THE CLASSICAL STYLE

Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven

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Comic Opera

On November 12, 1778, Mozart wrote to his father from Mannheim about a new kind of drama with music that was being produced there, and about the invitation extended to him by the producer to compose one: 'I have always wanted to write a drama of this kind. I cannot remember whether I told you anything about this type of drama the first time I was here? On that occasion I saw a piece of this sort performed twice and was absolutely delighted. Indeed, nothing has ever surprised me so much, for I had always imagined that such a piece would be quite ineffective. You know, of course, that there is no singing in it, only recitation, to which the music is like a sort of obbligato accompaniment to a recitative. Now and then words are spoken while the music goes on, and this produces the finest effect. . . . Do you know what I think? I think that most operative recitatives should be treated in this way—and only sung occasionally, when the words *can be perfectly expressed by the music*.'[1] The letter ought not, perhaps, to be taken at face value: Mozart's attempt to conquer the musical world of Paris had failed miserably, and he now faced what he most hated and dreaded, a return to Salzburg and the Archbishop's service once again. How much of his enthusiasm is genuine, and how much only an effort at persuading his father, who was waiting impatiently in Salzburg, that it was practical to put off the return for the moment, and that there were other prospects in view? Nevertheless, Mozart's attitude, his experimental approach, is revealing. He is delighted with the possibilities of what is called 'melodrama' (spoken dialogue accompanied by music), and his feeling for theatrical effect is by no means centered upon vocal music. On the contrary, he assumes a clear distinction between music that is an equivalent for dramatic action and music that is the perfect expression of the words.[2] It is the first concept that has priority, and he is willing to abandon sung words for spoken ones when the action can be made more telling this way.

Zaïde has some splendid effects of melodrama which look forward to the second act of *Fidelio*, but we have lost everything else that Mozart wrote in

[1] Mozart's own emphasis, cited from the *Letters of Mozart and his family*, ed. Emily Anderson, London, 1966.

[2] In a letter of November 8, 1780, he objected to the idea of an aside in an aria: 'In a dialogue all these things are quite natural, for a few words can be spoken aside hurriedly; but in an aria where the words have to be repeated, it has a bad effect, *and even if this were not the case I should prefer an uninterrupted aria*' [my emphasis, C. R.], *ibid.*, p. 659.

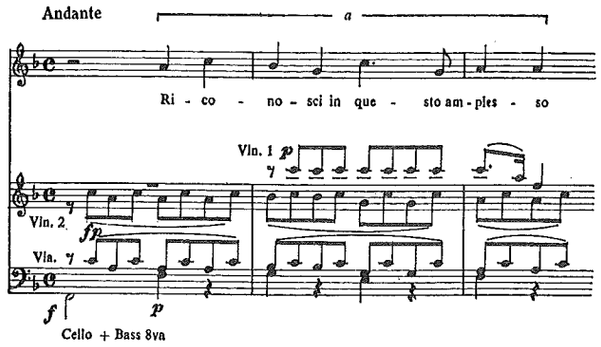
this form that so interested him for a moment, unless one counts the interruptions of Pedrillo's serenade and Osmin's song by spoken dialogue in *Die Entführung*, or the moment in *Die Zauberflöte* when Papageno counts three before preparing to commit suicide. Yet Mozart never lost his desire to experiment or his sense that, in opera, music as dramatic action takes precedence over music as expression. This is not to deny Mozart's skill at writing for the voice, or his love for elaborate vocal coloratura. Nevertheless he was not always tender with the vanity of singers who wished to show off the beauty of their voices. Particularly in ensembles, like the great quartet in *Idomeneo*, he insisted that the words should be more spoken than sung.[1] Mozart's brief interest in 'melodrama' while in Mannheim is the enthusiasm of a young composer who has just discovered that music on the stage can do more than meet the requirements of singers or express sentiment, but can become one with plot and intrigue as well. This was an idea that he had only half understood when writing the beautiful and little-known *La Finta Giardiniera*.

The style of the early eighteenth century had been equal to any demands that words alone could make. The operatic music of Handel and Rameau could transfigure the sentiment and the situation at each moment, but it left untouched the action and the movement—anything that was not static, in short. To say that the sonata style provided an ideal framework for the rendering of what was most dynamic on the stage is to oversimplify only insofar as it does not take account of the important role that opera itself played in the development of the sonata style. *Opera buffa*, in particular, was influential, and the classical style moves with the least strain in its depiction of comic intrigue and comic gesture.

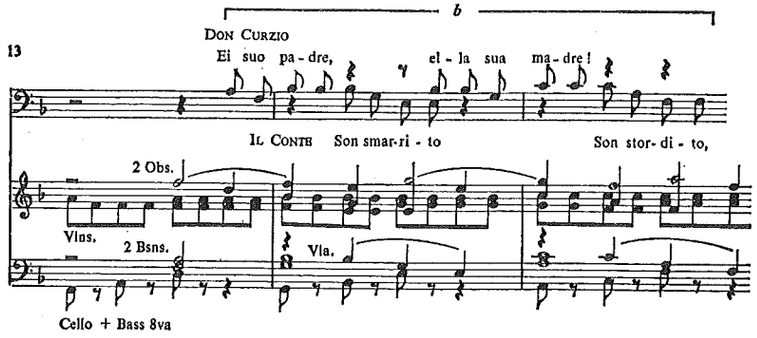
The three points that made the new style so apt for dramatic action were: first, the articulation of phrase and form which give a work the character of a series of distinct events; second, the greater polarization of tonic and dominant, which allowed for a much clearer rise in tension in the center of each work (as well as more specifically characterizing the significance of related harmonies, which could then also serve a dramatic meaning); and third, by no means the least important, the use of rhythmic transition, which permitted the texture to change with the action on the stage without endangering the purely musical unity in any way. All these stylistic characteristics belong to the 'anonymous' style of the period; they were the common currency of music by 1775. There is no question, however, that Mozart was the first composer to comprehend, in any systematic way, their implications for opera. In one sense, Gluck was a more original composer than Mozart, his style was much more personally forged by a stubborn act of will rather than by an acceptance of the traditions of his age. But this very originality barred the way to that ease and facility with which Mozart mastered the relation of music to drama.

[1] Letter of December 27, 1780, *ibid.*, p. 699.

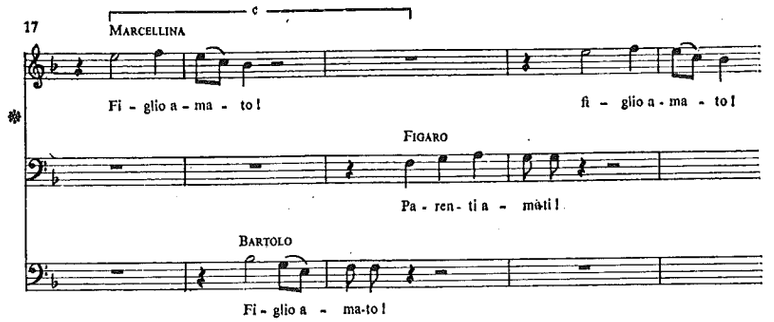
The adaptability of the sonata style to opera can be seen in its least complex and most perfect form in Mozart's own favorite among the individual numbers of *Figaro*, the great sextet of recognition in the third act, which is in slow-movement sonata form (i.e., without a development section, but with a recapitulation starting in the tonic—although the 'second group' of the exposition is sufficiently heightened and intensified here as to provide some of the effect of a development). The sextet begins with Marcellina's expression of joy at finding that Figaro is her long-lost son (*a*):



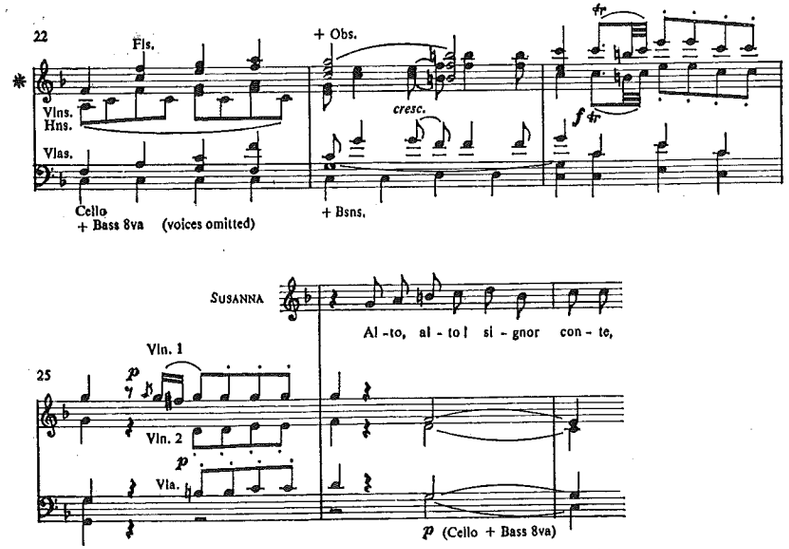
The tonic section has three main themes, of which this is the first. The second (*b*) appears after Doctor Bartolo has sung a variant of (*a*); Don Curzio and the Count express their irritation:



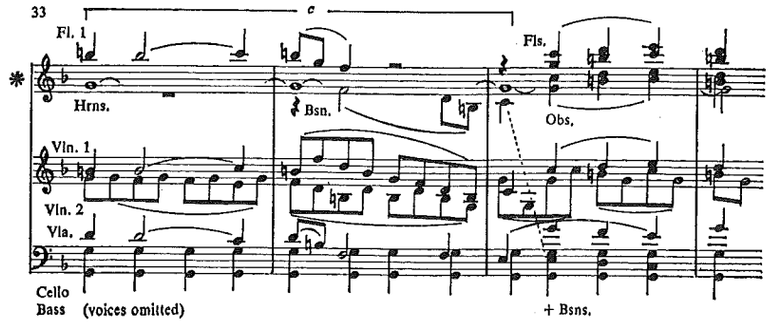
the third (*c*), an ecstatic one based on a diminished fifth, is divided between Marcellina, Figaro, and Doctor Bartolo:



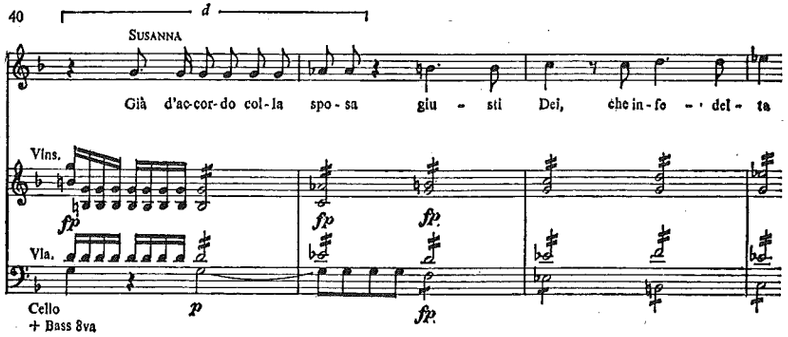
The painful dissonance outlined by this melody gives it its passionate character. The section ends on a semi-conclusive dominant cadence as Susanna enters with the money, no longer necessary, to buy Figaro out of his contract of marriage with Marcellina:



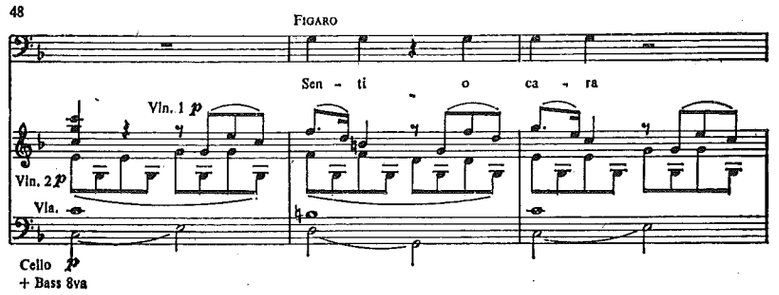
This is the beginning of what is respectably called the 'bridge passage' in a sonata exposition, and the added tension that comes with the change to the dominant is admirably calculated to parallel Susanna's ignorance of what has been happening and her inevitable misunderstanding. As at the beginning of the second group of most of Haydn's sonatas and many of Mozart's, part of the first group reappears:



