

Take My Hand: A Guide to Seduction in Late Eighteenth-Century Opera

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Abstract

Karen Wicke: *Take My Hand: A Guide to Seduction in Late Eighteenth-Century Opera*
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Late eighteenth-century French and Italian culture reflected an obsession with love and relationships through literature, music, and other art forms. Seduction scenes are one type of commentary on relationships that dot the landscape of opera of the time. The operatic seduction scene involves not only the two characters on stage but also a third agent – the music. After situating operatic seduction in the broader context of late eighteenth-century French and Italian culture, this thesis outlines the specific musical vocabulary of seduction that was put to use by composers, enacted on stage, and understood by audiences. This vocabulary is then applied to several case studies in the music of Mozart, who is now viewed as the dominant opera composer of the time, and his contemporaries. Through creative application and manipulation of the musical language of seduction, composers create ambiguous situations and invest the music with dramatic agency, allowing it to support, subvert, or otherwise comment on the seduction occurring on stage.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1822, French author Stendhal summarized his nearly forty years of experience with women in a rational analysis of romantic passion entitled *On Love*. On the topic of seduction, he concludes, “A wise woman should never give herself by appointment. It should always be an unforeseen delight.”¹ In this pithy statement, he captures the spirit of Enlightenment sexuality – its recognition of women’s role in the sexual act, its secular focus, with earthly happiness as a realizable goal, and its emphasis on free-flowing passion, which controls and guides human actions on the spur of the moment. He may have drawn this conclusion from his own experiences, but he could just as easily have been inspired by the preceding decades of artistic production – literature, art, drama, and opera – which encapsulated cultural ideas about love and relationships.

Love scenes are ubiquitous in opera of the late eighteenth century. Indeed, courtship, marriage, and fidelity/infidelity are typically crucial plot elements in works of this period. Whether comic or serious, operas of the time usually commented on the complexities of male-female relationships in some way. Late eighteenth-century cultural ideas about love and relationships determined what types of situations would have the greatest impact – be it shock, delight, or otherwise – on the mostly upper-class opera audiences. This study looks at one particularly potent type of male-female interaction –

¹ Marie-Henri Beyle de Stendhal, *On Love*, trans. H.B.V. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1983), 272.

the seduction – and traces its origins and expressions in culture, literature, and particularly opera.

In this dramatic-artistic culture obsessed with love, the seduction proved a tantalizing topic. A simple definition of seduction might go something like this: one person cajoles the other into a sexual relationship. In the midst of a staged drama, however, seduction is rarely this simple. Characters usually have complex identities beyond merely “seducer” or “seducee,” and they have motivations beyond sex. Therefore, defining what is and is not seduction is problematic, and ambiguous situations arise. A variety of factors could complicate a seduction. For example, can women seduce men, or must it always be the reverse? Can two characters who are already lovers seduce one another, or must they be strangers? Do pseudo-seductions or unsuccessful seductions, however one might define success in these situations, count? For the purposes of my study, the answers to all of the above questions are yes. By allowing ambiguous cases, I reveal some of the more interesting twists in what might otherwise seem to be the standard seduction narrative.

Within the world of late eighteenth-century opera, I will be focusing on one particular manifestation of seductions: the duet. I am defining the seduction duet as follows: (1) it must be a musical number for two characters of different genders who (2) are in or are seeking to be in some kind of relationship; (3) they are singing about that relationship; and finally, (4) there is some sort of tension in the relationship that is resolved one way or another *within* the boundaries of the duet number. This last characteristic is especially important because, in my view, the level of dramatic tension is what separates the seduction scene from a love scene. Unlike love numbers, seductions

are action-oriented and intensely dramatic. As we will see, seduction is as much a dialectic process as a mating call. Not only sex, but also egos are at stake. Seduction requires skill, persuasion, and manipulation, and as such, methodology is of utmost importance. In a sexually-supercharged Enlightenment cultural climate that we will explore in a moment, the seducer is part scientist and part rhetorician, trying to mix the right amount of charm and flattery with self-confidence in order to win the game.

On the opera stage, seducers have a number of tools at their disposal in order to achieve their ends. An operatic seduction occurs in at least three ways. First, it is written into the dialogue of the drama. Secondly, the seduction is a visual phenomenon through the effects of staging, set design, and character acting. Finally, an operatic seduction is musical in that certain aspects of the music “say” things to observant listeners in much the same way that words speak to the audience. This creates a level of signification beyond merely the sung words. It is the interplay of these three parameters – words, action, and music – that gives an operatic seduction its multi-layered richness.

Furthermore, one must consider eighteenth-century audiences who, hearing and seeing the dramatic and musical cues of an imminent seduction, came to expect certain outcomes. As the interplay of artistic parameters becomes more complex, the object of seduction becomes unclear as well. The listening audience may become as much seducer and seducee as the characters on stage. Sometimes the parameters work in tandem, but at other times each creates an alternate or contradictory narrative for the seduction scene. For instance, what happens when the characters say no, but the music says yes? The purely musical aspect of the seduction presents interesting parallels or counterpoints to the verbal and dramatic action. It is possible to view this musical language as a third

voice, with its own vocabulary and syntax, which interacts with the male and female character on stage and mediates the space between the stage action and the audience.

Music alone, when it is divorced from a libretto or text, communicates through sonic information. But this does not limit music's meaning to the general and abstract. Scholars recognize music's capacity for embodying specific meaning through sonic topoi. Musical features thus take on a semiotic meaning that is communicated to an informed audience. In opera, the semiotic message of the music forms a sort of "text" that can be read not only by the audience, but also by the other characters in the drama (assuming, for the moment, that they can hear the music), interacting with their verbal texts. In a seduction scene, a male and female character exchange sung or spoken words on stage, and the musical voice alternately supports or challenges that text, foreshadows future events, or otherwise comments on a dramatic situation. In the genre of the seduction duet, specific musical features such as melodic imitation and paralleling, vocal register, and shortened melodic units play this semiotic role. It is difficult to pinpoint how this web of encoded meaning through the purely sonic aspect of music takes form; meaning tends to be composer-, genre-, or period-specific.

In the case of late eighteenth-century opera, Mozart is clearly a dominant figure. In his operatic works, Mozart showed a preference for small and large ensemble numbers, alongside the traditional arias, that provided insight into his characters. The male-female duet is one such ensemble number that is a standard in Mozart's repertory. The ways of structuring and signifying in these numbers was refined and twisted to suit various dramatic situations, including seductions. Mozart's contemporaries also created variations on the seduction duet, still pulling from the same toolbox of musical topoi to

create a level of musical communication that interacts with text. The meanings that form around these seduction situations communicate to the audience and can even seem to influence the on-stage action. Seduction is a game of coercion, and the music serves as one indicator of the seducer's skill and whether or not he or she will ultimately be successful in the endeavor. Taken together, these sonic indicators form a musical language, spoken by opera composers and understood by opera audiences.

The first chapter of this study will set the scene for an inquiry into this musical language of seduction. I will explore the love culture of the late eighteenth century, with particular attention to scientific and social constructions of gender and sexuality. Contemporary literature, print media, drama, and art will provide the basis for this inquiry. This was a culture that gave birth to the historical seducer Giacomo Casanova and piqued a renewed interest in the legendary seducer Don Juan, encapsulated by Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Here also, I will consider possible functions of literary or dramatic seductions. There may have been an obsession or voyeuristic vogue associated with watching or reading about the forbidden act of seduction. It is also possible that, given the makeup of the audience, seductions served a moralistic purpose or provided verification of stereotyped gender views that contrasted the strong, persuasive male with the weak, persuadable female. Finally, seduction scenes created a safe space where the exploration of deviant or illicit sexual behavior could be sanctioned.

