglielmo’s less magical metamorphosis into Albanians affords them anonymity which they use for similar purposes, after likewise pretending to leave on a voyage. Like the officers, Cephalus repents of the test as soon as it has produced the feared result.

The myth of Cephalus and Procris was elaborated by many subsequent writers, including both Boccaccio (*De claris mulieribus*) and Ariosto.⁷ But a second major theme in *Così*, that of the wager, is exemplified in the second *giornata* of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, and in Shakespeare’s play *Cymbeline*, which partly derives from it. Boccaccio’s *novella* – certainly a more proximate source as far as Da Ponte was concerned – begins with speculation by Bernabò Lomellino of Genoa and several other Italian merchants about their wives’ behaviour during their stay in Paris. The first to speak echoes Cephalus in saying that he sees no conflict between the love he holds for his wife, and carnal pleasures taken elsewhere. Most in the group assume that their wives back home are no more celibate than they are. Only Bernabò dissents, thereby attracting the ridicule of his comrade Ambruogiuolo of Piacenza, who reminds Bernabò that ‘tu medesimo di’ che la moglie tua è femina e ch’ella è di carne e d’ossa come son l’altre’ (‘...you yourself say that your wife is a woman and that she is of flesh and blood like the rest’). This anticipates language used by Alfonso in the opening scene of *Così*, as he asks if his friends’ fiancées are made of ‘carne, ossa, e pelle’, and proposes to test whether they are truly ‘come l’altre sono’. In Boccaccio’s tale it is not the doubter, but the husband, who proposes the bet to see if Ambruogiuolo can seduce his wife Zinevra. Yet it is clearly the merchant from Piacenza who pushes the issue, with long-winded, pedantic arguments to which Bernabò can only respond, colloquially, ‘Io son

mercantante e non fisofolo' (I'm a merchant and not a philosopher). Arriving in Genoa, Ambruogiuolo soon despairs of actually seducing Zinevra, but manages to bribe her servant (as Alfonso does Despina), thereby acquiring proofs sufficient to convince Bernabò that he had been intimate with Zinevra. In the end it is Zinevra who removes her disguise and confounds both spouse and would-be seducer, rather than the other way around. But there is something almost Mozartian (or Da Pontean) in the ending, as the offended wife forgives her husband, though he be 'mal degno'. And the proverb quoted by the narrator Filomena at the beginning of the tale: '... lo 'ngannatore rimane a piè dello, 'ngannato' (roughly: the deceiver ends up as the deceived) is much the same as the explanation Alfonso offers the outraged Ferrarese sisters for his part in the charade: 'V'ingannai, ma fu l'inganno / Disinganno ai vostri amanti' (I deceived you, but the deception was undeceiving for your lovers).

Così fan tutte as Ariostan capriccio

Whereas mythology remained the principal source of opera plots in eighteenth-century France, most opere serie were based on ancient history. When more fanciful material was desired, Italian librettists often turned to a pair of Renaissance epics: Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* and Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, each of which contained a wealth of attractive tales. Tim Carter has catalogued close to a hundred operas deriving from each source.⁸ Two Viennese works which might be added to the list of Orlando operas are Casti's *Orlando furioso* (which remained unset), and Da Ponte's *Così fan tutte* – for one of the many reworkings of the Cephalus myth is to be found in Canto 43 of Ariosto's epic.

Despite transposition of the action to the Age of Chivalry, most elements of the Cephalus myth remain as in Ovid. Here the cuckold is a Mantuan knight who at this point in the poem is acting as host to Rinaldo. The sorceress Melissa here plays Aurora to the knight's Cephalus, suggesting (as would Alfonso) that his total faith in his wife's fidelity is premature:

Ma che ti sia fedel, tu non puoi dire, But canst thou know thy consort's
truth (she cry'd)
prima che di sua fè prova non vedi. Till such by ample proof be fairly
try'd?

(*Orlando furioso*, 43:25)

Qual prova avete voi, che ognor costanti
Vi sien le vostri amanti...?

(*Così fan tutte*, I/1: What proof do you have, that your lovers
are still faithful to you?)⁹

As had Ovid's Aurora, Melissa magically transforms the husband's appearance so that he might secretly court his wife. The few lines in which the wife's reactions are recorded (43:38) predict the women's progression across the two acts of *Così* from outrage (Nos. 13, 14) to hesitant interest (first finale, No. 20) to rationalization (II/2 onward) to capitulation (Nos. 23, 29). The similarities between *Così* and this telling of the story are about as close as to Ovid's version. But Da Ponte also borrowed some key elements from Ariosto's frame for the tale, clearly marking *Orlando furioso* as a more direct source for his text. The Mantuan knight recounts the destruction of his marriage, through his own curiosity, in the context of his proposal to test the fidelity of his guests' wives by means of a magic cup given him by Melissa:

Chi la moglie ha pudica, bee con He freely drinks, whose consort
quello: merits praise;
ma non vi può già ber chi l' ha Whose wife is false in vain the
puttana, draught essays:
che 'l vin, quando lo crede in bocca When to the vessel's brim his lips
porre, are prest,
tutto si sparge, e fuor nel petto The wine o'erflows and trickles
scorre. down his breast.

(*Orlando furioso*, 43:28)

In raising the goblet, the Mantuan host seemed rather to weep than to smile, Ariosto says – an opposition appropriated and repeated by Da Ponte. Rinaldo hesitates to drink, saying

... Ben sarebbe folle ... Insensate is the mind
chi quel che non vorria trovar, Who seeks for that it ne'er would
cercasse. wish to find.
Mia donna è donna, et ogni donna My wife's a woman – all the sex is
è molle: frail –
lasciàn star mia credenza come But let not hence my good opinion
stasse. fail:

(*Orlando furioso*, 43:6)

Addressing his young friends, Alfonso paraphrases this warning in the first number of Mozart's opera. In the dénouement, the officers

foreswear further tests – symmetrically bringing the plot to closure, just as Rinaldo had repeated the moral at the end of the Mantuan knight's sad tale (43:47).