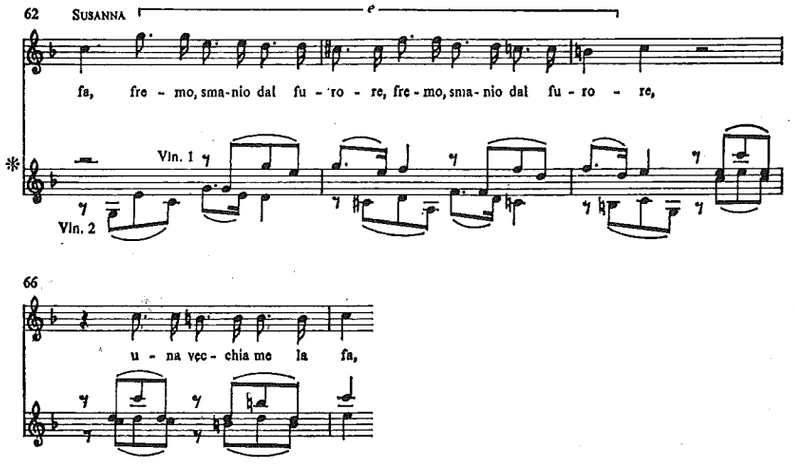
It is (*c*) that is repeated, as Marcellina, Figaro, and Bartolo are still lost in their discovery. A dissonant sonority appears with a turn to the dominant minor and Susanna's rage at seeing Figaro kissing Marcellina (*d*):



While Figaro tries to appease her, a new caressing motif appears in the violins:



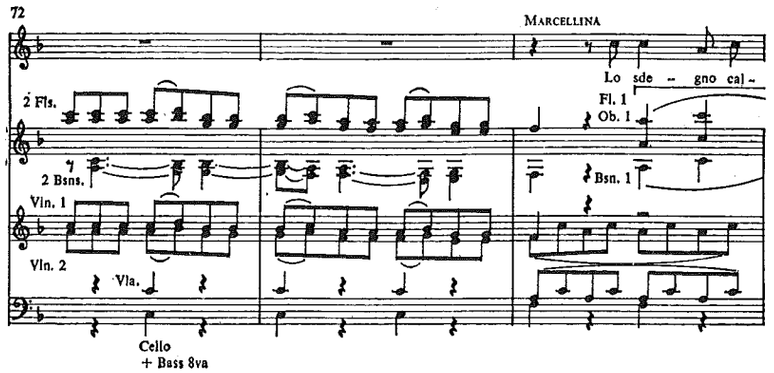
but it is derived from the violin part in (*a*), and has the same sensuous swell as (*c*). The exposition continues with a motif (*e*) derived from it and combining with it—which expresses Susanna's indignation:



and closes with a firm cadence on the dominant, as every exposition did then.

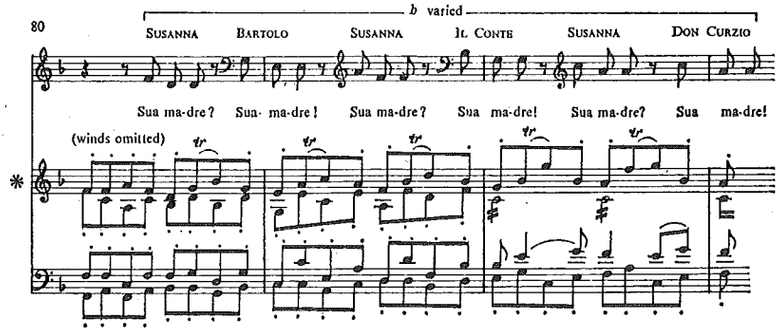
Only the recapitulation of a sonata requires any ingenuity in being adapted to the stage; an exposition is, as it stands, a model for an intrigue that becomes more complex and more tense with the introduction of new elements and new events. For a recapitulation, on the other hand, the classical composer had to find the elements of symmetry and resolution in the situation and in the very words of the libretto. It need hardly be emphasized that this is not a playful or pedantic adaptation of a fixed form to a dramatic genre; the symmetry and resolution of the sonata were permanent needs of the classical composer, not dispensable elements of form.

The resolution in the sextet begins when the situation is carefully explained to the furious Susanna; accordingly the tonic returns, and the recapitulation begins with (*a*) once more:

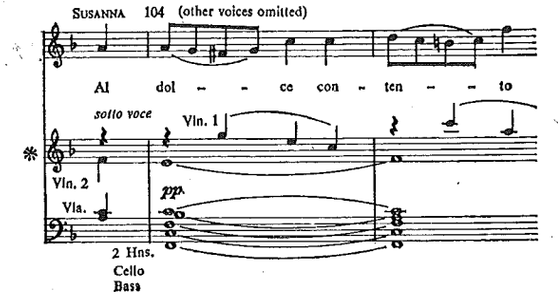


The words, of course, will no longer fit the opening melody, so it is the winds of the orchestra that play the melody (*a*) here, and Marcellina who decorates it.

Susanna is bewildered, and her confusion is expressed by a variant of (*b*), used in the exposition for the consternation of the Count and Don Curzio, quoted above:



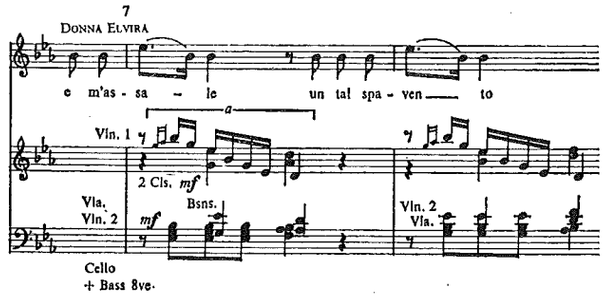
Finally, there is a concluding section in which all express their joy, except, of course, the Count and Don Curzio:



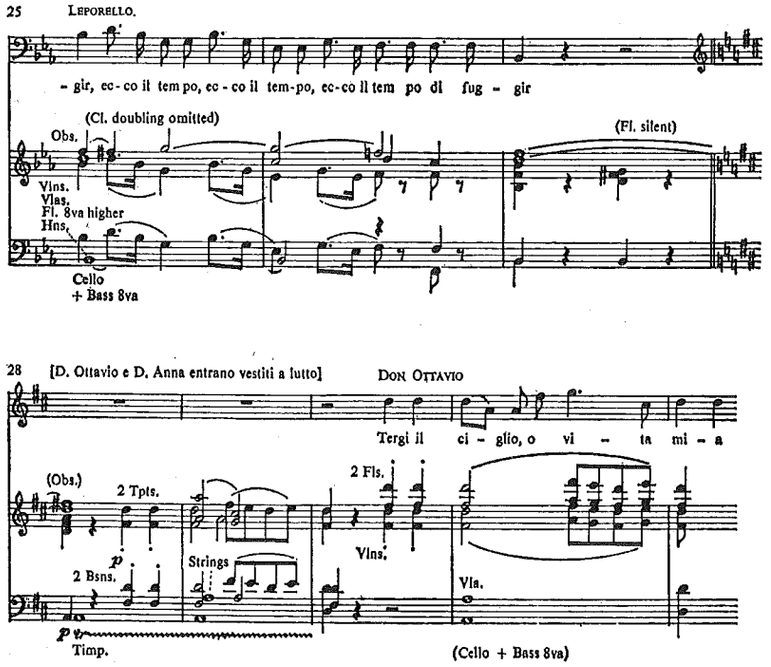
which recalls, above all, the deeply expressive character of (*c*). There is even a move towards F minor (mm. 110–117) which parallels the C minor of (*d*). We are given a fine example of the priorities of classical form: the harmonic structure and the proportions outweigh the letter of the melodic pattern here, just as they do in so many of Haydn's and Mozart's abstract works.

In fact, no description of sonata form can be given that will fit the Haydn quartets but not the majority of forms in a Mozart opera. This coincidence between abstract and dramatic pattern is significant in many ways, particularly in the insight it provides into the nature of late eighteenth-century form. There are no fixed 'rules,' although there are successful patterns imitated and even aped, and unconscious habits. The abstract forms, no more than the theatrical ones, do not make their effects by breaking 'rules,' as is so often thought: the element of surprise in the string quartets and the operas does not depend upon a deviation from some imagined musical norm outside the individual work. It is the work itself (once its language is understood) that provides its own expectations, disappoints and finally fulfils them: the tensions are implied more by the music and very little by the specific experience and prejudices of the listener, although he must have an educated ear to know what to listen for, educated in the stylistic language and not just in its superficial formalities. One must accept the essentially innovatory nature of the style, like that of any language, its built-in possibility of creating original combinations. In other words, such rules as the classical style genuinely developed—the need for resolution, the sense of proportion and of a closed and framed pattern—are never broken at all. They are its means of communication, and it could say astonishing things without violating its own grammar. As for the conventional patterns that so many composers used unthinkingly, they were not rules of grammar but clichés: they were turned into rules when the musical language changed, and the pressures and the forces that had produced the classical style (along with its idioms and formulas) were exhausted and died.

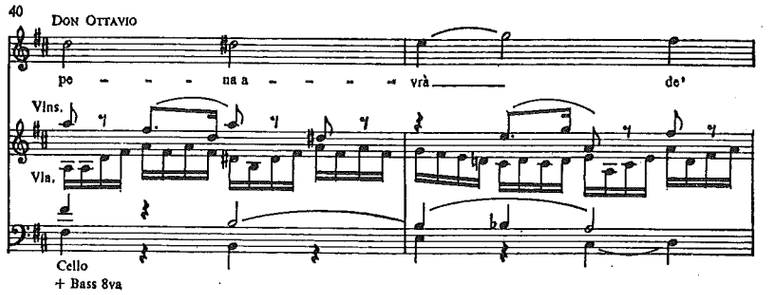
When the dramatic situation will not lend itself easily to a symmetrical resolution and recapitulation, the sonata aesthetic still remains valid in Mozart's operas. Its use is only superficially more complex: there is the same need for resolution, the same sense of proportion. The second act sextet of *Don Giovanni* has a form as clear but far less openly symmetrical than the sextet of *Figaro*, yet it satisfies the same aesthetic demands. The dramatic complexity—the gradual introduction of new characters, the surprising changes of situation—requires an immense expansion of the 'development section,' and much new material: the resolution is equally immense and emphatic. The opening in E flat major, a small sonata exposition, is short and succinct: like the exposition of Haydn's *Oxford* Symphony, it gives no hint of the enormous consequences that await. At the beginning, Donna Elvira and Leporello (whom she believes to be Don Giovanni) are lost in the dark. Donna Elvira is frightened at being abandoned and her shudder of fear is rendered by the orchestra with a motif (*a*) which will appear later:



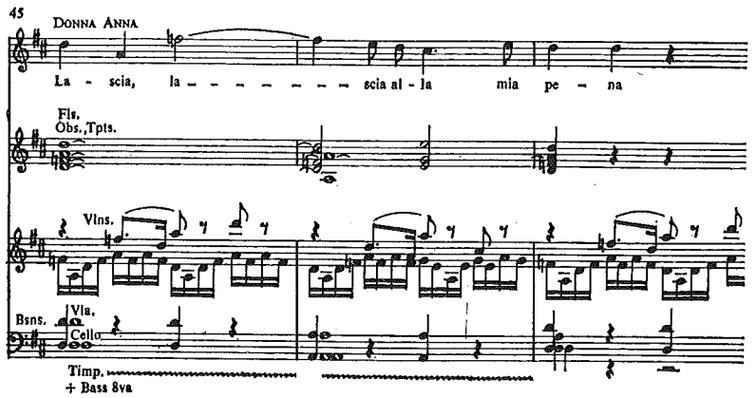
The music moves to the dominant as Leporello gropes for the door; as he finds it, he sings the typically regular closing theme and cadence of a sonata exposition. Then there is a most extraordinary moment, as Donna Anna and Don Ottavio appear dressed in mourning. The oboes hold their final notes of the dominant cadence, then with a soft drum-roll the music luminously moves to the remote key of D, and as Don Ottavio begins to sing, the transitional phrase is wonderfully repeated as a counterpoint. The overlapping enforces both continuity and articulation:



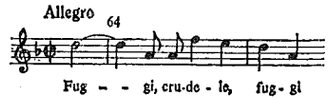
The tonal relations here entail an important paradox. D is a remote key in a work in E flat, but it is the basic key of the whole opera. The significance of this moment of modulation is therefore an ambiguous one, and it is no wonder that every listener senses its mysterious quality. The trumpets and drums, appearing in the sextet for the first time here, set the moment into sharp relief. The connection with the opening of the opera and the conviction that we have reached the central key are made strikingly evident in two ways. First Don Ottavio even recalls the main theme of the overture in the measures that follow:



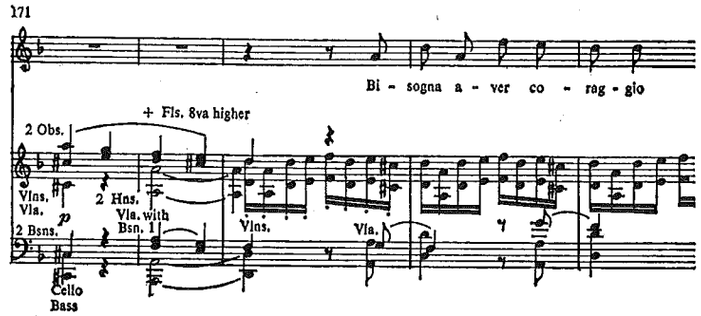
This is by no means a thematic allusion: it only comes because the conception of the key of D is so emphatically a unity throughout the opera and calls up the same associations. Then, when Donna Anna replies to Don Ottavio, the music shifts to the D minor mode of the opening of the overture and the Commendatore's murder. The change is once again marked by mysterious soft drum-rolls:



Until this point of the opera, whenever Donna Anna appeared, it was always with the fundamental key of D, except in the large ensemble numbers. Her first duet with Don Ottavio after the death of her father is in D, and the opening recalls her phrase in the sextet:



Her great aria 'Or sai chi l'onore' is also in D.[1] Moreover, when Donna Anna and her masked companions, Don Ottavio and Donna Elvira, appear for the first time in the finale of Act I, they bring the key of D minor with them:



The opening motif (given to Donna Elvira) is again close to the one in the sextet. These are not thematic references, but the result of a total conception of the opera in which everything is related to a central tonality, which itself has, not only a symbolic reference, but an individual sonority that it seems to evoke. The fact alone of having one singer so closely associated with the tonality lends it an immediately recognizable sound. Whatever key the individual section may be in, the appearance of D minor unequivocally calls up the death of the Commendatore.[2]

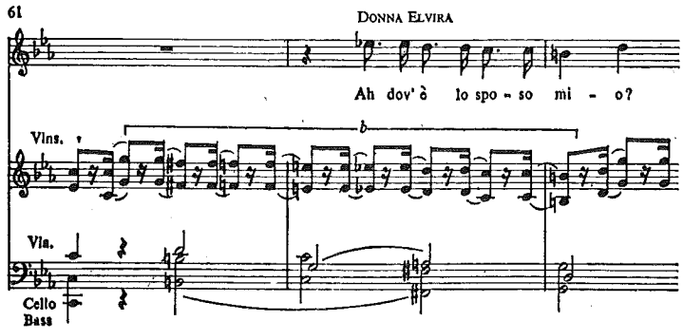
One does not, therefore, need perfect pitch to hear a reference to the tonic of the entire opera at this point in the sextet. Nevertheless, even in a non-operatic work an eighteenth-century composer's sensitivity to such long-range relations may have been greater than some critics, Tovey in particular, have been willing to admit. No composer, of course, has ever made his crucial effects depend on such perception: even if he expects his most subtle points to be appreciated only by connoisseurs, he does not write the entire work calculatedly above the head of the average listener. But there is at least one person who is sure to recognize the reappearance of a tonic even without thematic reference: the performer. It is for this reason that subtle effects based on tonal relations are much more likely to occur in a string quartet or a sonata, written as much for the performers as for the listeners, than in an opera or a symphony, more coarsely if more elaborately designed. The

[1] Her later aria, 'Non mi dir,' is in the relative major of D minor, F major, and it is preceded by an accompanied recitative largely dominated by D minor.

[2] Even the ghostly voice of the statue in the cemetery starts his first phrase with a D minor chord, while his final appearance in the last act is the signal, not only for the most emphatic return to D minor, but for an explicit recapitulation of much of the overture.

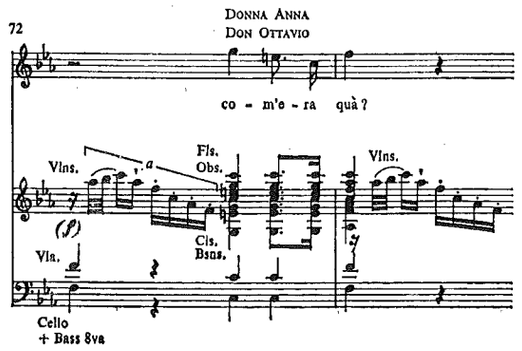
last sonatas of Haydn play with distant tonal relations, for example, in a way that he never attempts in the *London* Symphonies. Mozart, however, as we have seen, has dramatic ways of making these relations clearly felt in the operas.

The entrance of Don Ottavio and Donna Anna in the E flat major sextet, and the strange modulation that heralds it, make D into a second dominant in some ways more powerful than B flat major. (The search for a substitute dominant became very important later with Beethoven, but only once, at the end of his life, with the Sonata op. 110, did he attempt anything as harmonically daring as the key of the leading-tone. Mozart's success, however, depends as much on dramatic considerations that receive their harmonic justification outside the sextet as on the inner logic.) The D major and minor, in spite of the breadth with which they are established and drawn out, are therefore unstable and lead to a modulation to C minor, which by its immediate relation to E flat major reduces the highly charged atmosphere, but still moves as within a 'development section.' An important new theme for Donna Elvira (*b*) is introduced, built of sobs:



and Leporello, trying to leave, repeats his concluding theme and is stopped by the entrance of Zerlina and Masetto.

The discovery of Leporello brings back the little motif (*a*) that previously represented Donna Elvira's terror:



and then a long development of the sobbing phrase (*b*) begins, as Donna Elvira begs mercy for the man she believes to be Don Giovanni, and the music stays for many measures in G minor, which serves both to resolve the D major partially and to bring us closer to the tonic E flat major. Leporello, almost weeping, begins his plea, followed and seconded by a whining chromatic scale from all the winds: there is a marvelously witty passage at measures 108–109, where his phrase grows more impassioned and desperate, and the winds cannot wait to let him finish and impose their phrase contrapuntally over his. The development ends on a chord of G major, made doubly unstable by the sequences that have just preceded it. The signal for these sequences is the discovery that the terrified captive is Leporello, not Don Giovanni; they begin with a surprise cadence, and could be called a 'bridge' to the recapitulation, except that they do not lead directly to E flat major, but only serve to weaken the firm G minor of Leporello's plaint and to make it evident that the dissonant tonality is about to be resolved.

At this point, dramatic exigency has required that an 'exposition' of twenty-seven measures be succeeded by a 'development' of 113 measures: the resolution that will follow is properly grandiose. Everything that happens in the final section (mm. 131–277) is nothing more than a series of (V-I) tonic cadences on E flat, dramatized, decorated, expanded, and fantastically enlivened. The fundamental harmony does not really move: no matter how remote the chords or how complicated the harmony, there is no true modulation. The rhythmic motion, precipitate and furious, is all on the surface. This whole section, marked 'Molto allegro,' sticks even closer to the tonic than any abstract sonata recapitulation would dare to do; there is an E flat major triad in almost half the measures. The Molto allegro resolves as a recapitulation does, and its relative proportions are those of a sonata, given the greatly enlarged 'development' that preceded: the 140-odd measures of the Molto allegro go about twice as fast as the rest of the sextet, so that its length is equivalent to seventy of the preceding measures and its heavy concentration on the tonic make an adequate classical balance and resolution for all the harmonic tensions of the sextet. The climactic points of the sextet are, too, at the same places and have the same character as in a sonata: the startling change at the opening of the development when Donna Anna and Don Ottavio enter, and the long drawn-out tension at the end of it when Leporello reveals who he is. The last section Molto allegro may be said to follow the sonata aesthetic almost in spite of the words, as 'Mille torbidi pensieri' hardly implies so rigid an attachment to the tonic.

The sextet should not be considered as an abstract musical form; it is responsive to other than purely musical pressures. Nevertheless, the proportions and ideals that help to shape it are the same as those which created the sonata form. Mozart explicitly said that the words must be the servant of the music, but he also emphasized the parity of the dramatic and musical conceptions. In his operas, the intrigue and the musical forms are

indissoluble. The capacity of the sonata style to fuse with a dramatic conception as no other previous style had done was Mozart's historical opportunity. Without this complementary relation between musical style and dramatic conception, the greatest music cannot make an opera viable; with it, the most foolish libretto can barely undo one.

This sextet is conceived fundamentally as an *opera buffa* 'finale,' and for the development of this form Mozart owed little to his predecessors: he may be considered as at once the creator and the only master of it. Formally defined, the finale consists of all the music between the last *secco* recitative and the end of the act, and it may have as many as ten numbers or as little as one. Mozart appears to have been the first composer to conceive of the more complex finale as a tonal unity. It cannot have been a theoretical principle of the age; the finales of his earlier operas (*La Finta Giardiniera*, for example) begin and end in different keys. From *Die Entführung* on, however, the finale of every act of every opera ends in the key it started with, and the tonal relationships within them (and they are often very complex) are so conceived as to produce a harmonic equilibrium in terms of sonata style. Contemporaries of Mozart are either so inconsistent that we may consider the occasional finale that appears to be shaped around a tonic as an accident, or else (like those by Piccinni) they venture so little from their original key that the tonal relationships are unified only by remaining unvaried.

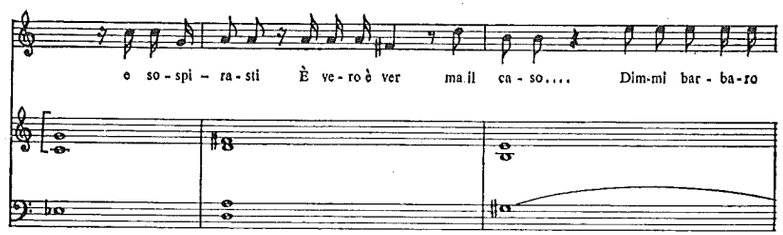
For the more complex finales, Mozart needed a libretto that provided him with a series of events so arranged that the music could both clarify and dramatize the order. He was prepared to insist upon transferring the beginning of one act to the end of the previous one if it would give him the situation and the order he wanted, even if it also entailed a less reasonably distributed action and forced the librettist to invent unnecessary complications to fill the gap. The supreme example of a librettist's achievement in constructing a finale is generally considered the reworking of Beaumarchais by da Ponte in the second act of *Figaro*, where the successive addition of new characters constantly enriches the sonority, and the growing complication of the plot is the ideal foil to the increased brilliance and animation of the music: it is a finale worked out with the musical style in mind.