My second chapter probes more deeply into models of operatic seduction and explains some of the topoi and structural signifiers that make up a musical vocabulary of seduction. I have purposely limited my study to Italian-language operas in order, on the one hand, to reduce problems of genre distinction, but also to posit Italian opera as a

cosmopolitan genre, where French culture, German musical traditions, and the Italian language came together. Mozart, whom historians have portrayed as the dominant composer and perhaps codifier of this semiotic vocabulary, is the focus of a third chapter. Seduction scenes from several of his operas are analyzed in light of the models presented in chapter 2. A discussion of *Don Giovanni*, however, is saved for the very end of the thesis. This work receives special attention because, as an opera based on the fictional Don Juan, it is sometimes viewed as a locus classicus of operatic seduction. The final chapter applies the same ideas to seduction duets by some of Mozart's lesser-known contemporaries. In these two analytical chapters, the musical vocabulary of seduction is understood in terms of its dramatic capabilities. The seduction paradigm is adapted to different dramatic situations involving different characters and different outcomes for the seducer. In the late eighteenth century, factors such as class, occupation, and age interacted with gender to determine socially appropriate male-female relationships. Different operatic characters and situations require different treatment, and paradigms or simple models become problematic. However, composers did draw on a common musical vocabulary of seduction to create these differentiated scenes, enhancing our understanding of the music's role in the drama.

Chapter 2

Sex, Seduction, and Culture

Late eighteenth-century European society was obsessed with men and women and the things they could do together. The Europe I refer to includes major cultural centers in France, Italy, and Austria, but France, above all, set the literary and artistic trends that became pervasively popular. Indeed, throughout the eighteenth century, French plays, novels, and paintings were widely disseminated in other countries and often provided the source material and inspiration for operas composed in Italy and elsewhere.²

Within this cultural community, a potpourri of ideas about sex, love, and libertinage was reflected in scientific, psychological, and artistic currents of the day. Conflicting strands of thought sought, at the same time, to draw clear distinctions between masculine and feminine and to conflate and confuse the two. Under the powerful authority of the Catholic Church, there was a strict emphasis on a clearly-defined morality, but for an increasingly secular society, the boundaries of morality and immorality were becoming hazier. There was a fascination with exploring the space in between the moral and the immoral. Eroticism, fueled by an explosion of scientific and psychological understandings of the male and female bodies, flooded the arts. If sexual license was morally reprehensible in the public sphere, it did not stop people from being

² Bruce Alan Brown, “*Lo specchio francese*: Viennese opera buffa and the legacy of French theatre,” in Mary Hunter and James Webster, eds., *Opera buffa in Mozart’s Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 50.

captivated by it in private. Novels and plays that were perhaps shocking, distasteful, and even sinful in the eyes of Church authority were nonetheless extremely popular. This popularity spread into the French countryside and spilled over France's borders as well, inducing censorship and denouncements by clergy. The Bishop of Châlons issued a pastoral letter in 1769 specifically for the purpose of condemning such *mauvais livres*, stating that these "impious and licentious books ... spill out from the capital and flow on into the provinces, where they destroy religion and morals."³ Literary seduction scenes seemed to satisfy the voyeuristic longings of a diverse public, who could then eagerly observe the pursuit of sexual immorality while still retaining the right to publicly condemn such actions.

Part of the fascination with sexual license in the late eighteenth century stemmed from an influx of physical and social scientific studies of sex that suggested an understanding of the libertine as a "natural" phenomenon. Carolus Linnaeus's biological classification systems, explained in *Systema naturae* (in its tenth edition by 1758), and Julien Offray de La Mettrie's *L'Homme machine* (1748) were widely circulated by mid-century.⁴ La Mettrie's work, which was originally published anonymously and faced severe censorship, presents an early justification of physical and sexual hedonism based on medical evidence. He concluded that physical sensations of pleasure were a result of chemical changes in the brain and nervous system. La Mettrie, an atheist as well, described man as merely a machine, whose purpose in life was to maximize this objective

³ Jean Marie Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts: Erotic Literature and its Readers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 6.

⁴ Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a machine*, Translated by Richard A. Watson and Maya Rybalka (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 1, 4.

experience of pleasure.⁵ Michel Foucault's famous study of sexuality in the eighteenth century (first volume published in 1976) also links the pleasures of sex to other physical pleasures such as music, food, and intoxication.⁶ In this age of biological discovery, renewed sexual enlightenment, and increasing secularism, there was a new goal for human existence: earthly happiness. Accordingly, long-accepted social constraints on sexuality were brought into question.

It should be noted that this sexual Enlightenment was directed at female minds and bodies as well as male ones. For the first time, female erotic desire was also subjected to explanation and study. Thomas Laqueur describes the eighteenth century as a major turning point in theorizing the human body because of the move from a one-sex (male-centered) to a two-sex model. Woman, once viewed as a physically incomplete version of man and a passive receptor of male desire, was now imbued with her own desires and physical characteristics.⁷ As we will see, women became active erotic agents in art and literature, even when the artists and authors themselves were male.

This growing body of knowledge about sex could also be applied to human interaction on a larger scale. Did unbridled sexuality threaten or enhance social order?

⁵ Aram Vartanian, "Trembley's Polyp, La Mettrie, and Eighteenth-Century French Materialism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 11 (1950): 261.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 3 (New York: Random House, 1990), 181.

⁷ Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1, 80. One of the main theories of gender difference popular before this sexual Enlightenment was based on the Aristotelian-Galenic theory of the four humors. Women were considered to have less heat than men because of underdeveloped genitalia, which was just like men's genitalia only located inside the body due to the female's lack of heat. Women's lack of heat pervaded their entire existence making them "imperfect men." Other competing gender concepts were based on Biblical arguments. For example, one theory proposed that because male and female were created in the image of deity, both with genderless souls. In other words, woman may be physically inferior to man physically, but through God's grace, she was his equal. Therefore, the mind and soul were sexless.

The taboos associated with libertinage, as well as the ideals of chastity were attacked as being merely arbitrary, imposed by a power-hungry clergy or an over-controlling state.⁸ John Cleland's 1749 novel *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, for example, presents a direct challenge to religious authority by declaring sex to be good and natural instead of vile and sinful.⁹ In fact, some authors went so far as to claim that chastity was to be avoided, because repressed sexuality would lead to self-mutilation, violence, and other social problems.¹⁰ Sex moved into the public sphere as something to be observed objectively from a scientific, and not merely a moral, perspective. The seducer was recast as a lab rat of sorts, an object of intense study and fascination.

The seducer was thus subjected to a variety of test situations in order to observe his actions and reactions. These "tests" were made safe for public consumption in the form of fictional literature and art. Sexual activity was presented for observation through the erotic paintings, novels, and diary accounts such as Giacomo Casanova's, which lay somewhere between autobiography and fiction. Fascinated readers and viewers wanted more; the methods of successful seducers were dissected in paramedical erotic manuals and how-to guides on arousal.¹¹ In this way, the literary seducer was something of a hero with special powers that could be studied and emulated. An accompanying proliferation of professional romantic seers and the manufacture and sale of "love potions" and other

⁸ George Sebastian Rousseau and Roy Porter, eds., *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2.