The evidence for a largely Ariostan origin for *Così fan tutte* is also circumstantial. Long ago Edward Dent noted that Marcellina's aria 'Il capro e la capretta' in the fourth act of *Le nozze di Figaro* is a close imitation of the opening of Canto 5 in *Orlando furioso*, an indictment of man as the only creature that mistreats the female of its species.¹⁰ Da Ponte's text for *Il finito cieco*, performed that same year (1786), likewise contains a reference to a character from this epic, the valorous Marfisa (I/5). Finally, Da Ponte left ample evidence, quite apart from his opera texts, of his affection for Ariosto. Near the beginning of his memoirs he calls Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto and Tasso his 'first masters', whose works he had largely committed to memory.¹¹ Throughout his memoirs, names from *Orlando furioso* are applied to himself and to his friends and lovers, and during his sojourn in London he even published an expurgated edition of the poem.¹² Several stanzas from Ariosto's epic were recited at 'the first Literary Conversazione, held at his house, in New-York, on the 10th of March, 1807', and no doubt on many other occasions. Da Ponte's was a life spent in constant communication with Ariosto, and the rest of the Italian literary Parnassus.

Dunstan reminds us that the Mantuan knight's tale is only the first of two stories of sexual jealousy in the forty-third Canto; the second is told to Rinaldo by the Mantuan knight's boatman, as the two make their way down the river Po.¹³ Reflecting on the previous evening's test of the cup, Rinaldo avows that there would be little to be gained, and much to be lost by drinking (43:66). Helping confirm him in this belief, the boatman tells him of the insanely jealous Mantuan judge Anselmo and his clever, beautiful, but ultimately unfaithful wife Argia. The intrigue is less like that of *Così* than is the previous tale's – though Dunstan calls attention to similarities between Argia's bribable wet-nurse and Da Ponte's Despina. In the end, Argia's adultery is discovered, and in his rage Anselmo plots her murder. This fails, and with both parties chastened, the only path to a reconciliation is through oblivion:

e sia la pace e sia l'accordo fatto,
 ch'ogni passato error vada in oblio;
 ... henceforth let us live
 In lasting peace, and all the past
 forgive:
 né ch'in parole io possa mai né in In word or deed I ne'er will more
 atto repine

ricordarti il tuo error, né a me tu il At thy offence, nor shalt thou
 mio. – censure mine.

(*Orlando furioso*, 43:143)

Similar sentiments are voiced – with somewhat analogous intent – in the toast to oblivion sung by the realigned lovers in the opera's second finale.

E nel tuo, nel mio bicchiero
 Si sommerge ogni pensiero,
 E non resti più memoria
 Del passato ai nostri cor.

(*Così fan tutte*, No. 31: And let every thought be submerged in
 your, in my glass, and let there remain in our hearts no
 memory of the past.)

These two tales from Canto 43 demonstrate quite diverse consequences of adultery. In the first, the disguised husband's temptation of his wife precludes any chance for happiness, while in the second, Argia's faithlessness is seen as no worse than Anselmo's maniacal jealousy, and a reconciliation ensues.

Earlier in *Orlando furioso*, in Canto 28, there is another tale of cuckoldry which, like the two such stories in Canto 43, Da Ponte suppressed in his edition of the poem.¹⁴ Ariosto himself gives the cue, in an opening apostrophe to 'Donne, e voi che le donne avete in pregio' ('Ye dames! and ye to whom each dame is dear), advising them to skip over this defamatory tale. Da Ponte mined these verses in composing 'Donne mie, la fate a tanti' (No. 26), in which Guglielmo apologizes in advance for his complaints about women's wiles. The story of Astolfo and Iocundo in Canto 28 provided another crucial element to the plot of *Così*: the doubling of the participants.¹⁵ The famously handsome King Astolfo, curious to see the man whose fair appearance is said to rival his own, summons Iocundo to his court. The latter, after a tearful parting from his young wife, remembers that he has forgotten the necklace she had given him as a token of her love; he returns to find her in bed with a servant. Though initially appalled, Iocundo comes to see that 'Her fault was but the fault of all her kind' (28:36) – an excuse adduced also by Alfonso in No. 30 of Mozart's opera. Astolfo's own spouse soon proves equally faithless, and both vow to avenge the wrongs done them by roaming the world in disguise, seducing women. Though these two Don Juans do not court each other's partners, as in *Così*, in the end they recognize that all women are the same:

Provate mille abbiamo, e tutte belle; A thousand women we before have
 né di tante una è ancor che ne try'd,
 contraste. Yet found not one our amorous
 Se provian l'altre, fian simili suit deny'd.
 anch'elie; A second thousand like the first
 ma per ultima prova costei basto. would fall:
 Dunque possiamo creder che più But this last proof may well suffice
 felle for all.
 non sien le nostre, o men de l'altre Then cease we more to blame our
 caste: Their thoughts less chaste than
 e se son come tutte l'altre sono, those of all their kind;
 the best,
 che torniamo a godercile fia buono. Let us return and live with them at
 rest.

(*Orlando furioso*, 28:73)

The suitors in *Così fan tutte*, confronted with the choice of marrying their faithless women or remaining celibate, ask Alfonso (immediately before the second finale) if men like them would ever lack for women. He replies:

Non c'è abbondanza d'altro. You'll find an abundance of them.
 Ma l'altre, che faran, se ciò fer But what would others do, if these
 queste? did this?