Unity in late eighteenth-century music is imposed chiefly by framing devices, and the more strongly the outer frame is defined as part of the work, the greater will be the tendency to set off individual sections within a larger whole by analogous framing. The opening scene of *Don Giovanni* starts in F major with Leporello alone on the stage, and the music ends before the first *secco* recitative (after the death of the Commendatore) in F minor. This long scene, however, is contained within a larger grouping, a fact emphasized by a slight dissolution or blurring of the inner frame at both ends: the orchestra modulates from the overture directly into Leporello's F major, and there is no full close at the end of the F minor, but rather a terrifyingly effec-

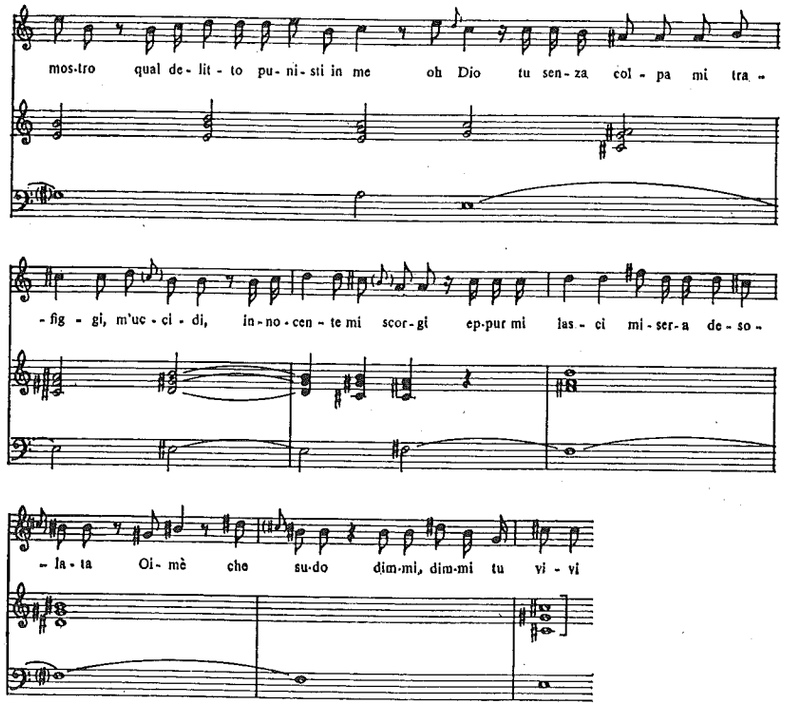
tive shading into the whispered recitative. The larger grouping is framed by the overture and the scene between Donna Anna and Don Ottavio, both of them in D, a tonality emphasized by its return in the central section of the group for the duel. This handling of the half-frame within a frame serves to establish D as the fundamental tonality of the opera, a function rigorously demonstrated when the next scene also ends in D major with Leporello's brilliant and comic catalogue aria, so that the D minor of the larger group (as well as of the smaller one of the overture alone) has a traditional D major resolution.[1]

The Mozart finale is made up of separate numbers, but many of them run directly one into another, and they are intended to be heard as a unit. Those large groupings represent the closest that Mozart came to the conception of large-scale continuity. The separate large divisions correspond to the inner articulation of the classical phrase; Beethoven, who tried (in the *Missa Solemnis*, in particular) for continuity on a greater scale than Mozart ever attempted, still relies on this kind of sectional form as the basis for a longer one (and there are even clear traces of it in Wagner). The importance of the Mozart finale within the operas as a whole cannot be placed too high: they gather together the disparate threads of both the drama and the musical form and give them a continuity that the opera had never before known. The arias, beautiful as they are, serve in part only as a preparation for the finale of the act, which is the set piece of the occasion.

It is not surprising that the development of the finale as a unified conception had, as one effect, the reduction of the musical importance of the *secco* recitative. Not that there is any less of it quantitatively in the later operas, but they are both less daring and less expressive. There is little *secco* recitative in Mozart after *La Finta Giardiniera* that can parallel the chromaticism of this passage from that early work:



[1] I have remarked above (pp. 94–5) on the similar framing of part of a larger whole in the finale to Act I of *Don Giovanni*.



Starting with *Idomeneo*, the *secco* recitatives are more workaday in their harmonic conception, although there are several interesting dramatic interruptions, particularly in *Figaro*. The *secco* recitatives now provide a truly dry contrast to the more expressively conceived large structures.

The sense of form in the finales is very similar to that in the symphonies and chamber music; the dramatic exigencies of eighteenth-century comedy and musical style have no difficulty walking in step. In the penultimate number of the second act finale of *Figaro*, the Countess reveals herself with the most gracious of transitions back to the tonic major: a sudden turn to the tonic minor represents the Count's shamed surprise as a secondary development section, and he turns back to the tonic major to ask forgiveness in a long resolving passage. The recapitulation of a string quartet has a dramatic shape that is not very different, and it would be a misunderstanding of Mozart's chamber music style to miss this point. Within the larger context of the whole finale, this penultimate number as a whole has a significance as ordered and as direct: it is in the subdominant (G major) of the basic D major tonality of the whole opera, and serves, as within an even larger recapitulation, to reinforce the final symmetry and resolution.

A finale is an opera in miniature: the same tonal unity that reigns there may

be found—more loosely understood as is appropriate to its greater length—within the opera as a whole. Once again Mozart appears to stand alone among his contemporaries in his insistence on this integrity. It is also a mature development: only after the age of twenty did Mozart invariably finish an opera in the key of the overture. Was this theory or developing instinct? This is not a question that can be fruitfully pursued, but in any case it would be absurd to consider Mozart's working habits as a form of somnambulism.

Where instinct surely played a role is in the constitution of classical proportions within the harmonic structure of the opera as a whole. The most highly organized and the most brilliant of the finales is never the last (or second of the two large ones) but the first: it is, like a development section, the extreme point of tension within the work. It is also placed harmonically as far away from the tonic of the whole opera as Mozart could go. The first finale of *Figaro* (actually in the second act of four) is in E flat major against the entire opera's tonic of D, and the other works follow the same pattern: D to C major for *Così fan tutte*, C to E flat major for *Die Zauberflöte*, C major to D minor/major for *Don Giovanni*. These central finales are indeed the heart of each work, and they are worked out with an elaboration and a complexity that Mozart reaches nowhere else. To many people, this has made the second finales of the operas, particularly those of *Figaro* and *Così*, disappointing.

The classical sense of an ending is the element of the style most antipathetic to modern taste, yet it is as essential to the style as the more organized textures of the opening and central sections of a work. In every one of the opera finales, without exception, the last number does not modulate, but remains firmly fixed on the tonic. It serves as a cadence to the finale as a whole, an expanded dominant-tonic (V–I), just as the last finale serves as a cadence to the entire opera. The last number of a finale is a harmonic resolution of all the preceding dissonance like the recapitulation of a sonata.

The looseness and even squareness, inseparable from the classical rondo-form so often used for the last movement of a sonata or symphony, is rendered in a striking way by the second act finale of *Don Giovanni*, which begins with an orchestra on the stage playing a medley of popular operatic tunes of the day. There is here a determined attempt to break down the dramatic concentration of the opera, and even to weaken the continuity. A similar looseness is evident in the fourth and last act of *Figaro* when it is performed uncut, with the arias of Basilio and Marcellina included. Even if these numbers were only provided because the singers had a right to at least one aria apiece, it is evident that both composer and librettist felt that the disruption of dramatic continuity would be most suitable in the last act. The finale of the second and last act of *Così fan tutte* has a modulatory structure that is bewilderingly rapid and sectional with none of the intensity and concentration of the first one; the inspiration and the mastery are, however, fully as consistent.

The solidity and clarity of the classical ending, above all the harmonic resolution of all the long-range dissonance, gave a new form to the operatic aria. With the finales and the sextet from *Don Giovanni* in mind as a model, we can understand the role of the final short allegros of arias like 'Non mi dir' and 'Battì, battì, bel Masetto.' An aria in moderate tempo with a faster concluding section is often found in operas of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and the final section is not a coda or an independent movement, like the second part of Bellini's 'Casta diva,' but a harmonic resolution of the previous tensions. The slower first part of almost all these arias is outwardly an *ABA* form which has nothing to do with the da capo aria, or with normal ternary form: the *B* goes always to the dominant, and has the character of a 'second group' in a sonata (followed sometimes by a development). The faster concluding section that follows the return of the opening theme substitutes harmonically for the recapitulation of *B*, or the 'second group': like the end of the sextet in *Don Giovanni*, this section never leaves the tonic, except for a glance at the subdominant, even in such long examples as the final Allegro moderato of ' Per pietà, ben mio' from *Così fan tutte*.[1] The Countess's aria 'Dove sono' in *Figaro* acknowledges this incomplete form of the first slow section by breaking off the return of the opening melody in the middle of a phrase: the Allegro that follows both resolves the phrase and the whole piece. This form of aria (Andante (tonic—dominant—tonic)—Allegro (tonic)) conforms to the harmonic ideal of the sonata by moving first towards the dominant, and by devoting at least the entire last quarter of its length to a firm tonic resolution; the harmonic climax is placed at the center, and the resolution is sustained by virtuosity as in the concerto.[2]

With the growth of his experience as a composer of operas, however, Mozart's conception of the aria became more imaginative. The sonata patterns of most of the arias in the earlier operas—*La Finta Giardiniera*, *Zaïde*, *Idomeneo*—are relatively simple and straightforward, the melodic symmetries clearly and literally marked. Many of them could be used as ideal textbook examples for the most rigid and most narrow definitions of sonata allegro. Even those arias with the most surprising innovations are relatively direct. Several times in *Idomeneo*, Mozart attempted a fusion of sonata and da capo forms (nos. 19, 27, and 31). The arias begin with a regular tonic-dominant sonata exposition, and they all have recapitulations which resolve

[1] Like his feeling for the tonal unity of an opera, this feeling for tonal proportion is a later development of Mozart's style, starting in this case with the *Entführung*. It is not true, for example, of the E major trio 'O selige Wonne' in *Zaïde*, which follows an unresolved sonata exposition with a complete sonata form.

[2] The duet 'Là, ci darem la mano' from *Don Giovanni* begins with a clear slow-movement sonata form (without a development section) with a full recapitulation; the faster section (in 6/8) that follows is an extended cadence, and it never leaves the tonic. It may be called a genuine coda, as its emphasis on the tonic has none of the urgency of the final section of the arias previously cited. With no formal need for resolution, the luxury of such an indulgence in the most consonant of harmonies, developed with the lilting dance rhythm of a siciliana, is a reflection of Zerlina's delighted surrender.