⁹ Rousseau and Porter, *Sexual Underworlds*, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹ Peter Wagner, "The discourse on sex, or sex as discourse," in Rousseau and Porter, *Sexual Underworlds*, 64.

sexual elixirs promised success for those wishing to imitate the heroic seducers of the fictional world.¹²

At the same time, theories of sexual excess condemned the seducer and even the seducee. Delirium, sexual abnormalities and dysfunctions, and other mental and physical illnesses were blamed on libertinage and over-arousal.¹³ Female characters seemed to be particularly prone to physical problems resulting from sexual excess. In Samuel-Auguste Tissot's novel, *De l'onanisme* (1760), for example, a female character succumbs to fatal convulsions while reading erotica and masturbating.¹⁴ Erotic novels presented male seducers as both heroic and tragic figures and revealed the "dangers" associated with hypersexuality. A tragic seducer was socially inept because he failed to achieve higher fulfillment in love. The Don Juan-style libertine was a prisoner of his own desires, who was condemned to a Sisyphean existence, doomed to repeat his actions and never be fulfilled. He was dysfunctional and out of control. These diverse castings of the seducer as hero, tragic figure, and pervert provided fertile material for fiction writers who could create highly-nuanced characters who were lovable, detestable, and pitiable, all at the same time.

Libertinage and Literature

In this late eighteenth-century environment of discovery and curiosity about human social activity, a discourse on sex flowed most liberally in the arts. Literature in

¹² Pierre Saint-Amand, *The Libertine's Progress: Seduction in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel*, Trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Hanover and London: Brown University Press, 1994), 6.

¹³ Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 2-3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41, 56.

particular experienced an explosion of interest in erotic subject matter. The French novelists led the way in the depiction of fictional seductions and graphic sexuality. Some examples include Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux's *The Virtuous Orphan, or, The Life of Marianne, Countess of ****** (1731) and *The Upstart Peasant* (1735), Antoine François Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731), Denis Diderot's *The Nun* (1760), and Prosper Jolyot de Crebillon's *The Wayward Head and Heart* (1738). Other authors outside of France who were influenced by this school include Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose *Elective Affinities* and even *Faust* describe seduction. Non-heteronormative sexualities also received treatment in this body of literature. Diderot's *The Nun* is an example of female-on-female eroticism, and Cleland's *Fanny Hill* depicts a sodomite culture among men, as well as many other types of sexual activity. Sexuality takes an especially dark turn near the end of the century, with depictions of horrific sexual violence in, for example, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) and the Marquis de Sade's *Juliette* (c. 1801). Many of these titles feature women, which bears witness to the increasing focus on women's sexuality and their role as agents in the seduction act, whether for good or evil.

In this body of literature, authors use numerous strategies to depict seduction. Literary seducer-types range from those who seek purely sexual enjoyment at anyone else's expense to tragic libertines with hearts of gold. Nonetheless, the one constant in all literary seduction scenes is dramatic tension. Tension and desire are the very substance of a seduction, and novelists played up these features to the extreme. In fact, this tension appears to be much more important than the actual fulfillment of the sexual desire; novels

often cut away at the very moment of consummation.¹⁵ This implied sex was perhaps more powerful than explicit description because it aroused the reader's imagination. Descriptions of slightly exposed body parts, indiscreet gazes, and innocent sighs had much the same effect of titillating and teasing the senses. Consider the following excerpt from Crébillon's *The Wayward Head and Heart*:

She threw me troubled glances, raised her eyes to heaven, let them fall tenderly upon me again, and seemed unable to tear them away. She kept giving heart-rending sighs, and there was something so natural and touching about her distress, she looked so lovely in her confusion, and filled me with such reverence, that if I had not already wished to please her she would surely have made me wish to do so then.¹⁶

Here, the reader is meant to identify with the young observer, following his imagination and mounting desire. In this way, erotic novels are a voyeuristic art form; the reader is always an implied third (or fourth or fifth) party to the seduction scene. Parallel examples can be found in the visual arts. In the French paintings below, the reader is an unobserved third party to the erotic situations depicted; the eyes of the subjects look away or at each other rather than at the observer.

¹⁵ Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 62. In many cases, these cut-aways were necessary in order to avoid censorship.

¹⁶ Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, *The Wayward Head and Heart*, trans. Barbara Bray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963): 61-62.



Figure 1: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, "The Bolt" c. 1778
Oil on canvas, 73 x 93 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 2: Jean-Honoré Fragonard, "The Stolen Kiss" 1787-89
Oil on canvas
The Hermitage, St. Petersburg



Figure 3: François Boucher, "The Interrupted Sleep" 1750
Oil on canvas
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

In art, as in literature, the emphasis on the build-up to sex rather than the actual act naturally brings the *methodology* more than the sexuality of the seducer into the limelight. In essence, the libertine novel is a method book on the art of persuasion, a type of sexual rhetoric if you will. Scholars of this body of work often point to persuasive techniques that draw on so-called natural human laws: "To seduce is to bring the other

person to give way to the insistence of desire, and to recognize, by means of a mechanism that is not so far removed from that of religious conversion, that the one who preaches the *law of pleasure* is right and that one must yield to that law” (emphasis mine).¹⁷ Desire and its fulfillment, then, were seen by some as natural, inescapable, and good. Religious metaphors relating to conversion are at work in this excerpt, but analogies to war and athletic contests are common as well. Fictional accounts of seduction spawned a dense network of over-metaphorization that described the sex act as crossing the threshold, riding a horse, or burning incense at the altar.¹⁸

Eroticism in literature reached its extreme in novels and plays that were downright pornographic, either because of the sheer amount of sexual activity depicted or its explicitness. French culture in particular, which exerted strong influence over Italian and German cultural centers at this time, possessed an obscene “high culture” of pornography.¹⁹ Many dismissed these works as trifling, diversionary leisure reads, but church leaders vehemently attacked them. They claimed that reading such texts could easily corrupt the heart and impel the reader to sinful action, erotic frenzy, loss of religion, or other types of physical and moral sully.²⁰ Printers of pornographic literature ranged from reputable companies to underground private enterprises. Avignon was the French center for printing this type of literature in the late eighteenth century. The sale of pornography was part of a general reaction against the Church and ruling

¹⁷ Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹ Rousseau and Porter, *Sexual Underworlds*, 14.

²⁰ Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 7-8, 21.

monarchy in pre-revolutionary France. Buyers came from all segments of society, ranging from the nobility to the underclass.²¹

This high culture of pornography was, however, not merely about reading. The language used to describe this type of literature reveals a strong bias towards the visual as well as the written text. The French word “obscène,” often used to describe pornography, carries the embedded implication of a sexual “scène,” denoting a theatrical and visual experience. The word supports an emphasis on the voyeuristic culture that sought to observe sexuality from multiple artistic points of view. In fact, the novel itself was something of a multimedia experience, with illustrated title-pages, frontespieces, and inserts that revealed some of the lascivious content of the book. Others had witty titles, subtitles and insignias that might allude to other obscene works of art or literature. These were ways that books with perhaps less revealing titles could set themselves apart and proclaim, “I am a pornographic novel” to potential buyers.²² This type of signification that references many different art forms is applicable to the operatic seduction. Its music, like the artwork in a novel, creates a subtext and can send very strong messages as to the content of the work without (or in spite of) the text.

Contemporary visual artists also depicted the actual act of reading, further blurring lines between the two media. The titillating effect of reading erotic literature was particularly interesting to painters, who sought to capture the very private responses of readers. Pierre-Antoine Baudouin’s portrait “Le Midi” (c. 1760) (shown below), for

²¹ Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 16-17, 24.