The humane (if not completely evenhanded) moral of the opera was thus not born of Enlightenment philosophy, but a piece of wisdom from centuries earlier.

If the portions of Ariosto's epic discussed thus far provided some essential features of Da Ponte's plot, other passages helped define the personalities of the opera's heroines. Andrew Steptoe recognized a general resemblance between Ariosto's and Da Ponte's Fiordiligis, on the one hand, and the more flighty Doralice and Dorabella on the other.¹⁶ But Dunstan's thorough reading of Ariosto reveals both a more complicated ancestry for Dorabella, and touches of cruel parody in Da Ponte's handling of Fiordiligi. Dorabella, she writes, is not simply a version of Ariosto's Doralice, but

a composite name deriving from the two ladies who frame the story in Canto 28. Rodomonte is in love with one after the other: his fiancée Doralice betrays him for Mandricardo and Isabella escapes his embraces by cleverly contrived suicide.¹⁷

With Dora- -bella as precedent, Da Ponte then extracted Despina's name from that of Ariosto's Spanish princess Fiordispina.¹⁸ And though the contexts are completely different, there is also a clear model in *Orlando furioso* (42:14) for Guglielmo's dismemberment of the name Fiordiligi (lily-flower) following her betrayal of him.¹⁹

Both Fiordiligi and the Saracen Isabella (or Issabella) are paragons of wifely virtue in Ariosto's poem, so when they are invoked or paraphrased in an opera called *Così fan tutte*, the effect is necessarily ironic. So devoted is Ariosto's Fiordiligi to her husband Brandimarte that he cannot bring himself to tell her of his impending departure with Orlando. When after several months he has still not returned, Fiordiligi sets off in search of him. They are eventually reunited, but when Brandimarte is killed soon afterward, Fiordiligi berates herself for not following him into combat. Thus does Da Ponte's Fiordiligi, gnawed by remorse after lending an ear to her seducer, plan to join her betrothed on the battlefield (II/11). (At this point the librettist also has Fiordiligi tear off her 'fatal' feminine ornaments, in imitation of Tasso's Rinaldo as he removes the womanish emblems of his servitude to Armida [16:31 ff.]) Fiordiligi's earlier aria 'Come scoglio', on the other hand, was apparently modelled on a speech by another faithful woman in Ariosto's epic, Ruggero's beloved Bradamante:²⁰

immobil son di vera fede scoglio	In me behold a rock of truth, that braves
che d'ogn'intorno il vento e il mar	The howling tempest and the
percuote:	dashing waves:
né già mai per bonaccia né per	Not spring or winter have I
verno	chang'd my place,
luogo mutai, né muterò in eterno.	Nor aught shall ever shake my steadfast base.

(*Orlando furioso*, 44:61)

Come scoglio immoto resta
 Contra i venti, e la tempesta,
 Così ognor quest'alma è forte
 Nella fede, e nell'amor. . .

(*Così fan tutte*, No. 14: As the rock remains firm against
 the winds and the storm, thus this soul is ever strong, in faith
 and in love. . .)

Da Ponte's imitation is more thoroughgoing, and in better taste, than that of Casti in *La grotta di Trofonio*, who has Plistene declare

Ma io per la mia Dori

Duro, e costante ognor, come uno scoglio.

(1/9: But for my Dori, I'm hard and ever constant, like a rock.)

Fiordiligi's reaction to the news of Bradamante's death furnished Da Ponte with models for the hysterics of both sisters as they contemplate life without their fiancés. Whereas the earlier Fiordiligi merely shuns the light (43:157), before her first aria (No. 11) Dorabella hates the light, the air she breathes, even herself. Bradamante's widow had torn her hair and cheeks, and

donna talor che 'l demon rio . . . grida, come
percuote, . . . rav'd as if some fiend her
o come s'ode che già a suon di soul possess'd.
corno So seem'd the Menades, when wide
Menade corse, et aggrossi intorno. were borne
Their shouts and clamours with the
maddening horn.
(*Orlando furioso*, 43:158)

just as would Dorabella in her invocation of the Eumenides, 'Smanie implacabili'. Fiordiligi's plea for a knife to end her woes echoes Isabella's words to her dying lover Zerbino:

Non si tosto vedrò chiudervi gli . . . when ruthless death shall
occhi, close
o che m'ucciderà il dolore interno, Thy fading eyes – that moment
ends my woes!
o se quel non può tanto, io vi Or should I still survive that stroke
prometto of grief,
con questa spada oggi passarvi At least thy sword will yield a sure
il petto. relief.
(*Orlando furioso*, 24:81)

Similar expressions abound in *Così fan tutte*: in the sisters' reaction to the imminent departure of their fiancés, in No. 6 and immediately thereafter, and as their treachery is discovered in the second finale (Andante, bb. 466 ff.). Finally, the grief-stricken Fiordiligi shuts herself up in Brandimarte's tomb to waste away her days (see Plate 4). When Da Ponte's Fiordiligi compares Guglielmo's absence to death, Dorabella outdoes her, likening Ferrando's departure to live burial (1/9). Both before and after Dorabella's fall from innocence, Guglielmo cites the original example of such devotion, by the Carian queen Artemisia (who had sealed herself in the tomb



I.B. Cipriani del.

F. Bartolozzi Sculp.

Stava ella nel sepolcro; e quivi attrita
Da penitenza, orando giorno e notte.

(Canto XLIII, Stanza CXXXV.)

4 Ariosto's Fiordiligi: engraving by F. Bartolozzi after G. B. Cipriani, from John Baskerville's edition of *Orlando furioso* (Birmingham, 1773)

of her husband Mausolus) – first naïvely (II/11), and then ironically (II/13).