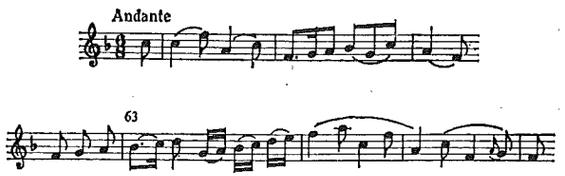
the 'second group' in the tonic (no. 27, 'Nò, la morte,' even shows the older dominant-tonic form of recapitulation). The middle section is in a different and contrasting tempo, which sometimes begins with the relaxed air of the trio of a minuet and then begins to show the more dramatic character of a 'development' section leading directly back to the opening. These examples are experiments in Mozart's career, and ideally none of them should be considered apart from their dramatic function, the words, and their place in the opera as a whole. One example of an unusual formal device must suffice for all, Electra's 'Tutto nel cor' (*Idomeneo*, no. 4), where a D minor exposition has a recapitulation that begins for 12 measures in C minor, the key of the flat leading tone—as far removed from resolution as one could imagine. It is, of course, a departure that Mozart justifies dramatically and formally, as a perfect equivalent for the violence and rage of Electra's character; the same harmonic instability is revealed in her other arias. But it is equally noteworthy that this D minor aria is followed without interruption by a stormy chorus in C minor, describing the shipwreck: the abnormal opening in C minor of the recapitulation of the aria prepares this without lessening its dramatic effect. This recapitulation, in turn, is itself prepared by the exposition, which goes from D minor to F minor as much as to F major. The C minor seems natural when it appears as it arises from the F minor; only the realization that it is the true beginning of a complete recapitulation, and not a development, is a surprise. The return of the *tonic* paradoxically provides the real shock, an effect typically concise and powerful.

To some readers these considerations may appear unnecessarily finicky: still others may find such large-scale tonal significances simplistic. Yet there is no question that Mozart himself thought in exactly such terms, as is shown by the often-quoted letter to his father about *Die Entführung*, where he explains the choice of A minor to finish an aria of Osmin that begins in F major. There is, one must add, an element of self-justification in the letter: he is explaining one of his more surprising harmonic effects—indeed, almost explaining it away: 'as music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear, but must please the listener, or in other words must never cease to be *music*, so I have not chosen a key remote from F (in which the aria is written) but one related to it—not the nearest, D minor, but the more remote A minor.' This is, no doubt, the expression of a deeply classical taste, one which had repudiated the mannerism of the previous generation; but it is also an attempt to reassure a father always afraid his son will write clever, *avant-garde* music unintelligible to the general public, and not make any money—which is, of course, more or less what happened. The change of key in the aria of Osmin in question (no. 3 of the *Entführung*)[1] does not in any way invalidate Mozart's insistence on unity of key, as the different sections

[1] It is a relationship that symmetrically reappears (once again to illustrate Osmin's rage) in the *vaudeville* at the end of the opera, but is there resolved within a larger frame.

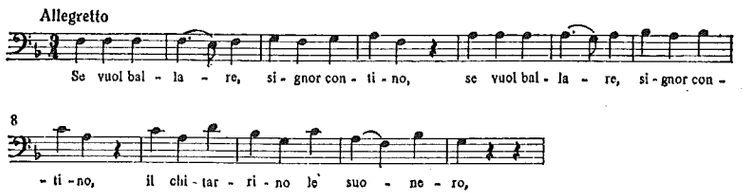
are clearly, if briefly, separated by spoken dialogue; a naïve device, perhaps, but the tonal patterns of the *Entführung* are not yet as sophisticated as those of the later operas. The whole of the letter to his father, however, makes it clear that a definite symbolic meaning was to be attached to a change of key.

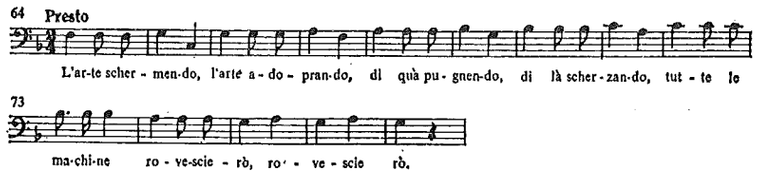
The arias in the later operas are much more subtle and infinitely more varied. The more common symmetries of sonata form, as manifold as they were, are no longer used so directly and simply, although they remain the guiding principles: the harmonic and rhythmic energies of the sonata style are combined with the dramatic situation in ever more imaginative ways. Susanna's 'Deh vieni, non tardar' seems, at first hearing, to be pure song, untrammeled by any strict conception of form. It is, however, in what I have called sonata-minuet form, in which a more animated combined 'second-group'-and-'development' starts in the dominant after the first double-bar. In 'Deh vieni' the recapitulation is a half-disguised variation of the opening:



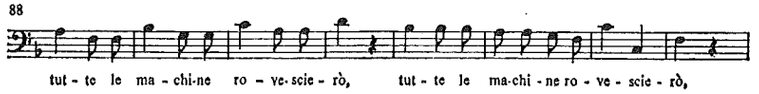
The final form interchanges and expands both halves of the opening, and in this way the first measure of the melody is turned into the lyrical expansion of a cadence. There are many sketches for this exquisite and subtle aria, and its perfection was not easily arrived at.

Figaro's cavatina 'Se vuol ballare' is an even more remarkable example of a freedom supported by a strict sense of proportion and balance. It begins as a monothematic sonata, the opening melody reappearing at the dominant, and a modulation to D minor acting as a clear development section. The Presto that follows is a variation of the opening theme; it stays entirely in the tonic and functions as a resolution and recapitulation, but it admirably represents Figaro's menacing sense of triumph as he contemplates the future ruin of the Count's plans. The opening must be compared with the Presto, to see how powerful the transformation is in its change of rhythm and speed, and yet how the original outline remains unaltered:



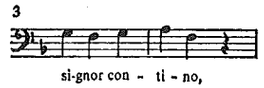


The wittiest stroke is to have the basic melodic elements move twice as fast in a phrase which sums up the whole aria at top speed:

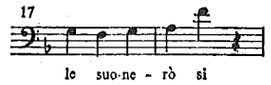


The original tempo is brought back at the end before a very short final burst of Presto to make the relation more telling and the balance more dramatic. Mozart's recapitulations in all the operas after the *Entführung* became less and less literal, but his sense of harmonic proportion and symmetry never wavered.

The economy of a Mozart aria is exactly that of a Haydn quartet. The little phrase 'signor contino'



becomes a triumphant assertion of victory with 'le suonerò sì,'



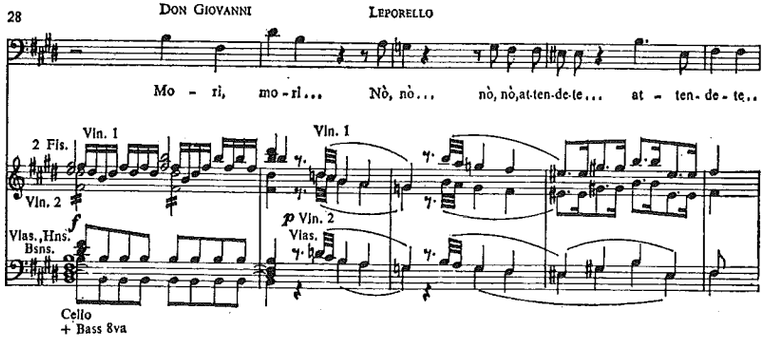
merely by transposing the final note up an octave, and the motif that makes this change possible runs through all the transformations of the melodic outline in the cavatina. This kind of dynamically conceived motivic development derives, as a technique, from Haydn, but its dramatic propriety is incontestable. The changing forms of a motif not only give a logical coherence to the music, but allow it to express not a fixed sentiment, but an emotion that changes before our eyes from menace to triumph. Here, as elsewhere, the classical style achieves unity and continuity with the use of discrete, separable elements.

The coincidence of musical and dramatic events is the glory of Mozart's operatic style. In an essay defending the complexity of Mozart's operatic music, E. T. A. Hoffmann describes a moment from *Don Giovanni*:

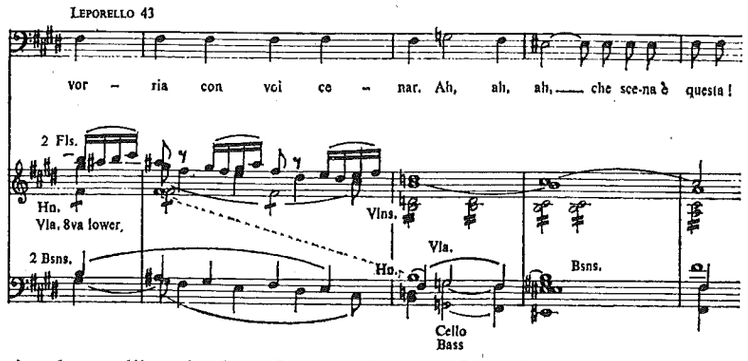
> When in *Don Giovanni* the statue of the Commendatore sounds his terrible 'Si' on the tonic E, but the composer now takes this E as the third

of C and thus modulates to C major, which tonality is seized upon by Leporello, no layman in musical matters will be able to understand the technical structure of this transition, but in the depths of his being he will tremble with Leporello; similarly the musician who has attained the highest level of culture will, in the moment of this most profound emotion, give as little thought to this structure, because the construction has long since occurred to him and so he has come round again to the layman's position.

The descent admired by Hoffmann is only one of a series in this E major duet, and forms part of a 'sonata' symmetry. There are four such descents, two from the dominant (B major) to a G♮, and then two—as a recapitulation —from the tonic to C♮. The first occurs when Don Giovanni threatens to kill Leporello if he refuses to approach the statue:

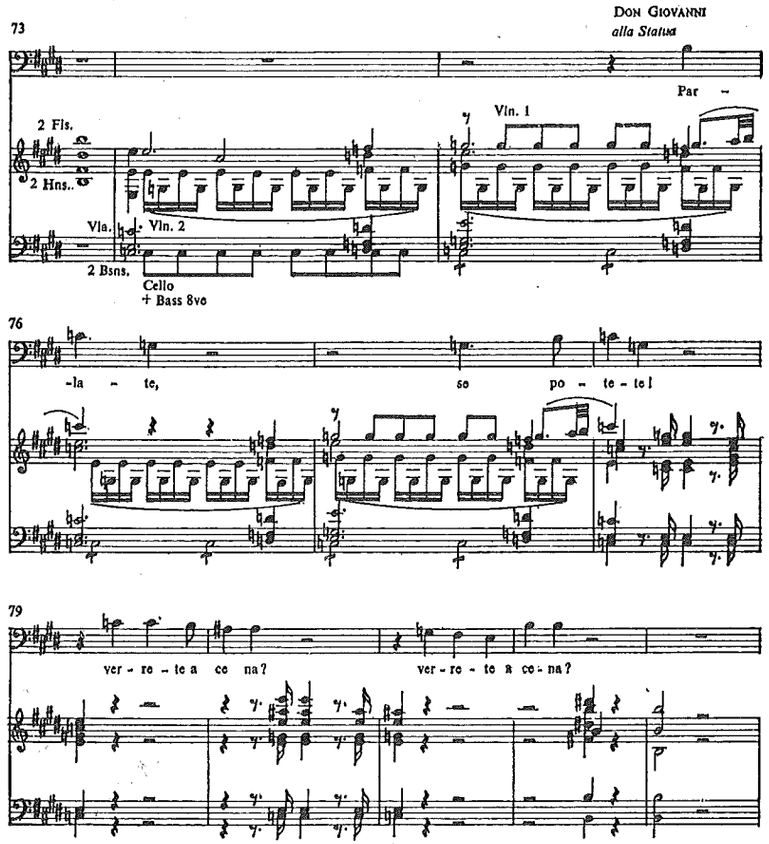


the second when the statue terrifyingly nods its head:

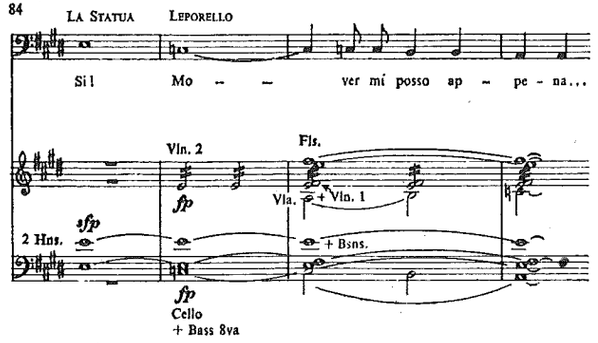


obviously recalling the first. The two descents from the tonic to C♮ are more elaborate,[1] first when Don Giovanni steps forward to command the statue to speak:

[1] The descent to C♮ in measure 49 has a different harmonic sense, as it is immediately preceded by the drop to G♮ just cited, and it is in the context of the dominant key of B major.