²² *Ibid.*, 82-110.

example, depicts a young girl who has been consumed by the erotic literature lying at her feet and is presumably masturbating while being gazed at by a statue of a male bust.²³



Figure 4: Emmanuel de Ghendt, “Le Midi” c. 1760
Print by Ghendt after a gouache by P. A. Baudouin
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

This double voyeurism – firstly by the unmoving statue and secondly by the viewer of the portrait – reflects a keen interest in the visual and tactile aspects of erotica. Pornographic literature was itself seductive, grabbing all of the senses at once. “The eyes do not read, they look”; the effects of the gaze are more important than the actual words on the page.²⁴ These examples are indicative of the eighteenth-century public’s particular taste for art’s commentary on love, through a variety of media.

²³ Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

Masculinity, Femininity, and Seduction

Seducers are usually (though, as we will see, not always) male figures. Regardless of the gender of the seducer, he or she exerts a type of power over the seduced, even if only for a moment. Roland Barthes, in *A Lover's Discourse*, reminds us that "the lover – the one who has been ravished – is always feminized."²⁵ The main reasons for this can be traced to eighteenth-century ideas about masculinity and femininity. The feminine sphere was much more private, as opposed to the public and at times overtly political masculine sphere. As private figures, women commanded an air of mystery, and, accordingly, society often marked them as weak and suspicious characters.²⁶

The new physical and social scientific atmosphere proclaimed that women were natural and fully sexual creatures who most definitely experienced sexual desires, but this did not mean that old ideas about sexual difference disappeared. Society still viewed the new, sexualized woman somewhat derisively. Art and literature of the time depict women fulfilling their natural desires, often with disastrous effects. To cite just a few examples, Laclos's heroine, Madame Merteuil, succumbs to a dreadful fever and deformities as a result of her promiscuity, and Diderot's nun, Suzanne, suffers blackouts and hallucinations. The assumption was that all women, especially married ones, were potential whores who needed to be watched very closely.²⁷ For a man in this culture, sexual freedom was generally accepted as natural and perhaps even socially desirable; seduction was a way of emphasizing one's masculinity. As a result of cultural

²⁵ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 188-89.

²⁶ Rousseau and Porter, *Sexual Underworlds*, 4.

²⁷ Randolph Trumbach, "Modern prostitution and gender in *Fanny Hill*: libertine and domesticated fantasy," in Rousseau and Porter, *Sexual Underworlds*, 73.

constructions of femininity and the practical realities of reproduction, she-seducers suffered harsher criticism and more severe consequences.

In the more normative situation, with a male seducing a female, a number of character types emerge. Together, they help us form a picture of the range of sexual identities attributed to men and women in the eighteenth century. For the female seducee, character types were distinguished by the degree to which they were willing participants in the seduction drama. The coquette, for example, is a popular type. She feigns disinterest or prudery, but in the end gets the sexual fulfillment she desires. In a way, she is like a passive seductress and is, in the process, masculinized to some degree. The angelic virgin lies at the other extreme. The sexual simpleton, a variant of the angelic virgin, requires a sexual education, and the seducer is the one to provide it for her. The libertine as a teacher figure appears frequently in the works of Laclos and, in a much darker way, those of the Marquis de Sade. Laclos's character Cecile in *Les Liaisons* (1782), for example, is portrayed as a sensual but naïve girl who has strong desires but does not know how to channel them. Her education comes at the hands of her two seducers, Valmont and Merteuil.²⁸ Some other female types include the whore, the redeemable whore, the exotic enigma, the respectable (possibly married) loose woman, and the older, experienced one.

Just as there are types of female seducees, there are also categories of male seducers. The "Casanova" label is a heroic eponym that denotes a sexually successful man. There seems to be no equivalent title for women that carried the same glorification without shame. Foucault names two main categories of seducers – those who want the

²⁸ Saint-Amand, *The Libertine's Progress*, 97.

woman to submit in a voluntary union and those who seek no connection other than the sexual encounter.²⁹ The former type is significantly less macho, because his pleasure is more dependent on the other; his self-affirmation is contingent upon the response of his seducee. Mimesis and play-acting form a large part of his arsenal, as he holds up an idealized image of himself to others, hoping for the imitation and submission that will translate into his own self-love.³⁰

On the other hand, the merely sex-driven seducer has completely separated the emotional aspect (“love”) from the physical (“sex”) and, as such, is more concerned with the game of seduction than the female individual per se. In these cases, the female seducees may as well be interchangeable. This emotional separation is part of the macho aspect of a seduction. Roland Barthes explains this in his preface to Renaud Camus’s *Tricks* (1978), a collection of erotic short-stories from the first person perspective:

The trick ... is a virtual love, deliberately stopped short on each side; by contract [it is] a submission to the cultural code which identifies cruising with Don Juanism. The tricks repeat themselves; the subject is on a treadmill.³¹

Love is feigned in order to achieve an end. Don Juans, as Barthes suggests, are not at all concerned with love; rather, they are cool, calculating, and highly-skilled professionals. As in a chess match, the acts of the libertine are part of a dialectical process – clearly, the domain of the head and not the heart.

However, a closer examination of fictional seducer figures reveals that these are not either/or categorizations. Literature suggests that we cannot view the seducer as a

²⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, 75. See also Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts*, 50.

³⁰ Saint-Amand, *The Libertine’s Progress*, 90.

³¹ Roland Barthes, “Prelude to *Tricks*,” in Renaud Camus, *Tricks: 25 Encounters*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), ix.

completely one-dimensional hedonist, nor as a pathetic egoist. The Casanova's life is glamorously macho but also morally complex. This is true of the real Giacomo Casanova as well; we learn from his memoirs that, while he often acted selfishly, he was very much concerned about the pleasure of his partners as well. He wanted his conquests to submit freely, because he believed that, deep down, they too wanted pleasure. Later in life, Casanova began to rethink his hedonistic philosophy of pleasure for pleasure's sake, perhaps understanding that his youthful definition of pleasure was not shared by all those around him.³² Similarly, the title character of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* might be said to be a combination of both types of seducers discussed above. There is certainly an insensitive coldness about the Don's seductive maneuvers. But along with this macho element there exists a pathetic one; in our post-Freudian culture, we might understand the Don's excessive and obsessive search for women as symptomatic of his low self-esteem or a lack of connection to other human beings. This reading perhaps draws too heavily on popular psychology, but it gets at the basic effectiveness of the opera's plot. The ending is only heartfelt because of the complexity of the Don's character, as revealed through his seductive interactions with all those around him. We experience something of a love / hate relationship with him, at the same time cheering, condemning, and pitying him.

³² Giacomo Casanova, *History of My Life*, Vol. 1-2, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959).

Chapter 3

Towards a Musical Vocabulary of Seduction

The cultural and literary fascination with the seducer is paralleled in the late eighteenth-century musical world as well. As with the erotic novel, opera is a space where sexuality and morality can be worked out, and, for the audience, the consequences are minimal. It is a safe space. Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* are both artistic manifestations of the scientific experiments in the air at the time. Both place love under the microscope. They allow us to both explore and perhaps cast judgment on seducers and seduction in a sort of laboratory environment. The appropriate conditions (i.e., the fictional world) allow us to enjoy the pleasures of music and drama without the risk or consequences involved with enacting these scenes in real life. Furthermore, the opera stage offers many avenues for interpretation of love and seduction. Being a multimedia art form, opera communicates this atmosphere of seduction through the combination the visual, verbal, and musical aspects of performance. I will focus now on the least explicit of these three means of communication, the musical vocabulary of seduction, and explore how specific musical symbols form a language that can be understood by informed audiences.

Theorizing Musical Topoi

Much writing about music from all historical periods focuses on a central question: how do composers communicate with their audiences? While the compositional goal of communication has not always been universally accepted (for instance, by proponents of absolute music or certain strands of esoteric or avant-garde music), it was an especially important concern for Classical-period composers. Music needed to express something, even if that something could not be explicitly named. The literary arts, for the very reason of their explicitness, were held in very high esteem by theorists of the Classical period. They made comparisons between modes of verbal discourse, especially oratory, and music's "language" and "rhetoric." Language analogies are found in the writings of nearly all major music theorists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including Johann Mattheson, Heinrich Koch, Francesco Galeazzi, and Johann Friedrich Daube.