As befits a character of such mixed ancestry, Dorabella's initial protestations of loyalty to Ferrando soon give way to interest in a more available lover. Once Alfonso's infidel friends appear on the scene, her behaviour is exactly parallel to that of Doralice of Granada who, though betrothed to the warrior Rodomonte, offers little resistance to the advances of Mandricardo.²¹ Later forced to choose between the rivals for her hand, she prefers the newer one, and the spurned Rodomonte vents his anger in language of the sort used throughout *Così* by Alfonso:

– Oh femminile ingegno (egli dicea), O female sex! (he cry'd) whose
come ti volgi e muti facilmente, Inconstant, shifts with every
contrario oggetto proprio de la changing wind:
fedel! O faithless woman! perjur'd and
Oh infelice, oh miser chi ti crede! Most wretched those who place in
thee their trust!
(*Orlando furioso*, 27:117)

Rodomonte pays back the false Doralice in kind, transferring his affections to the grieving Isabella. Da Ponte seems to have found inspiration in Ariosto's proverbial description of the process:

E ben gli par dignissima Issabella, While Isabella worthy seem'd to
in cui locar debba il suo amor prove
secondo, The peerless object of his second
e spenger totalmente il primo, love;
a modo And from his breast expunge
che da l'asse si trae **chiodo** Granada's dame,
con chiodo. As pity yields to pity, flame to
(*Orlando furioso*, 28:98)

Alf.: Or ben; se mai per consolarle Well then, if to console them a bit
un poco
E **trar**, come diciam, **chiodo** and, so to speak, drive out one
per chiodo, nail with another,
Tu ritrovassi il modo you could find a way
Da metter in lor grazia due to put into their good graces two
soggetti clever fellows. . .
Di garbo. . .

(*Così fan tutte*, I/10)

Two further signs of *Così*'s inspiration in Ariosto's epic remain to be mentioned. One was removed before the opera reached performance: namely, Guglielmo's comparison of himself to 'un Orlando innamorato', in the reference-saturated aria 'Rivolgete a lui lo sguardo'. The second clue is more formal: Da Ponte's use in Alfonso's No. 30 of *ottava rima*, the type of verse used by Ariosto for the whole of *Orlando furioso*.²² The librettist delighted in such poetic artifices, which nicely complement his borrowing of themes and vocabulary from earlier authors. They are like nuggets of gold lying on the ground, inviting the observant passer-by to dig deeper.

Ultimately, Da Ponte's aim in taking so much inspiration from Ariosto's poem was not to surpass Casti's displays of erudition – though these included references to characters from the epic, in his libretto *Prima la musica e poi le parole*, for Salieri – nor even to represent the Ferrarese poet's opinions at face value. For as we have seen, Da Ponte turns nearly all the borrowed material to one purpose: proving the foolishness of trusting in women's constancy. What the librettist hoped to gain was something of the earlier poet's psychological insight, on a subject that interested him greatly. Da Ponte's more pervasive cynicism did not prevent him from retaining Ariosto's generosity when the latter says that, though women be false, one can and must still love them. *Così fan tutte* cannot be considered a true parody, since no one story (whether from *Orlando furioso* or elsewhere) is followed from start to finish. Its effect is more that of an architectural caprice, such as were painted by Da Ponte's countrymen Antonio Canaletto and Francesco Guardi. Pictures and libretto alike include clearly recognizable elements, rearranged and placed among invented ones in a pleasing and coherent whole. Though other sources contributed to the text of *Così*, Ariosto set the tone and provided the framework. In his memoirs Da Ponte tells of taking Dante as his inspiration for Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Petrarch as a guide for Martin's *L'arbore di Diana*, and Tasso for Salieri's *Axur*.²³ In similar fashion, Ariosto stands as godfather over the composition of *Così fan tutte*.

There is one other sixteenth-century text which Alfonso quotes outright in *Così*. As the officers' boat moves away from shore, the philosopher gleefully anticipates the ease with which he will win his bet, citing for support three lines from an eclogue in Jacopo Sannazaro's pastoral novel *L'Arcadia* (published 1504); the initial quotation marks in the original libretto show that they were meant to be recognized as a quotation:

"Nel mare solca, e nell'arena semina,

"E il vago vento spera in rete accogliere

"Chi fonda sue speranze in cor di femmina.

(*Così fan tutte*, 1/7: He who places his faith in women might as well plough the waves, sow the sands, or catch the wind in nets.)

Like so much in this libretto, this passage is proverbial, which has prompted more than one of Sannazaro's editors to suspect that still older models lay behind it. And like the *ottava rima* of No. 30, the verse form calls attention to itself, with its *sdruciolato* (dactyl-ending) hendecasyllables. In their original context, these lines are not quite as misogynist as they seem, for they occur within a larger debate which includes more optimistic views of love.

Da Ponte and the 'demonstration comedy': Marivaux and Beaumarchais

However much Ariosto may have contributed to the plot and language of *Così fan tutte*, it is still very much an eighteenth-century libretto, reliant to a large degree on convention. The company of singers who would perform the opera had quite specific expectations concerning the vocabulary and situations appropriate to their character-types, and a host of other matters. Nor could Da Ponte ignore the fact that his poetic allusions and conceits would be lost upon a good many spectators; the piece had also to appeal to the interests and tastes of a contemporary audience. There are several eighteenth-century writers to whom Da Ponte probably turned in drafting his libretto for *Così fan tutte*, including two French dramatists who treated the theme of sexual jealousy with notable insight.