(again clearly recalling the earlier examples), and immediately following this, with the most dramatic sudden accents as the statue sings his one word of acceptance:



There is no better example of the ease with which Mozart's style offers a true equivalent for stage action and not only an expression of it: the symmetries he needed were not a hindrance but an inspiration.

Not only the new classical style made this equivalence of drama and music possible. There was also a corresponding revolution of dramatic technique in the eighteenth century, most significantly in the development of the rhythm of comic intrigue. The comedy of character was dethroned, and the comedy of situation took its place. The comedy of situation had, of course, always existed: *Twelfth Night* and the *Comedy of Errors* are only the most famous English examples of a genre that goes back to Menander. But comedy based on character was the dominant mode, and it was considered the higher form by most critics, Lessing being the most authoritative German dramatist to proclaim its superiority. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, Herder was to insist that the comedy of character was dead, and that the only plays of Molière which could still hold the stage were those based on situation, like the *Médecin malgré lui*. In an article, 'Das Lustspiel,' Herder reversed the usual critical commonplace and insisted that characters (like Tartuffe and Harpagon) dated and changed from era to era, while situations—comic intrigue and the dramatic upsets and reversals of comic plots—remained eternally valid and ever fresh.

Character, of course, is as eternal—and no more so—than situation, but the eighteenth-century preference went very deep. The pre-eminence of the comedy of situation did not come from its novelty, as it was hardly new, but from the development of dramatic rhythm. The eighteenth century created a new kind of art from the sheer mechanism of stage management; what was new was not the awkward discovery, the inopportune arrival, the disguise unconsciously revealed, but the speed, controlled and accelerated, with which these events occurred. Already at the end of the seventeenth century, the successors of Molière (Dancourt and Le Sage, in particular) had begun to develop this art of rhythm, and to neglect the powerful psychological typology of Molière. The greatest masters by the middle of the eighteenth century were Beaumarchais and Goldoni; in spite of the latter's continuation of the comedy of picturesque characters and of local manners, he wrote several masterpieces of pure comedy of situation like *Il Ventaglio*, where the interest centers almost exclusively upon the rhythm of the intrigue.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the genre finally attained an almost abstract form, the comedy of adultery, in which there is no sensuality at all, and illicit sexual relations are only strings that pull the puppets and make them run. The comedies of Feydeau are the greatest examples: character has disappeared, and there is a mathematical poetry drawn from the manipulation of a formidable number of adulterous liaisons and cross-liaisons in and out of the doors of several hotel rooms. But this is the old age of the form, and in the eighteenth century we have only its first moment of maturity. The

origin is the improvised theater—the *commedia dell'arte*, the *Théâtre de la Foire*, for which many of the greatest writers of the eighteenth century wrote scenarios. Mozart came along at the exact moment when the improvisation had been replaced by a fixed and literary art, when the sketched scenarios of a series of comic situations became plays and librettos, developing the new rhythm of intrigue learnt from the popular, improvising troupes. It was an opportune time for Mozart, and we must be grateful that it coincided so neatly with the new dramatic possibilities of the sonata style. The arts do not always run so smoothly in harness, but eighteenth-century theater had developed the same feeling as music for an articulated series of events and for controlled rhythmic transitions. This conjunction made it possible for Mozart's genius to be deployed with such ease in his operas: he had the feeling lacking in Haydn for large-scale dramatic movement, and he had a control of the sonata style that only Haydn, of all his contemporaries, could equal. From the point of view of large-scale rhythmic movement, *Figaro* is his masterpiece, and for this Beaumarchais and da Ponte must share in the credit. It is the supreme musical example of the comedy of intrigue.

The development of the rhythm of comic intrigue was facilitated by a changing conception of personality in the eighteenth century, based on a new, although still primitive interest in experimental psychology. Earlier centuries produced a more striking and more individual conception of personality: Molière's Harpagon, to take only one example from so many in his plays, is neither an average miser nor an allegorical personification of avarice but a man possessed by avarice as if by a demon; Alceste, in *Le Misanthrope*, struggles against the misanthropy which controls him, and ends by yielding to it with delight. This conception of personality is reflected throughout the seventeenth century in the interest of the animal in man, the fables of La Fontaine, the studies by Della Porta and Le Brun of facial resemblances between animals and men, and it is closely related to the idea of human personality dominated by the humors. All men are different, each can be set off from his fellows, characterized by the abstract forces that govern his individual nature. The eighteenth-century view, by contrast, was a more leveling one: all men are the same, all dominated by the same motifs; *così fan tutti:* they all behave the same way; the differences between Fiordiligi and Dorabella are only superficial, the one like the other will end in the arms of a new suitor. One of the most revealing moments in *Le Nozze di Figaro* is when the valet, misled by Susanna, becomes as blind with jealousy as his master. Eighteenth-century comedy springs from the tradition of masked players, but it made the mimes drop the masks as the century went on, as if the fixed grimace were irrelevant to the blander, more mobile, real face underneath.

The relation of eighteenth-century comedy to the popular improvised theater cannot be overestimated, but it can be misunderstood. All the great comedies of the time are in some way related to this tradition, yet none of them

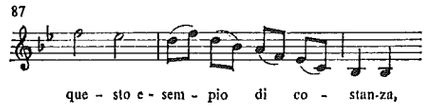
allow for improvisation—in fact, they destroyed it. The *opéra-comique* arose from a scenario where only the songs were written out, but it was not long before the dialogue was set down as well. Even Gozzi, who promoted the improvised, masked theater in opposition to Goldoni, wrote out all the dialogue after the success of his first scenario, *The Love for Three Oranges*. The stylization of the masked troupes fitted in very well with eighteenth-century psychology: the outward personality is a mask, what is real is the *tabula rasa* underneath upon which experience writes. For the seventeenth century, beneath the mask lie features even more strikingly characterized, more individual; beneath the eighteenth-century mask is only human nature. In comparison to the individualized characters of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century stages, the personages of the eighteenth century are almost blanks; their reactions can be controlled and manipulated by the intelligent rascal and the clever valet—except that they, too, can be caught in their own plot when the complexity escapes them. The reliance of the popular theater upon stylized characters and upon the comedy of situation—the development of intrigue—was an inspiration to the eighteenth-century playwright, but the theater did not remain popular for long under his hands. It was for the masked troupe of the Italian Comedians that Marivaux developed his highly sophisticated plays and created 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, and they are almost scientific in the way they show precisely how these laws work in practice.

Così fan tutte belongs in the center of this tradition: if the book is less profoundly conceived than the finest of Marivaux, it is still, because of its music, the greatest example of its kind. 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*, 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. There must be a disguise, or the play would be not a psychological comedy, but a social drama about marrying outside one's class; and it must be a double disguise, so that both lovers may be guinea-pigs. In plays where only the man is disguised, the valet-scientist must fool him so that he, too, will become a part of the experiment, and weep real tears. In *Così fan tutte*, we know in advance that the girls will be unfaithful, but we expect a demonstration of how they will yield: step by step, it must be true to the eighteenth-century laws of psychology. It is necessary that the new lovers be the old ones disguised, or we would have a *comédie larmoyante* of the returning soldier who finds the girl he left behind in the arms of another; but it is necessary, too, that the disguised lovers each take the other's former girl, or

the girls would be unconsciously faithful, and the play would prove quite a different psychological theorem.

In short, what is essential is a closed system. No outside influences may be allowed to enter: the atmosphere of the rest of life is sealed off. There are only victims and scientists; and the two young men, who start by thinking they are among the scientists, learn, to their rage, that they are numbered among the victims. That is why in *Così fan tutte* Guglielmo cannot join in the beautiful A flat major canon at the wedding but mutters that he hopes they are drinking poison. In order to isolate the experiment, the scientists play all the necessary roles: the notary and the doctor are both Despina disguised. The libretto has been condemned as absurd and cynically immoral, and oddly defended as realistic (by W. J. Turner): it is none of these. It constructs an artificial and completely traditional world in which a psychological demonstration may be acted out, and it is true, not to life, which never intrudes here, but to the eighteenth-century view of human nature. The psychological viewpoint was one that the nineteenth century found outdated, and yet so recently overthrown as to be distasteful: the opera was, in fact, the very end of a tradition and had to deal with a changed atmosphere from the start. Soon after its first performance it was already being censured as immoral and trivial, and for the next hundred years only exceptional critics, like E. T. A. Hoffmann, understood the warmth and irony that the libretto enabled Mozart to achieve.

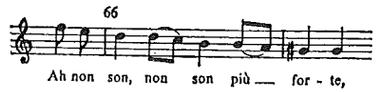
The music follows the psychological progression with great sensitivity. Fiordiligi's two famous arias strikingly reflect the individual psychological moment: the first, proclaiming her fidelity 'like a rock,' is magnificently comic, with her display of virtue accompanied by two trumpets, and with vocal leaps as enormous and as ludicrous as the words. At moments, pride is mocked by the gaiety of the music as it forces the singer into an ungrateful register:



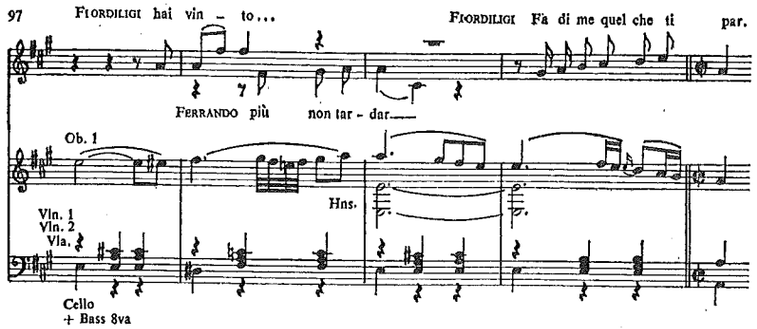
In the second aria 'Per pietà, ben mio,' however, Fiordiligi is deeply troubled by the realization that her fidelity was, not a sham, but the most fragile of constructions. The two trumpets are replaced by two horns, the long leaps are no longer ridiculous but deeply expressive, the phrasing more complex.

From the point of view of the opera, when Fiordiligi yields to Ferrando (in the great A major duet 'Per gli amplessi') she becomes more herself as she becomes more like every woman: after the mock grandeur of her first aria and the real grandeur of the second, the music of the duet is correspondingly more human. The relation of musical style to operatic psychology is ambiguous at best, and always indirect, but in this duet Mozart abandons the

immediately perceptible formal clarity that he commanded so readily, although the final resolution and the proportions are as satisfying as ever. The normal movement to the dominant E major has only begun when it is cut short by the entrance of Ferrando, and a surprising modulation to C major establishes this key (the flat mediant) as a new 'dominant' or secondary key. This is another anticipation of Beethoven's use of a substitute dominant, that is, a chord sufficiently akin to the dominant to be reasonably set against the tonic, and yet remote enough to give a chromatically expressive, large-scale dissonance to the structure: its purpose here is symbolic, but dramatically and not only expressively so. Fiordiligi's music expresses real anguish, but her most despairing cry, 'Ah non son, non son più forte':



is the conventional operatic representation of tears, nonetheless deeply touching: she is at her most desperate as the music obviously moves (from C major to A minor) towards a return of the tonic. We know how near Fiordiligi is to admitting her love, as we become aware how close the sound of A major is. When it finally comes, we sense that Ferrando has won, and he begins his final plea in a new tempo (Andante), full of confidence. Fiordiligi's answer—her defeat—is the most exquisite of cadences:



in which it is no longer the vocal line that carries the dramatic meaning, but the long-drawn-out and finally resolved phrase of the oboe. The classical realization of the cadence as an articulate dramatic event finds its triumph here.