For the purpose of communicating meaning, it was thought that vocal music had an advantage over instrumental music because of its directness in expression by virtue of its text. In 1802, Koch writes: "It remains an established fact that vocal music retains a marked and undeniable advantage over pure instrumental music."³³ The elevated status of vocal music, including opera, was due to the fact that it could directly correlate meaning (words) and means of expression (music). Mattheson, in his work on musical style and technique, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739) underscores this perceived primacy:

³³ Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon, welches die theoretische und praktische Tonkunst, encyclopädisch bearbeitet, alle alten und neuen Kunstwörter erklärt, und die alten und neuen Instrumente beschrieben, enthält* (Frankfurt am Main, 1802), 894.

“The first distinction between vocal music and instrumental music ... is that the first is the mother, the second the daughter.”³⁴ Instrumental music took its cues from the musical figures commonly used to express meaning in vocal music. Later, in the nineteenth century, the situation became nearly reversed; purely instrumental music was valued by some for its ability to convey a message that is beyond words and unique to the musical artwork. Eighteenth-century theoretical writings, however, link text, expression, and music in a positive way, and seek to explain how composers of both instrumental and vocal music drew from a specific musical vocabulary. As the highest form of vocal music in the Classical period, opera was a prime breeding ground for the formation of this semiosis.

Specific elements in this vocabulary are often called “topics.” Kofi Agawu defines topics as “musical signs. They consist of a signifier (a certain disposition of musical dimensions) and a signified (a conventional stylistic unit, often but not always referential in quality).”³⁵ Wye J. Allanbrook explains the expressive vocabulary of musical content as “a collection in music of what in the theory of rhetoric are called *topoi*, or topics for formal discourse.”³⁶ Interpreting *topoi* requires a historical consciousness; we must attempt to place ourselves in the world of the eighteenth-century listener to some degree to understand the semiotic system in place at that time. But this is not as difficult as it seems, because we still experience many of the effects of this system.

³⁴ Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister: das ist gründliche Anzeige aller derjenigen Sachen, die einer wissen, können, and vollkommen inne haben muss, der einer Capelle mit ehren und nutzen vorstehen Will* (Hamburg: Verlegts Christian Herold, 1739), 204.

³⁵ Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classical Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 49.

³⁶ Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1983), 2.

In other words, modern listeners often perceive the expressive meaning of the topoi even if they do not know their origins.³⁷ Topoi exist on both large and small scales in music. Symbolic musical elements may range from specific intervals or rhythms to larger structural devices, such as tempos, meter, key, and long-range harmonic motion. The result is a network of signs that formed a common vocabulary understood by audiences and composers alike. This common network approaches a definition of style.

Within the rich semiotic world of Classical opera, I examine one particular type of dramatic situation – the seduction – and explore the semiotic vocabulary that gives the music voice. When Mattheson and Koch praised vocal music for its direct expression, they recognized the potential for music both to enhance the meaning of the words and to create new meaning. Semiologically supercharged in this way, music could in a sense speak for itself in non-verbal (i.e. instrumental) contexts. Good composers viewed music not merely as support for the opera libretto; when inscribed with meaning, music could add layers of nuance to a dramatic situation, even where verbal text was absent or obscured in some way.

Categories of Seduction Semiosis

In the particular domain of the seduction duet, there are a number of topoi that formed the musical vocabulary for Mozart and his contemporaries. These seduction topoi will be discussed and understood for their semiotic meaning in the specific situation of the seduction duet.

Extended-coda form. The most important defining aspect of an operatic seduction is the dramatic tension it entails. There is uncertainty at the beginning of the duet that

³⁷ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 3.

reaches a point of crisis and is finally resolved, either in favor of the seducer or not. As a result, the articulation of the seduction drama tends to reflect this development and resolution. A problem emerges, however, when the progressive drama of the seduction is wedded with typical Classical forms where musical material is recapitulated, such as ABA or sonata form. The repetition of text and music from the beginning of the scene is dramatically awkward, especially if the seduction has been resolved and then the music and/or text return to a moment before this resolution. The transposition of the music into the tonic key for a recapitulation also has consequences for singers; their vocal lines must sometimes be altered to accommodate ranges, and as a result, the semiotic meaning of the music can similarly be altered.

A common solution to these compositional problems is to articulate the seduction drama through a modified sonata or ABA form, with an extended coda. In this way, the moment of highest dramatic tension can occur *after* the musical material is recapitulated. The extended coda allows for a more dramatic break from the tension-filled first part of the duet, sometimes utilizing a new tempo, meter, texture, etc. An extended coda also befits the seduction duet because the resolution or moment of repose after the winners and losers of the seduction have been determined needs to balance the previous sections.

One of Johann Mattheson's formal models, based on rhetorical oratory, can be applied to the seduction duet. Mattheson's sequence of exordium – narratio – propositio – confutatio – confirmatio – peroratio was used by theorists during sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.³⁸ This model was meant to be applied to larger forms, but may also be applicable on a condensed scale to smaller vocal genres. When applied to the seduction duet, the exordium and narratio usually occur in the recitative section that

³⁸ Agawu, *Signs*, 52.

precedes the duet proper. The proposition and confutation map onto what I will refer to as the “proposal” and “response” sections of the duet, where the conflict between the two characters is exposed. The confirmation is equivalent to my terminology of “climax.” This is where one of the characters either confirms or denies the others’ advances. Finally, in the peroration, or “resolution” section, tension dissipates, and a final decision is sealed. This common sequence of events in the drama of a seduction duet, shown in Figure 5, is mirrored in the musical form.

Section of seduction duet	Proposal	Response	Intensification	Climax	Resolution
Corresponding section from Mattheson	Propositio	Confutatio	---	Confirmatio	Peroratio
Description	First character extends invitation	Second character introduces conflict	Both continue to debate the outcome	Outcome is decided	Outcome is played out

Figure 5: The sections of a dramatic seduction.

Changes in meter and tempo. Wye J. Allanbrook’s book on topoi in Mozart’s operas examines many rhythmic gestures and genres and their semiotic significance. The social dance, the exalted *alla breve* march, the pastoral 6/8, the happy 4/4 gavotte, and others are used for dramatic purposes in Mozart’s operas.³⁹ The choice of certain meters and tempi, Allanbrook argues, was a large part of Mozart’s musical vocabulary and late-eighteenth-century culture at large. Allanbrook argues that if the meter or tempo change in the course of an operatic number, this signifies a shift of genre or topos. I suggest that the change in meter or tempo is itself a topos. In the seduction duet, such a shift often

³⁹ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 13-17.

occurs at the climactic moment, reflecting the decision made by the characters on stage. As a musical gesture, this change, or what follows it, can either confirm, contradict, or comment on the situation presented in the verbal text alone.