Several recent theories on the origins of *Così fan tutte* have revolved around the works of Pierre Marivaux, the majority of which deal with the mysteries of the human heart. Daniel Hertz has noted numerous convergences of themes and dramatic strategies between the French writer's comedies and the Mozart-Da Ponte operas, and also the popularity of the former in Vienna, whether in the original language or in translation. *Les Fausses Confidences*, in which 'the process of falling in love is . . . observed with a kind of clinical detachment by an older and "philosophical" type', was performed there repeatedly, right up to the year of *Così*'s première.²⁴ For Charles Rosen, Da Ponte's libretto, like Marivaux's comedies for the Théâtre Italien, belonged to

a genre that may be called the comedy of experimental psychology, a kind of play that was quickly taken up in Italy and Germany. These are not 'thesis' plays but 'demonstration' plays: there is never anything controversial about their ideas. They demonstrate – prove by acting out – psychological ideas and 'laws' that everyone accepted. . . The interest in such a play lies chiefly in the psychological steps by which the characters move to an end known in advance: as in Marivaux' *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* [1730], how a young girl disguised as a maid and a young man disguised as a valet will overcome their feelings of class and, first, become aware that they are in love and, then, openly admit it.²⁵

The link with this play was followed up by Andrew Steptoe, with particular attention to the symmetry that its plot shares with that of *Così*.²⁶ The element of class plays no such role for Da Ponte's crossed pairs of fiancés, but the controlling figure of Orgon does have an equivalent in Alfonso. An even more clinical experimenter is the Prince of the play *La Dispute* (1744), which Nicholas Till has recently proposed as the principal model for *Così*.²⁷ The dispute of the title concerned the question: Which sex is more inconstant in love? To settle the matter, the Prince's father had ordered two pairs of children to be raised in isolation; when a bet is made on the same issue nearly two decades later, the son sets the demonstration in motion. The two couples go into raptures upon first meeting, but when the females are exposed to their opposite numbers from the other pair, they trade partners with little ado. As in Da Ponte's plot, the tokens of betrayal are portraits, and in the end the original couples are rejoined. But, as one of the observers complains, this dénouement is due merely to the male sex's propensity to change 'for no reason, without even seeking an excuse' (Scene 20) – a notion far removed from the moral of *Così*, or of the tale of Astolfo and Ilocondo.

The original production of *La Dispute* was a failure, but the curious could still read it in editions of Marivaux's works. In 1778 Marivaux's play was translated by Johann Friedrich Schmidt, and published in Vienna as *Wer ist in der Liebe unbeständig?*, in a volume of prize-winning plays for the new Nationaltheater.²⁸ That same year it was adapted by Johann Josef Kurz as a Singspiel, and performed in the Burgtheater with music by Franz Aspelmayr, under the title *Die Kinder der Natur*. It is conceivable that, in one form or another, the play could have come to Mozart's attention; if Da Ponte encountered the work, it would probably have been in the original language. Was *La Dispute* 'the' source for *Così fan tutte*? A comparison of the language of the two pieces suggests that it was not. The young lovers in *La Dispute*, innocent of any sort of moral

code, speak with a naïveté reminiscent of Favart, whereas the fiancés of *Così* start from very fixed, though unrealistic, notions of fidelity and honour. In terms of the mechanics of the plot, Da Ponte needed to look no farther than the garden scene of his own *Le nozze di Figaro* to find an example of crossed pairs of lovers. *Così fan tutte* relates to *La Dispute* and other comedies by Marivaux simply as an example of a widespread type. It is rather in their portrayals of women gradually becoming aware of love, or struggling against it (as in Fiordiligi's anguished *rondo*) that Da Ponte and Marivaux intersect most closely.

Throughout his libretto, Da Ponte rang changes on the title *Così fan tutte*, just as Beaumarchais had burned the theme of jealousy into the minds of the spectators in his earlier play *Le Barbier de Séville* through repeated statements of its subtitle, *La Précaution inutile*. Mozart's collaborator may also have taken a hint from Beaumarchais when he had Ferrando taunt the freshly betrayed Guglielmo with his own earlier boasts ('Un poco di più merto. . .'), for there is just such a scene in the fourth act of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, in which Marceline throws Figaro's sanguine philosophy on jealousy back in his face after he has learnt of Suzanne's assignation with the Count.

In a sense, *Così fan tutte*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode* (after Goldoni) are all 'demonstration comedies', in that their titles or subtitles foretell the outcome of the drama. *Così fan tutte* also bears a relation – in rather a roundabout way – to another subgenre of eighteenth-century drama: sentimental comedy. Its plot is based on the officers' sentimental conviction that their women are superior beings, and on their fiancées' pity for the mysterious 'strangers', which is manipulated into something that they mistake for love. In addition, the text displays some of what Frank Ellis has termed the 'secondary characteristics' of sentimental comedy: undeserved distress (the sisters'), following the departure of their men; reckless, self-sacrificing virtue (the fiancées' hysterics, and particularly Fiordiligi's decision to follow Guglielmo to the battlefield); and a great deal of overt moralizing.²⁹ Of course most of the sentimentality is included in order to be mocked or contradicted – as in Alfonso's scoffing dismissal of 'tears, sighs, caresses, swooning' (I/I). By the start of the second finale, all the lovers are more or less converted to the anti-sentimental position of Alfonso and Despina. But this conversion is not sufficiently reflective for the opera simply to end with the marriage of the new couples. The rules of comedy

require that the 'distress-providing' characters unmask and reveal their 'essential good nature', and that the (original) lovers confess and renounce their faults in full knowledge of their situation, so they may be free to enjoy one another.³⁰ Da Ponte varies the formula in interesting ways. Alfonso wears his disguise by proxy, in that the good purpose of his scheme is revealed only by the soldiers' unmasking. Despina, after removing her notary's costume, remains perplexed by the dénouement, as Alfonso had revealed only a part of his design to her. Mozart's music frequently seems to encourage the lovers' illusions, perhaps more than Da Ponte had envisaged. The text's constant invitations to operatic parody determined his approach in many instances – though not to the exclusion of heartfelt sentiment.