It should not be concluded that the music becomes more sincere as the characters drop their pretenses. Mozart is as direct—and as pretentious—in the one instance as in the other. The irony of the opera depends on its tact; it is a masterpiece of 'tone,' this most civilized of all aesthetic qualities. There is no way of knowing in what proportions mockery and sympathy are blended

in Mozart's music and how seriously he took his puppets, just as we cannot know how seriously Ariosto took his tales of ancient chivalry or La Fontaine the morals of the fables he versified. Even to ask is to miss the point: the art in these matters is to tell one's story without being foolishly taken in by it and yet without a trace of disdain for its apparent simplicity. It is an art which can become profound only when the attitude of superiority never implies withdrawal, when objectivity and acceptance are indistinguishable. Those who think that Mozart wrote profound music for a trivial libretto misunderstand his achievement almost as radically as those who, like Wagner, felt that with *Così fan tutte* he had put empty music to a foolish book.

The farewell quintet in the first act ('Write to me every day,'—'Twice a day') is a touchstone of Mozart's success: heartbreaking without ever for a moment approaching tragedy, and delightful without a trace of explicit mockery in the music, it seems to hold laughter and sympathy in a beautiful equilibrium. Even the parody of the operatic sob is done with great delicacy (as it is in Stravinsky's parody of, and homage to, this quintet, the chorus of sentimental prostitutes in *The Rake's Progress*).

This virtuosity of tone is everywhere visible in the score. One of its most remarkable manifestations is in the finale of the first act: as the two men, supposedly dying of poison, lie stretched out on the ground, and the ladies examine them with more tenderness than before ('What an interesting face!'), the orchestra plays what would be a long double fugue—except that there is only one voice at a time, and almost no accompaniment. The music becomes genuinely and richly polyphonic after this long passage, but the surprising combination of baroque contrapuntal movement and the thinnest of *opera buffa* textures once again holds the finest of balances between seriousness and comedy.

The operas of Mozart are international in style, and borrow eclectically from all the important contemporary dramatic traditions of Europe. Even the *Singspiel* has not much more specific local character for Mozart than the Italian operas. The background of French culture, for example, is perceptible throughout *Die Entführung*, not least in its vaudeville ending. The 'seraglio' comedy, in fact, was developed with more grace and wit in France by Favart than by any of the Italian playwrights. The only dramatic form in eighteenth-century Europe not to have affected Mozart's work at all is the serious German comedy that found its first great exponents in Lessing and Lenz and its masterpiece later in *Der zerbrochene Krug* of Kleist. This tradition, the most original of all the German contributions to comedy, seems not to have existed for Mozart. Otherwise he took his material wherever he found it: Beaumarchais, Wieland, Favart, Metastasio, Molière, Goldoni. The essentially Viennese transformation of the Italian clown into the Hans Wurst figure is, of course, important for *Die Zauberflöte*, but even in this supposedly most Viennese of Viennese operas, the model and the inspiration for

the form comes essentially from Italy through the work of a Venetian, Carlo Gozzi, and his influence on the Viennese comedy of magic.

Turandot and *The Love for Three Oranges* still keep Gozzi's name alive today. Enormously popular in Germany during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, he provided a challenge and an alternative to the rational, bourgeois comedy of his arch-enemy Goldoni, who was influenced heavily by the French tradition. Gozzi called his own works dramatic fables, and what he says about them (in his *Memoirs of a Useless Man*) reads like a hand-tailored description of *Die Zauberflöte*:

> 'the dramatic genre of the fable . . . is the most difficult of all . . . it should have an imposing grandeur, a fascinating and majestic mystery, arresting novelty of spectacle, intoxicating eloquence, sentiments of moral philosophy, the sophisticated wit (*sali urbani*) of nourishing criticism, dialogue that springs from the heart, and above all the great magic of seduction that creates an enchanting illusion of making the impossible appear as truth to the mind and spirit of the spectators.'[1]

The impossible fabulous fairy-tale plot made to seem real, the spectacle, the mystery, the didacticism, the critical approach, the heartfelt sentiments—all this strangely mixed together can be found in *Die Zauberflöte*. In addition, the incongruous juxtaposition of vulgar traditional clowning and political and religious allegory so characteristic of *Die Zauberflöte* was already at the heart of Gozzi's first play.

The theater that Gozzi partly invented, partly revived, was both aristocratic and popular, fiercely reactionary in philosophy and brilliantly innovatory in its mixing of previous genres. Essentially it was based on a combination of fairy-tale adventure of great nobility with the farcical tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*; originally an attempt to revive the inspired improvisatory style of the discredited *commedia dell'arte* troupes, it quickly turned into something new, fully written out and heavily charged with ideological content. Perhaps only through the Viennese *Singspiel* could this hybrid inspiration—this monstrous child of farce, philosophy, dialect comedy, fairy-tale and Spanish tragedy—be transformed into musical theater. The *opera buffa* was too well-defined a tradition to tolerate such a metamorphosis, but the *Singspiel* remained as yet undeveloped and malleable.

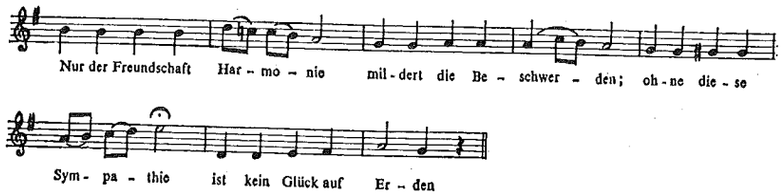
Mozart's correspondence testifies to his interest in Gozzi's work, and Schikaneder, the librettist of *Die Zauberflöte*, was producing plays of Gozzi with his troupe in Salzburg at a time when Mozart was still there. What Gozzi provided was a structure—a systematic conception of drama and even stagecraft—that enabled Mozart to unite and to fuse the most popular and the most complex and learned forms of art. The action of *Die Zauberflöte* ranges (as in Gozzi's dramatic fables) from the popular farce of Papageno (partly

[1] Bari, 1910, vol. I, p. 267.

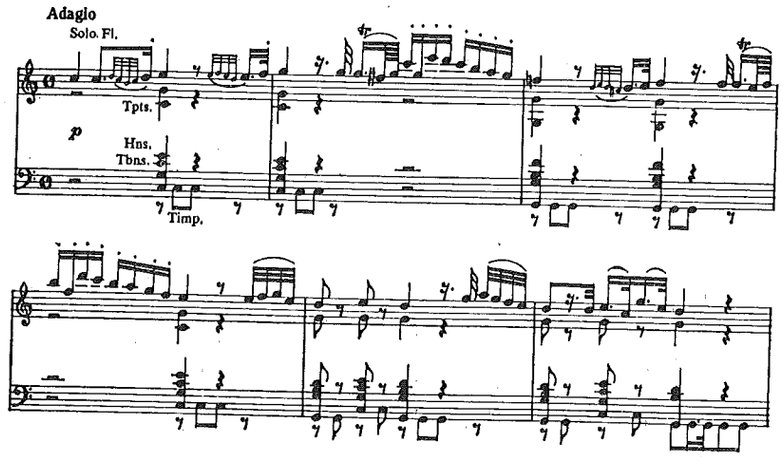
improvised by Schikaneder at the first performances, it appears) to fairy-tale illusionism and spectacle and even to religious ritual. Sensitive people are sometimes made uncomfortable by the vulgar diction of *Die Zauberflöte*, but the conception, flawed as it is by inconsistencies, is among the noblest on the operatic stage. The music correspondingly goes from the simplest of tunes and the most farcical of patter-effects to the fugue and even the chorale prelude (a revival of this very special Baroque form that was to remain unique in the classical style until Beethoven's Quartet op. 132 with its working of *Veni Creator*, *Spiritus*). In *Die Zauberflöte*, too, Mozart was able to create the first genuinely classical religious style that could be placed with honor beside his imitations of the Baroque religious forms and textures.

With the role of Sarastro and the chorus of priests, the classical hymn makes its first appearance; it is a texture rather than a specific form, and one that was to be of central importance in Beethoven's development. It attains gravity while deliberately avoiding the rich and complicated movement of inner voices of the Baroque. Above all, it avoids the Baroque harmonic dissonance, and replaces the continuously expressive suspensions almost entirely by pure triadic sonority. Harmonically, therefore, it is partly a return to sixteenth-century sound, above all that of Palestrina, whose music remained alive and performed throughout the eighteenth century. The melodic line, however, is the classical one, expressively shaped, symmetrical, and with a sharply marked climax; the articulation is equally sharp and the phrases lack not only the rich continuity of the Baroque, but the delicacy of the sixteenth-century divisions as well. The appearance of this texture in the classical style was not unprecedented in *Die Zauberflöte*; it affects the same harmonic simplicity as one finds in many passages of Gluck. The neoclassical ideal finds in passages of *Die Zauberflöte* a most remarkable incarnation. The immediate origin of the classical 'hymn,' however, is to be found in some of the symphonic slow movements of Haydn: the idea of applying it within a religious context belongs to Mozart. The renunciation of his favorite appoggiaturas, which invariably emphasize dissonance, and the reliance on the undecorated shape of the melodic line alone are managed by Mozart with exquisite virtuosity.

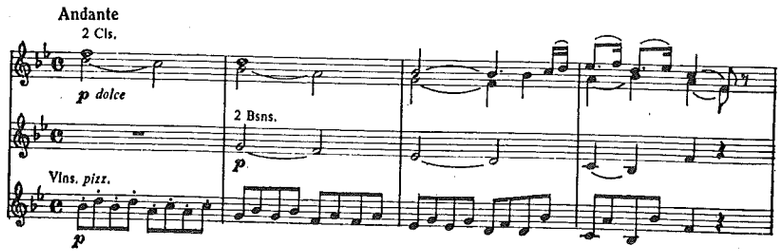
Die Zauberflöte develops, as a corollary to the hymn, a conception of music as a vehicle for simple moral truths: in this work, the expressive range of music is decisively enlarged in an intellectual direction. There is no question, of course, of music as a substitute for verbal expression, but of the creation of a viable setting for the exposition of ideas. 'What shall we say to Sarastro?' Papageno whimpers, and as Pamina cries 'The truth,' the music takes on an heroic radiance unheard in opera before then. The morality of *Die Zauberflöte* is sententious, and the music often assumes a squareness rare in Mozart, along with a narrowness of range and an emphasis on a few notes very close together that beautifully illuminate the middle-class philosophy of the text:



Mozart's *Gemütlichkeit* here is as much intellectual as sensuous, and it is characteristic that in responding to the bourgeois, sentimental world of *Die Zauberflöte*, with its self-satisfied farcical comedy and its easy Masonic mysticism, his sonorities become purer, less chromatic in detail than in any other work. Sometimes this purity is clearly symbolic, as in the march of the trial by fire, where the majestic dwelling on the tonic, varied only by a dominant-seventh chord, is the musical equivalent for the steadfastness of the Masonic initiate:



The bare, strange sonority, entirely of flute, brass, and timpani, reflects and enhances the absolute simplicity here. The transparency, however, is often its own justification:



This is Mozart's late style developed as far as he carried it: the purity and the bareness are almost exotic, so extreme have they become, and this almost wilful leanness is only emphasized by the exquisite orchestration. Each of the mature operas of Mozart has its characteristic sonority, but in none is this sonority so much to the fore, so direct in its action and so fundamental, as in *Die Zauberflöte*.