Key. The study of keys or key areas as topoi is somewhat controversial, especially if we accept that the idea of communication to an audience was as a major compositional goal for Mozart and his contemporaries. Listeners without perfect pitch may not have been able to perceive a key, but they might have recognized a set of musical gestures and figures particular to that key. In this sense, key could have semiotic meaning. Furthermore, some scholars have argued convincingly for a composer-centered notion of key characteristics. Rita Steblin's work on key characteristics cites earlier treatises that address the affects of particular keys, and she makes a convincing argument that composers of the Classical era used keys expressively. She argues that the physical feel, sound, or characteristic figurations of a certain key influenced composers to use them to evoke specific moods.⁴⁰ Tim Carter has shown how Mozart in particular consistently used certain keys in certain contexts.⁴¹ For Mozart, the key of A major is used almost exclusively for love scenes, or more particularly, for scenes involving "amorous persuasion."⁴²

This is especially evident in the two A major ensemble numbers in *Don Giovanni*. Alfred Einstein exclaims, "What an A major is this! Consider the seduction duet 'Là ci darem la mano,' and the trio of temptation, 'Ah, taci, ingiusto core'! The music is full to

⁴⁰ Rita Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983).

⁴¹ Tim Carter, *W. A. Mozart, Le Nozze di Figaro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁴² Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer, 1980), 398.

the brim with sensuousness; another drop and it would overflow.”⁴³ Einstein clearly sensed something about the music itself, apart from the text, which was sensuous and seductive. The analyses presented in Chapter 4 suggest that A major does not have special significance in the broader world of eighteenth-century opera, but it does have special meaning for Mozart. In his operas, this key-topos immediately draws the listener in to an atmosphere of love and possibly seduction as well.

The pastoral. One metrical genre that is particularly pertinent to the seduction duet is what Allanbrook calls the peasant or pastoral mode, in 6/8 meter. The compound duple meter gives this topos a dance-like quality. This rhythmic mode is often combined with a musette texture; its simple harmonies and drone bass imitate the bagpipes and recall other peasant instruments.⁴⁴ The vocal duet in parallel thirds or sixths is another musical characteristic that evokes the simplicity and accord of a pastoral setting. Parallel thirds or sixths in this context symbolize consent, usually in conjunction with change of tempo and meter in the coda section of the duet. All of these generic elements combine to evoke the pastoral in the seduction duet. The pastoral symbolizes a wide range of things. Allanbrook links the pastoral primarily with class, but for the purposes of this study, two other connotations are important – nature and sexual license. The implication is that sex is part of the “natural” world of human events and is therefore not something to be resisted. It is clear, then, why a seducer might benefit from a musical setting evocative of the pastoral; the musical setting makes an argument for the desirability and naturalness of sex and creates a safe musical space for sexual exploration.

⁴³ Alfred Einstein, “Mozart’s Choice of Keys,” *The Musical Quarterly* 27 (1941): 416.

⁴⁴ Ratner, *Classic Music*, 21.

Imitative phrase structure. Vocal phrases between the two singers in a seduction duet are arranged in a particular way, and these two vocal lines usually relate to each other musically through imitation. The concept of mimesis informs a study of musical imitation. By echoing, or miming, the seducer, the respondent affirms him or her. The seducer's desire for the other is often a veiled desire for the self. Imitation is music to the seducer's ears, so to speak, because it confirms and affirms these desires. In this sense, imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery.

For the two characters in a seduction duet, the imitation of each other's melodies indicates an early stage in the drama where propositions are made and responses are returned. Typically, one character (usually the man) gives an opening musical statement that is harmonically simple and rhythmically square; in other words, it is easily imitable. The other character then answers back with essentially the same musical material (although it may be transposed or slightly altered to accommodate different harmonic underpinning) and with a text expressing complementary emotions. This process of proposal and repetition of textual and musical material may occur several more times, often with the phrases shortening as the urgency and breathlessness of love washes over the participants. As a moment of decision approaches, the exactness or inexactness of this melodic mimicry is a way for the music to comment on the situation and add something to the drama.

The concept of mimesis, then, is applied here to opera, not as the imitation of the outside world in music (e.g. bird calls and ticking clocks), but as the imitation of the *other's* music in a character's own music. Music is a mirror that reveals the intentions of the characters on stage. The seduction duet is a very critical mirror-holding moment,

where the seducer presents himself or herself, hoping for affirmation in the form of imitation. On a larger scale, the music of seduction holds a mirror to the audience. The popularity of comic opera was in part due to its depiction of workaday situations and sympathetic characters, because in this type of drama audiences saw themselves and their own culture and could easily relate to the situations on the stage.

The idea of symmetry is closely related to the imitative musical structures I am discussing here. Symmetry as an ideal became important in the Classical period, in the visual arts and architecture as well as music.⁴⁵ Theorists began writing about antecedent and consequent phrases and tonal questions and answers as articulation devices to make ideas more understandable. In the seduction duet, the balance of two voices – male and female – evoked this idea of symmetry, and it is often a theme throughout the number, involving melodic trading and tonal balance. Rousseau in 1768, for example, addresses vocal duets and the importance of dialogue between voices and equality of voices rather than one standing out as more important than the other.⁴⁶ Furthermore, in 1802, Koch writes about the distinction between oppositional (dramatic dialogue) duets and those dedicated to the expression of a single sentiment.⁴⁷ The seduction duet, depending on the outcome, could balance both of these types, displaying conflict at the beginning and solidarity of mind at the end. The interplay of musical voice and texted voice could allow

⁴⁵ Ratner, *Classic Music*, 36.

⁴⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (Genève: Aux Deux-Ponts, Chez Sanson et compagnie, 1782), 179ff.

⁴⁷ Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon*, 499.

for conflict and resolution to coexist as well, creating dramatic tension. Composers could then manipulate this symmetry and balance for expressive purposes.⁴⁸

Climax mapped onto harmonic structure. Because the seduction duet is, by my definition, a dramatic rather than a static number, there is always a climactic moment. The situation is uncertain at the beginning of the number, the drama reaches a climax, and it is finally resolved. This climactic moment can also be mapped onto the overall harmonic and melodic structure of the piece; the high point of the drama often coincides with the literal high point of the melody and the height of dominant-area harmonic tension. Similarly, the resolution of the drama is paired with harmonic resolution back to tonic for the coda portion of the duet.

To summarize, the topoi presented here could be combined to construct a model for the seduction duet. This model would be characterized by the following:

- short vocal duet for male and female soloists in an extended-coda form
- a change of tempo and meter for the extended-coda resolution section
- parallel thirds or sixths and a drone bass in the resolution section (coda)
- imitative phrase structure, symmetry and balance between the two voices
- a melodic intensification that leads to a climax on the dominant harmony
- a high point in the vocal line that coincides with the climax

This model should be kept in mind for the analyses that follow. However, it will be seen that the plot and characterizations specific to each example studied below influence the use and manipulation of the various seduction topoi. As a result, this model

⁴⁸ Ratner, *Classic Music*, 169.

is flexible, and actual seduction duets only conform to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the requirements of the drama. Just as it is difficult to talk about a Classical “style,” so too is it problematic to create simplistic musical and dramatic models and expect them to map onto actual seductions in the operatic repertory. The “model” presented here is constructed from a few famous examples and a compilation of traits from various seduction duets, but deviations provide the most interest for the analyst. Variants and reinterpretations of the seduction topoi make room for remarkable dramatic interplay between spoken and musical voice.

Chapter 4

Mozart's Seduction Duets

Mozart's operas provide a starting point for the analysis of this musical vocabulary in context. The case studies presented here were selected for the dramatic tension they entail and the use of topoi outlined in chapter 2. The seduction label is not always clearly applicable; in many cases, the dramatic situations and characters' previous relationships complicate the interpretation of a duet and make definitive categorization impossible. In these cases, a more nuanced reading of the interaction between the two characters' voices and the musical voice is necessary; ambiguity appears to be the norm. As a result, although one might be tempted to start with *Don Giovanni*, given its eponymous hero's reputation as a seducer, and still more, to treat the Don's seduction of the peasant girl, Zerlina, in the Act I duet "Là ci darem la mano" as somehow paradigmatic of seduction duets—as many scholars have viewed it—its status now becomes somewhat problematic. It, too, is beholden to the demands of the drama, providing a window into the Don's dominant, manipulative, and hyper-sexualized interactions with women, but more, it will seem from an examination of other seductions by Mozart and his contemporaries, as an exaggeration, rather than a representative model, of seduction topoi. This effect perfectly complements the Don's grossly exaggerated vulgarity as a character. Through the careful choice, manipulation, and even subversion

of the seduction topoi discussed above, Mozart showed his command of a musical vocabulary that could highlight the meaning of the text *and* express meaning on its own terms.