Opera out of opera.

Of the operatic prototypes for the text of *Così fan tutte*, the first to claim our attention, Goldoni's *Le pescatrici* (The fisherwomen), comes from an earlier efflorescence of opera buffa in the Burgtheater, before Joseph II's experiment with a *Nationalssingspiel*. The opera was performed in Vienna in 1771, with music by Florian Gassmann, and pleased Joseph so much that he sent copies of its libretto and score to his brother Leopold in Florence.³¹ Whether its libretto was among those examined by Da Ponte on his arrival in the capital, we cannot say, but it is probable that he knew the work, in whose third act one finds the plot and characters of *Così* prefigured.³² After the conclusion of the opera's main action, the fishermen Burlotto and Frisellino, in love with each other's sisters, decide to test the fidelity of their girlfriends. They borrow fine clothes and moustaches and, disguised as noblemen, offer to take Nerina and Lesbina away with them to a better fate. (They do not reverse the original pairing, as this would be double incest.) When the women quickly agree to the proposition, the men remove their costumes, with ironic *révérences* such as the unmasked Ferrando would make to his 'bella damina'. The wise old fisherman Masticcio comes upon the couples, and hearing the nature of their dispute, berates his foolish young friends for tempting fate. His solution – marriage, and silence on the past – is the one proposed by Alfonso:

E chi, pazzi, v'insegna
 Le femmine tentare? In caso tale
 Che avreste fatto voi, sciocchi che siete?
 Se bene a lor volete,
 Sposatele, tacete, e non parlate:
 Si strapperà, se troppo la tirate.

 Chi va il male cercando, il mal ritrova.

(Goldoni, *Le pescatrici*, III/7: And who taught you idiots to go tempting women? What might you have done in a similar case, fools that you are? If you wish them well, marry them, be silent, and say nothing; what is drawn too tight will snap. . . He who goes looking for trouble will find it.)

These lines suggest that Goldoni, too, was well acquainted with *Orlando furioso*, and Canto 43 in particular. But the passage in question occupies a mere handful of pages in *Le pescatrici*; even if Da Ponte did borrow the premise or other details from his countryman's earlier opera, he could not have crafted the libretto he did without independent recourse to Ariosto.

Despite frequent reminders (allusions to *cicisbei*,³³ to Mesmer) that we are in the eighteenth century, *Così fan tutte* has a timeless quality which stems in part from Alfonso's reliance on proverbs. The first of these brings together several layers of Da Ponte's source material. Amused by Ferrando and Guglielmo's innocent faith in the constancy of their fiancées, Alfonso adduces an old saying:

È la fede delle femmine
 Come l'araba fenice:
 Che vi sia, ciascun lo dice;
 Dove sia. . . nessun lo sa.

(*Così fan tutte*, No. 2: The faith of women is like the Arabian phoenix; everyone says it exists, but no one knows where to find it.)

Many in the audience would have recognized the quatrain as coming from Metastasio's *Demetrio* of 1731, which was set by more than fifty composers over the next century. Guglielmo and Ferrando certainly do, judging from their reactions. Da Ponte's intent is not in the main parodistic; in his memoirs he recalled how on first encountering them, Metastasio's 'verses produced the same sensation in my soul as does music'.³⁴ Metastasio's phoenix stands as a harbinger of much opera seria language to come, notably in Ferrando's second

aria, whose Metastasian ancestry has already been mentioned (see Synopsis). Even if a spectator was unacquainted with opera seria, he might recognize Alfonso's lines in the second terzetto from canon settings of them by Metastasio himself (published in 1782), and by Martin (published 1787). (In these versions, as in *Demetrio*, the first line ends more impartially with 'amanti'.) The writing of canons, often on scurrilous texts, had long been a pastime of composers; in Josephinian Vienna it spilt over onto the stage, with the inclusion of canons in both *L'arbare di Diana* and *Una cosa rara* by Martin, in Salieri's *Axur* (1788), and Mozart's sublime canon in the second finale of *Così*.³⁵

The lineage of Alfonso's borrowed quatrain extends further in both directions. The phoenix was ubiquitous in literature as an image of the myth of female constancy, though the Mozartian singer Michael Kelly identified its original author as St Jerome.³⁶ The metaphor occurs also in the frame to the tale of Astolfo and Ilocondo (27:136). Daniel Heartz has observed that 'Da Ponte was not the first comic librettist to cite this particular verse [from *Demetrio*]. Goldoni used it in *La scuola moderna* (1748), and in a manner that made clear it was a borrowing'.³⁷ Da Ponte himself reused it in an opera for London, *L'isola del piacere* (1795, with music by Martín).³⁸ And at the time he wrote *Così fan tutte*, Da Ponte had used the phoenix metaphor twice already, in his librettos for *Il ricco d'un giorno* (1784) and *Una cosa rara* (1786). As employed in the former work, the derivation from Metastasio is particularly clear:

Giacinto: Siete savissima,
 Ciascun lo dice,
 Siete l'arabica
 Rara Fenice. . .

(*Il ricco d'un giorno*, II/9: You are most wise, everyone says it, you are the rare Arabian phoenix. . .)

For spectators at performances of *Così*, then, Alfonso's quotation would have resonated in any number of ways, depending on the breadth of their reading and theatrical experiences.