Gozzi's 'fable' was a two-edged weapon: with its reliance upon old-fashioned popular farce and tales of magical enchantment for the conveyance of philosophical and political ideas, he hoped to combat the nefarious influence of the French Enlightenment and to reinforce the waning prestige of the aristocracy. In the hands of Mozart and Schikaneder, it became an arm of middle-class liberalism, a covert attack on the government, and a splendid work of propaganda for the Freemasons. Gozzi's aristocratic bias remains implicit in the form, however, in the contrast between the princely, idealistic Tamino and the materialistic Papageno, a figure made complex only by the venerable farcical tradition in which he exists, and which he implicitly recalls. Gozzi's work was, in the most profound way, an attack on contemporary rationalism, and his mixed forms released new springs of imagination. His influence on Mozart cannot be confined to *Die Zauberflöte*: the dramatic current that he set in motion had its effect on *Don Giovanni* as well. To some extent the text of da Ponte follows, not Molière, but the version of Gozzi's arch-enemy Goldoni, who had, however, sensibly removed from the story the childish devices of the stone statue that walked and talked, and the descent into hell—in his play, Don Giovanni was more reasonably struck by lightning. Childish popular traditions of this kind were, however, the very stuff of Gozzi's conception of drama—they gave the chance for elaborate spectacle, and most of all they represented the old order, the old way of things, they preserved the traditions by which the aristocratic life could survive. Gozzi's was not the first, nor the last, romantic alliance of the aristocracy and the lower-class against the bourgeoisie. With all da Ponte's and Mozart's dependance on Goldoni, their conception of the Don Juan story was essentially Gozzian in taste and outlook: the statue and the descent into hell are restored, and it is these Punch-and-Judy elements and the clowning of Leporello that have the greatest share in the imaginative and philosophical depth of the opera.

The comic side of *Don Giovanni* has given rise to the kind of controversy that, by its very nature, does not admit of a straightforward solution. Is *Don Giovanni* tragic or comic? Phrased this way, the question makes any answer right, but this would be to mistake the importance of the genre in eighteenth-century operatic practice. Is *Don Giovanni opera seria* or *buffa*? In the passion of the argument, intelligent men have lost their heads over even this innocuous technical point. Dent claimed that none of the characters of the opera had anything to do with *opera seria*, which is patently extravagant.

The structure and pacing of *Don Giovanni* are those of *opera buffa*, but it is evident that at least one of the characters, Donna Anna, comes directly from the world of *seria*, and Donna Elvira and Don Ottavio and even Don Giovanni himself mediate in varying degrees between the two worlds. This is not to imply that Donna Anna, too, is not contaminated at some points by the more fundamental *buffa* atmosphere, particularly in the ensembles. Nevertheless, the range of style of *opera buffa* is considerably broadened: Donna Elvira's aria 'Ah fuggil traditor' is a parody of old-fashioned *seria*, while Donna Anna's 'Or sai chi l'onore' is pure *seria* in its noblest form. The pathos of *Don Giovanni* is no greater than that of *Idomeneo*, but it is at moments as elevated and far more concentrated. The speed of the *opera buffa*'s large-scale rhythm and its emphasis on action in place of the dignified expression of *opera seria* enable the work to move at a dazzling pace from aria to ensemble: the moments of terror and pity are all the sharper in such surroundings. The first minutes of the opera set the tone, and establish the contrast, as the comic complaint of Leporello leads swiftly to the duel, and the pianissimo trio of horror as the Commendatore dies. No *opera seria* moves with this velocity. The comic pacing is essential to the effect, yet the result is anything but comic. This range of tone is, of course, not confined to *Don Giovanni*; the nobility of Fiordiligi or the Countess equally depends on the surrounding *opera buffa* structure for its full significance. The fusion is so perfect in *Don Giovanni* that the mixture of genres is no longer noticed today, but it was decidedly remarked upon and often condemned at the end of the eighteenth century.

The mixed genre in the eighteenth century is a sign of indecorum, and *Don Giovanni*, in more ways than one, is decidedly indecorous. In acknowledgement of this, da Ponte and Mozart called it not an *opera buffa*, but a *dramma giocoso*. Like *Così fan tutte* it was attacked from the beginning: it was immoral, shocking, out-of-date, and childish. The artistry of the music was naturally recognized, if its complexity was often bitterly resented. (The first Italian production had to be given up in despair after many rehearsals because of the difficulty of the score.) It was a frequent complaint of the time that Mozart's style was too learned to speak directly to the heart, but his enormous skill was never questioned. The dramatic conception, however, by no means always found favor. A critic of the first Berlin production wrote that the ear was enchanted while virtue was trampled underfoot.

The scandalous side of *Don Giovanni* had political, as well as artistic, overtones. It will not do to overstate this, but an element of liberal revolutionary aspiration is decidedly, if unsystematically, present in the work. No one in 1787 (the year when the meeting of the Estates-General echoed over all of Europe) could have missed the significance of Mozart's triumphantly overemphatic setting of 'Viva la libertà'[1], or of the wicked exploitation of

[1] See above, pp. 94–5, for the structural role of this passage in the first act finale.

peasant innocence for dissolute aristocratic vice. The novels and political pamphlets of the time were filled with references to such matters. Mozart's ideological bias is clear in all the late operas, except for *La Clemenza di Tito* and *Così fan tutte*, which exist in abstract worlds of their own. The cartoon-like attack on the Catholic Establishment of Austria is not a negligible part of *Die Zauberflöte*; it has been denied that the identification of Maria Theresa with the Queen of the Night was intended, but it was made from the beginning, and Schikaneder and Mozart would have had to be astonishingly obtuse not to have foreseen this in a work so heavily charged with Masonic doctrine and ritual (Freemasonry was the principal outlet in Austria at that time for bourgeois revolutionary ideals). In *Figaro*, too, the omission of the more overtly political passages of Beaumarchais' play can have made little difference to a public which, for the most part, knew quite clearly what was being left out; and in any case the call for the renunciation of unjust aristocratic privilege is sufficiently underlined in the opera as it stands. *Don Giovanni*, however, goes beyond all of this in its deliberate picture of a complete world disrupted by aristocratic immorality. The great ball scene in the first act is not mere musical virtuosity with all its three separate orchestras on the stage, and the complicated cross-rhythms of the dances. Each of the social classes—peasantry, bourgeoisie, and aristocracy—has its own dance, and the total independence of every rhythm is a reflection of the social hierarchy; it is this order and harmony that is destroyed by the attempted rape of Zerlina off-stage.[1]

The political ambiance of *Don Giovanni* is given greater weight by the close relation in the eighteenth century between revolutionary thought and eroticism. I have no wish to draw a consistent doctrine from the work, but only to set in relief the significance of some of its aspects. Political and sexual liberalism were intimately connected in the 1780s; even for the most respectable citizens the idea took the shape of a governing fear that republicanism implied complete sexual license. The Marquis de Sade, in his pamphlet *One More Step* did, indeed, claim the most extravagant sexual freedom as a logical corollary of political liberty; his ideas were current everywhere in a milder form, and were the end of an already considerable amount of eighteenth-century speculation. Mozart's early and devoutly Catholic horror at French liberal thought must surely have abated considerably when he became a Freemason, but in any case his personal beliefs have little importance in this connection. The political connotations of sexual liberty were very much alive at the première of *Don Giovanni*, and they would have been inescapable. Part of the outrage and the attraction that this work inspired for years to come must be understood in this context. After 1790, the repudiation of sexual liberty and the extreme puritanism of the revolutionary government

[1] Don Giovanni lowers himself and raises Zerlina as he dances with her to the music for the bourgeoisie, meeting her halfway, as it were.

of France (and of the counter-revolutionary governments elsewhere as well) are a reaction to the intellectual climate that produced *Don Giovanni*, and are reflected in Beethoven's rejection of Mozart's libretti as unworthy of being set to music.

This sense of outrage connected with the opera—and it is implicit in Kierkegaard's view of *Don Giovanni* as the only work that perfectly embodies the essentially erotic nature of music, and in E. T. A. Hoffmann's stressing of what he called its 'romanticism'—this sense of *Don Giovanni* as an attack, at once frontal and oblique, upon aesthetic and moral values is more useful for understanding the opera, and Mozart's music in general, than the common-sense view which shrugs off this aspect impatiently. Music is the most abstract of all the arts only in the sense that it is the least representational: it is, however, the least abstract in its direct physical assault on the listeners' nerves, in the immediacy of effect that its patterns gain from the apparently almost total reduction of mediating symbolism, of all ideas that seem to call for decoding and interpretation, and so to stand between music and listener. (If, as a matter of fact, the reduction is very far from total, and the listener must expend considerable labor decoding the symbolic relationships set before him, his activity is less conscious, less verbalized, than in any other art.) When this physical immediacy of music is stressed, then its erotic aspect stands well to the fore. Perhaps no composer used the seductive physical power of music with the intensity and the range of Mozart. The flesh is corrupt and corrupting. Behind Kierkegaard's essay on *Don Giovanni* stands the idea that music is a sin: it seems fundamentally sound that he should have chosen Mozart as the most sinful composer of all. What is most extraordinary about Mozart's style is the combination of physical delight—a sensuous play of sonority, an indulgence in the most luscious harmonic sequences—with a purity and economy of line and form that render the seduction all the more efficient.

A more prosaic and more conventionally respectable view of Mozart comes not from the sober perspective of the twentieth century but from the height of Romantic enthusiasm: in the G minor Symphony, a work of passion, violence, and grief for those who love Mozart most, Schumann saw nothing but lightness, grace, and charm. It should be said at once that to reduce a work to the expression of sentiments, however powerful, is to trivialize it in any case: the G minor Symphony is not much more profound conceived as a tragic cry from the heart than as a work of exquisite charm. Nevertheless, Schumann's attitude to Mozart ends by destroying his vitality as it canonizes him. It is only through recognizing the violence and the sensuality at the center of Mozart's work that we can make a start towards a comprehension of his structures and an insight into his magnificence. In a paradoxical way, however, Schumann's superficial characterization of the G minor Symphony can help us to see Mozart's daemon more steadily. In all of Mozart's supreme expressions of suffering and terror—the G minor Symphony, *Don Giovanni*, the G minor Quintet, Pamina's aria in *Die Zauberflöte*—there is something

shockingly voluptuous. Nor does this detract from its power or effectiveness: the grief and the sensuality strengthen each other, and end by becoming indivisible, indistinguishable one from the other. (Tchaikovsky's grief, for example, has an equal lubricity, but his diffuse and wasteful technique of composition makes him far less dangerous.) In his corruption of sentimental values, Mozart is a subversive artist.

Almost all art is subversive: it attacks established values, and replaces them with those of its own creation; it substitutes its own order for that of society. The disconcertingly suggestive aspects—moral and political—of Mozart's operas are only a surface appearance of this aggression. His works are in many ways an assault upon the musical language that he helped to create: the powerful chromaticism that he could employ with such ease comes near at moments to destroying the tonal clarity that was essential to the significance of his own forms, and it was this chromaticism that had a real influence upon the Romantic style, on Chopin and Wagner in particular. The artistic personality that Haydn created for himself (related to, but not to be confused with, the face he wore for everyday purposes) prevented, by its assumption of an easy-going geniality, the full development of the subversive and revolutionary aspect of his art: his music, as E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote, appears to have been composed before original sin. Beethoven's attack was naked, no art was less accommodating in its refusal to accept any other conditions than its own. Mozart was as unaccommodating as Beethoven, and the sheer physical beauty, prettiness, even, of so much of what he composed masks the uncompromising character of his art. It cannot be fully appreciated without recalling the uneasiness and even dismay that it so often evoked in its time, and without recreating in our own minds the conditions in which it could still seem dangerous.