Le nozze di Figaro (1786)

Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte collaborated on three *opere buffe*, all of which contain seduction moments with interesting twists. In *Le nozze di Figaro*, the Count's "seduction" of Susanna in "Crudel! Perchè finora" exhibits many of the musical features discussed in chapter 2. There is an opening section of alternating male and female statements, a middle section where their parts overlap and run together, and a final section of tight parallel thirds. Although the number begins in the key of A minor, it quickly shifts to the major mode, referencing the love idiom. But the power situation between the Count and Susanna represents a reversal of the norm. The woman, Susanna, appears to be holding the dramatic and musical reins. It is her agency that determines the outcome of the number. The Count's opening proposal segment lacks confidence and assurance of success:

Count: Crudel! Perché finora farmi languir così?	Cruel one, why have you Made me suffer for so long?
Susanna: Signor, la donna ognora tempo ha dir di sì.	My Lord, a woman always Takes her time to say yes.
C: Dunque, in giardin verrai?	Then you'll meet me in the garden?
S: Se piace a voi, verrò.	If you wish it, I will.
C: E non mi mancherai?	And you won't fail me?
S: No, non vi mancherò.	No, I won't fail you.

C:	Verrai?	Really?
S:	Si!	Yes!
C:	Non mancherai?	You won't fail?
S:	No!	No!

In fact, the Count's opening text consists entirely of questions, whereas Susanna's responses are more emphatic, greatly increasing her power in this situation. She acknowledges her choice in her opening line, "In time we women grant you what we at first deny." She is the one who chooses to go through with this experiment, feigning a love interest in the Count, and, in effect, stringing him along. In the midst of all these questions, Susanna's self-assuredness is contrasted with the Count's hesitancy, and this is underscored in the music by her downbeat attacks in comparison to the Count's upbeat attacks:

The image shows a musical score for Susanna and the Count. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows Susanna's vocal line (treble clef) and the Count's vocal line (bass clef). Susanna's lyrics are: "No, non vi man-che rò. Si! No!". The Count's lyrics are: "Ver-ra - i? Non man-che-ra - i? Dun-que ver-ra - i?". The second system shows Susanna's vocal line (treble clef) and the Count's vocal line (bass clef). Susanna's lyrics are: "No! Si! se — pia - ce a voi, ver - rò.". The Count's lyrics are: "No?". The music features rhythmic patterns that emphasize the contrast between the characters' attitudes.

Figure 6: Mozart, "Crudel! Perchè finora," mm. 41-48.

In addition, Susanna does not adopt the Count's music; they achieve no real musical unity until the parallel thirds section in the last ten measures, which seems to be more for musical reasons than to signal any kind of agreement between the characters. The middle section of this seduction is particularly long, de-emphasizing the drama of seduction and re-emphasizing the Count's lack of confidence as he continues to ask for reassurance even after Susanna's repeated affirmative responses. The resolution section is thus ironic because Susanna is pretending, and the Count thinks she really is falling for his feeble advances. In the end, "Crudel! Perchè finora" cannot be considered a successful seduction. It is a pathetic attempt on the part of the Count, whose efforts are undercut by a clever and calculating woman. Dramatically, this number serves to further the action of two sub-plots: the Count's unfaithfulness and Susanna's manipulations of Figaro.

Così fan tutte (1790)

Ferrando's seduction of Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, is a more successful venture, but again it plays with the model to suit a different dramatic situation, thoroughly integrated into the opera's plot. When his friend, Guglielmo, succeeds in seducing Dorabella, Ferrando does not want to be outdone. Unlike Don Giovanni, Ferrando is not a seasoned seducer, but he is desperately trying to be one. He is not only "playing" the role of seducer; he is also in disguise as a mysterious and handsome Albanian. This double-layered role-playing complicates the seduction moment in "Fra gli amplessi in pochi istanti." Is it real or just a fake drama-within-a-drama? The music offers some clues.

Structurally, this duet is longer, more sectional, and more harmonically complex than the model. The opening proposal and response are strange. Fiordiligi begins with an affirmation of her fidelity to Guglielmo. The fact that the woman proposes and the man responds seems to be an inversion of the normative model. But in this case, Fiordiligi's opening statement perhaps reflects this opera's focus on women as experimental subjects and possessors of sexual desire. As the opera's title suggests, the women's devotion and reputation are placed under the microscope. Like much contemporaneous literature, an air of scientific discovery pervades the drama, as love and seduction are tested in laboratory-like conditions.

After her proposal, Ferrando, in desperation, adopts a last-ditch strategy of pleading with Fiordiligi, saying that he would rather die than go on without her. Like the Count in *Figaro*, Ferrando seems somewhat desperate and lacks the carefree confidence that we might expect from a seducer. Perhaps as a sign of this ineffectiveness, Ferrando and Fiordiligi do not imitate each other musically. Instead, they inhabit two different thematic and even tonal worlds. His own mental instability (either feigned or real) is mirrored by tonal instability; his response moves us to the flat III key area of C major. Susanna, too, explored C major tonality in "Crudel! Perchè finora."

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a duet from Mozart's opera. The top system is for Ferrando, and the bottom system is for Fiordiligi. Both parts are in D major (two sharps) and 8/8 time. Ferrando's melody is more active, while Fiordiligi's is more static, with long rests. The lyrics are in Italian, with some words split across lines.

Figure 7: Mozart, “Fra gli amplessi.” Beginning of C major section, mm. 15-24.

This long foray into C major involves, for the first time in this number, the trading of similar musical ideas and phrase overlap between the two characters, but extended motivic unity between the two parts is lacking. Fiordiligi hints at her eventual capitulation by emphasizing her growing weakness, saying “non son piú forte” (“my strength is failing”). A very short segment in parallel sixths also serves as a foreshadowing of the eventual success of the seduction:

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Mozart's opera. The first system features two vocal staves: the top staff is for Fiordiligi and the bottom for Ferrando. Both staves are in treble clef with a common time signature. The lyrics for both characters are: "In - co - min - cia a va - cil - lar, in - co - min - cia a va - cil -". The second system continues the vocal lines, with lyrics: "lar, in - co - min - cia a va - cil - lar." for both characters. The piano accompaniment is shown in a bass clef staff below the vocal staves, providing harmonic support with a steady eighth-note pattern.

Figure 8: Mozart, “Fra gli amplessi.” Parallel sixths, mm. 51-57.

Ferrando does begin to adopt an imperative tone towards the end of this section with lines like “Don’t resist me” and “say you love me.” After a long and winding fifty-plus measures of phrase-trading and intensification, there is a climax. Fiordiligi’s outburst on the high A indicates her final submission:

Figure 9: Mozart, “Fra gli amplessi.” First climax and resolution, mm. 72-77.

Ferrando goes on to assure her that his love is sincere and tender with a return to the original key of A major, before they both launch into a genuine “resolution” section with parallel thirds and tonic harmony. Typically, the resolution section is set apart by a new tempo and time signature:

Figure 10: Mozart, “Fra gli amplessi.” Second resolution, mm. 100-103.