Two Da Pontean librettos from 1786 offer such striking similarities to scenes in *Così fan tutte* that one can assume that the poet had consciously mined them for useful material. In *Il finto cieco* the protagonist Sempronio (whose name would serve as Ferrando's

Albanian pseudonym) sings an aria text uncannily close to that of the opening trio of *Così* in its premise, setting and use of Latin:

Vidi una volta – Certi filosofi,
Che disputavano – Dentro un caffè.
Uno gridava – *Infida est foemmina*.
L'altro strillava – *Infidus masculus*. . .

(Da Ponte/Gazzaniga, *Il finto cieco*, I/11: Once I saw certain philosophers arguing in a café. One cried 'Women are faithless.' The other screamed 'Faithless is man'. . .)

Significantly, the dispute ends in a draw. Parallels to *Così* are no less evident in *Una cosa rara*, where Lilla and Ghita's discussion of how love need not enter into certain types of amorous arrangements foreshadows the scenes in Act II in which Fiordiligi, Dorabella and Despina debate the morality of a 'diversion' with the Albanian suitors. Ghita's subsequent aria 'Colla flemma che tu vedi' is extremely close to Despina's 'Una donna a quindici anni', as regards both content and form; the pieces' musical similarities will occupy us further in Chapter 6. There are reminiscences in *Così* also of Da Ponte's *L'arbore di Diana*. Besides the theme of inevitable capitulation to love, there is a precedent (in Britomarte's aria 'De' tre, che qui veggio') for Fiordiligi and Dorabella's choosing of lovers according to hair colour, in their duet 'Prenderò quel brunettino'. And as Dorothea Link has pointed out, for members of the original audience of *Così*, Dorabella's aria 'È Amore un ladroncello' would have brought to mind not just 'love' or 'Cupid', but also Louise Villeneuve, the singer of Amore in the earlier opera, and the Dorabella of *Così*.³⁹ Indeed, the aria Dorabella sings in order to justify her behaviour provides an ironic contrast to the words of Amore's third aria in *L'arbore di Diana*:

Si dice qua e là
Amore è un briconcello,
Che intorbida il cervello,
Che sospirar ci fa.

Nessun lo crede già!
Amore è buono e bello,
Amore è solo quello
Che dà felicità.

(*L'arbore di Diana*, I/11: It is said here and there that Cupid is a rascal who muddles our brains, who makes us sigh. Don't

anyone believe it! Cupid is good and fair, it is Cupid alone who gives happiness.)

È Amore un ladroncello,
Un serpentello è Amore;
Ei toglie e dà la pace,
Come gli piace, ai cor. . .

(*Così fan tutte*, No. 28: Cupid is a little thief, Cupid is a little snake; he gives and takes our hearts' peace, as it pleases him. . .)

The fact that Dorabella's aria was a late addition to the score suggests all the more strongly that Mozart intended the piece as a comment on the aria in Martín's opera, which was still in the repertory.

It was natural enough for Da Ponte to allude to passages from his own previous works; between his librettos and those of his rival Casti there is a rather more uneasy relationship. Even if Da Ponte occasionally found inspiration in his competitor's works, another concern was to avenge Casti's slanderous portrayal of him in his libretto to Salieri's *Prima la musica e poi le parole*, and to achieve the sort of success Casti had scored with the Viennese public with his and Paisiello's *Il re Teodoro in Venezia*. In his memoirs Da Ponte complains that following the opera's première in 1784 Casti was considered well nigh as 'infallible in Vienna as the Pope in Rome',⁴⁰ and enumerates the libretto's many shortcomings. The poet was also the subject of Da Ponte's satirical poem 'Epistola all'Abate Casti', published in 1786. In some respects, Da Ponte's text for *Così fan tutte* can also be considered as a response to Casti. The noisy *chiusa* first finale of *Il re Teodoro*:

Che sussurro! che bisbiglio
Or mi ronzia nell'orecchio.
Non rimiro ovunque volgom[!:]
Che disordine, e scompiglio. . .

(*Il re Teodoro in Venezia*, Finale I: What a racket! what noise is buzzing in my ear! I don't know where to turn; what disorder and confusion!)

is seemingly echoed in the exaggerated protests of the offended sisters in No. 13 of *Così*. At the conclusion of this piece, which prematurely exhibits the form and cacophony of a finale, Alfonso enters asking.

Che sussurro, che strepito,
 Che scompiglio è mai questo,
 Siete pazze care le mie ragazze,
 Volete solevar il vicinato,
 Cos'avete, ch'è nato?

(*Così fan tutte*, No. 13: What is this noise, this racket, whatever is all this confusion? Are you mad, my dear girls, do you wish to rouse the neighbourhood? What's the matter, what has happened?)

Da Ponte faulted Casti also for the 'unlikely and almost tragic' ending of his opera,⁴¹ in which the king narrowly escapes debtor's prison. In Teodoro's reflections on the caprices of fortune we see a rather repetitive antecedent of Alfonso's philosophical lesson at the end of *Così*:

Come una ruota è il mondo,
 Chi in cima sta, chi in fondo,
 E chi era in fondo prima,
 Poscia ritorna in cima,
 Chi salta, che precipita
 E chi va in sù, chi in giù.
 Ma se la ruota gira,
 Lascisi pur girar,
 Felice è chi fra i vortici
 Tranquillo può restar.

(*Il re Teodoro in Venezia*, II/20: The world is like a wheel; now some are at the summit, some at the bottom, and he who at first was on the bottom later returns to the summit; some leap up, some tumble, and some go up, some go down. But if the wheel turns, let it turn; happy is he who can remain calm among the vortices.)

Casti's *La grotta di Trofonio* also comes in for criticism in Da Ponte's memoirs, and though Edward Dent and others have called the work a model for *Così fan tutte*, this is at best only superficially true. Casti's plot resembles Da Ponte's in that it features two pairs of lovers who are manipulated by a 'philosopher', Trofonio. But in the serious couple's discussion of marriage in their first-act duet one sees that fidelity is by no means assumed, as at the equivalent point in *Così*. In Casti and Salieri's opera there is no wager, no test of fidelity, not even the suggestion that the partners will be exchanged. Trofonio is really more of a sorcerer than a philosopher; it is the bookish Ofelia and her sober Artemidore who represent the

latter occupation – through continual talk of 'reading, retirement and quiet', and the carrying around of volumes of Plato. After several repetitious transformations of character, as they enter and emerge from Trofonio's cave, the lovers are restored to their original states – having learnt nothing, and the opera ends with no moral whatsoever. One can easily imagine Da Ponte thinking how much more might be done with such a premise. And indeed, in *Così fan tutte* Alfonso teaches a truer sort of philosophy, summed up by all in terms reminiscent of the moral of *Il re Teodoro* (though more succinctly), and of Plistene's advice (in *Trofonio*) about taking marriage the right way ('pel buon verso'):

Fortunato l'uom che prende
 Ogni cosa pel buon verso
 E tra i casi e le vicende
 Da ragion guidar si fa.
 Quel che suole altrui far piangere
 Fia per lui cagion di riso
 E del mondo in mezzo i turbini
 Bella calma troverà.

(*Così fan tutte*, No. 31: Fortunate is the man who looks at all things on the bright side, and in all cases and through every vicissitude lets himself be guided by reason. That which is wont to make others weep is for him a cause for laughter, and amid the storms and whirlwinds of the world he will find perfect calm.)

Looking beyond Casti to other librettists' works for the Viennese opera buffa company, two operas from the first season of 1783 invite comparison to *Così*. The very first piece presented by the troupe was Salieri's *La scuola de' gelosi* (Venice, 1778), on a text by Da Ponte's former mentor Caterino Mazzolà. Here a lieutenant plays a part analogous to that of Don Alfonso in *Così*, dispassionately manipulating the partners in two couples disrupted by jealousy and illicit lust, in order to effect a reconciliation.⁴² The strategy was hardly new (Rousseau uses it in *Le Devin du village*), but the assortment of characters in the piece and its title do suggest a connection. Even closer to *Così*'s plot is that of Pasquale Anfossi's *Il curioso indiscreto*, originally written for Rome in 1777 (by either Giovanni Bertati or Giuseppe Petrosellini), for which Mozart reset several numbers when the opera was given in Vienna. The story is based on an episode from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, in which elements from both the Cephalus myth and Ariosto's tale of the Mantuan knight

are already mixed. A Marchese Calandrino seeks to test the fidelity of his fiancée, by having his friend the Contino woo her, with the result that the latter two fall in love. The Contino is initially reluctant to do the Marchese's bidding, saying

Ma questo, perdonate,
È andar cercando il mal. . .

(But this, pardon my saying so, is looking for trouble. . .)

to which Calandrino responds, 'I am only seeking my peace of mind.' It is hard to imagine that Da Ponte did not at least recall these lines when drafting his libretto to *Così*, whether or not *Il curioso indiscreto* had prompted him to explore the same subject matter.

Looking still further afield, one encounters other operatic traditions which Da Ponte may well have had in mind as he shaped his libretto. One of these was the custom whereby (according to Goldoni) the soubrette of an Italian opera buffa troupe gave 'several times every year pieces which were called transformations. . . in which the actress, appearing under different forms, was obliged to change her dress frequently, to act different characters and speak various languages'.⁴³ This describes precisely the nature of Despina's roles in the two finales of *Così fan tutte*. All three of Guglielmo's arias (counting the discarded 'Rivolgete') belonged to types of long standing: the self-portrait/catalogue aria or the 'women-are-fickle' aria. The latter category was particularly widespread, and included a sub-class in which 'le donne' are apostrophized directly – as also in Ariosto's introduction to Canto 28. One of the many examples of such texts by Goldoni occurs in *La mascherata* (1751), an opera so denigrating of women that the poet felt obliged to balance it with another, *Le donne vendicate* (Women avenged). Da Ponte and Mozart had similar concerns about alienating female spectators, and so included an aria ('In uomini, in soldati') in which Despina upbraids men at least as mercilessly as Guglielmo does women.

Once Da Ponte had decided what source material to use and what to reject, and drafted a text which corresponded to the norms of opera buffa practice, it was still far from being a finished libretto. Mozart invariably asked his poets for changes, additions and cuts, in the interests of effective musical theatre. Scant evidence remains of this process with regard to *Così* – apart from the changes in the

first scene, compared to the version set by Salieri. But we can be sure that it included discussion of the numerous literary allusions Da Ponte had included in his text. As the composer had once declared that a comic opera was no place for anything 'learned' (gelehrtes),⁴⁴ it is likely that Da Ponte had to convince him of the comic or moral value of a good many of his quotations and paraphrases of earlier poets. An illuminating example of accommodation is provided by the Latin greeting sung to the sisters by Despina-as-notary, which is correct in Da Ponte's libretto, but comically garbled ('Salvete amabiles / Bones puelles') in Mozart's score. That poet and composer were able to arrive at something approaching a common purpose in *Così fan tutte* is suggested also by the fact that in this opera, as in their previous collaborations, Mozart put aside his stated aversion to prominent rhymes, giving free rein to Da Ponte's virtuosio talent in this sphere. The librettist, too, must have yielded on some points, or at least watched in wonder as his literary conceits and strokes of high comedy acquired new and deeper meanings, in the garb of Mozart's sublime music.