Throughout this long, sectional, and wandering number, Ferrando’s sincerity is questionable. He clearly does not want to be outdone by his friend Guglielmo, but it is difficult to tell whether his character really wants to be paired with Fiordiligi or with his

original lover, Dorabella. This dramatic ambiguity and his physical disguise certainly tinge an analysis of this seduction. In fact, the question is not so much whether or not Fiordiligi gives in, which she clearly does, but whether we, the audience, are seduced by Ferrando's music. He seems to follow her musical lead more than the other way around, and his desperate strategy of love me or kill me certainly underscores his dependence on Fiordiligi. As a seducer, Ferrando begins the number rather impotently, but he does eventually achieve his goal of winning Fiordiligi. Perhaps the long and winding musical setting tells us that Fiordiligi is an especially difficult sell and needs more work than the typical seducee. Perhaps Ferrando is simply a better lover than a seducer, waxing eloquent and poetic when he should be persuading and maneuvering. These interpretations come to bear on the audience's understanding of the opera as a whole, as they try to piece together who belongs with whom in the confusion and mixing of couples.

La finta giardiniera (1775)

La finta giardiniera is one of Mozart's earliest operas, composed when he was only eighteen years of age, yet the musical language of seduction is just as well-developed here as in his later masterpieces. The Act III number "Tu mi lasci" is equal parts seduction duet and recognition duet. As in "Fra gli amplessi," the two characters know each other, but a disguise complicates the situation. The Marchioness Violante is masquerading as the maid, Sandrina. She is concealing herself because she wants to spy on her former lover, Belfiore, who stabbed her and left her for dead a year ago. She learns, much to her surprise and dismay, that he is betrothed to Arminda. Throughout the

opera, Sandrina slowly reveals her true identity to Belfiore. Their duet occurs just before the finale, when they are left alone to recognize each other fully and to rekindle their past love. Because of the complications of Belfiore's engagement, they determine to part ways. But by the end of the duet, they have mutually seduced one another, deciding that they must be together at any cost. It is clear, not only from the placement of the number at the end of the opera, but also from the musical layout, that this duet is a point of climax and decision. The music progresses through various tempos and meters to suggest the progression of the characters' recognition not only of identity, but of their love for each other.

This time in the key of B flat major, "Tu mi lasci" opens with Belfiore's proposal. It is echoed by Sandrina, although inexactly, with ornamentation, and expanded by two measures. After the opening statements, the two characters exchange shorter phrases and join together from time to time, although generally not in parallel motion. There is more often contrary and oblique motion between their two melodies in this opening section. A climax is reached just before the tempo change, with a melodic high point in the soprano (A flat), under an extended pedal tone of E flat in the bass. The insistent repetition of the bass E flat is paralleled by the insistence of the text: "Courage, I must be resolute and go away from here." After the climax, the meter shifts from duple to triple, and the tempo quickens from adagio to andantino. Mode also shifts here; the E flat major emphasis before this tempo and meter change is replaced by the relative minor, C minor. A new tempo shifts us from Adagio to a more jaunty Andantino, and from duple to triple meter:

Sandrina

Andantino

Figure 11: Mozart, “Tu mi lasci?” First climax, mm. 48-55.

The fact that both characters utter this line about courage shows that they are of one mind, both of them outwardly determined to leave but inwardly unable to resist. The melodic high points in both voices occur on the word “si.” Although it is actually the reflexive pronoun in this context, it also might represent “sì,” the character’s mutual agreement and capitulation. The characters are insistent in their verbal texts, but the music foreshadows their eventual capitulation.

The shift to the minor mode and the new meter of 3/8 is rather abrupt, indicating a change in the character’s intentions as well. In this C minor section, simple harmonies and even simpler rhythms abound. Short phrases and parallel harmonies lead to another

tempo shift, this time to an even faster Allegro. There is a more satisfying resolution here, as we resolve to the overarching tonic of B flat, and the characters sing “Lovely souls, aflame with love.”

Figure 12: Mozart, “Tu mi lasci?” Second climax and resolution, mm. 94-107.

There is no longer any doubt that this seduction is successful. Togetherness is made apparent by tighter parallel melodies, more exact matches in contour, and homorhythmic declamation between the two voices. Resolution is emphasized through an abundance of tonic harmony and tonic bass pedals. Gradual tempo acceleration throughout the entire number is a unique feature of this duet and is reflective of its

dramatic requirements. Like a snowball rolling downhill, the characters' increasing recognition of love accelerates to a point where union is inescapable.

Chapter 5

Contemporary Composers and the Seduction Duet

In light of Mozart's dominance in modern accounts of late eighteenth-century opera, it is easy to forget that others were composing for the stage as well. Vicente Martín y Soler, Giovanni Paisiello, Domenico Cimarosa, and Antonio Salieri are a few of the most successful of Mozart's contemporaries in the theater. Joseph Haydn is, of course, widely famous for his instrumental works, but he too wrote several operas that enjoyed considerable success. This chapter looks at a representative work from each of these composers' operas and analyzes the application of seduction topoi to their seduction duets. Each composer has his own musical style that is markedly different from Mozart's; nonetheless, the language of the Classical style in general and the vocabulary of seduction in particular pervade their works as well. By tracing seduction topoi in the operas of Mozart's contemporaries, I suggest a network of musical semiosis that spanned individual styles and was universally understood by opera audiences of the time.

Cimarosa, Il matrimonio segreto (1792)

Domenico Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* tells the story of two young lovers, Carolina and Paolino, who must keep their recent marriage a secret from Carolina's father, Geronimo, who prefers a titled husband for his daughter. Carolina and Paolino's

Act I duet, “Io ti lascio,” is similarly titled as Mozart’s “Tu mi lasci” and shares many dramatic similarities with that number as well. Both pairs of lovers struggle with having to leave (*lasciare*), but wanting to remain together. In “Io ti lascio,” the couple discusses plans for breaking the news to Geronimo. Carolina is having second thoughts about the whole endeavor, but Paolino convinces her to follow through in the name of love. Even though they know they must part ways to escape notice, they cannot help but to linger in an embrace for one more moment.

Carolina begins with a 22-measure proposition, mostly diatonic and in the key of C major, that resolutely states her intention to leave. Paolino answers with exactly the same music, agreeing that she must go, but saying that it will break his heart nonetheless. Stage directions written into the score indicate that both characters begin to leave, only to return to each other again (“per partire, poi ritorna”). Now in the dominant key area, the duet continues in an exceptionally brief six-measure section of phrase-trading between characters. Carolina repeatedly says the word “no,” while Paolino answers with the same musical material, but the opposite text, “sì.”

The musical score for the phrase-trading section of "Io ti lascio" from Cimarosa is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is for Carolina (treble clef) and the bottom staff is for Paolino (bass clef). The time signature is 2/4. Carolina's lyrics are "No, no non vie - ne..." and Paolino's are "Sì, sì, a - des - so...". The music features a simple melodic line with a steady accompaniment of eighth notes in the bass.

Figure 13: Cimarosa, “Io ti lascio.” Phrase-trading section, mm. 80-85.

Carolina’s “no” refers to the approaching footsteps of Geronimo, as in “no, he’s not coming.” Paolino responds that, yes, he is coming, and he will discover their illicit love for one another. This brief section, in which the characters utter different texts with exactly the same music, encapsulates the entire drama of the number. Although they are, on the surface, talking about Geronimo, their *sìs* and *nos* also apply to their relationship in general. The fact that Paolino’s *sìs* get repeated for an extra two bars and lead directly into the embrace and resolution section reveals that, in the end, the “yes” response wins out. Their love for one another is as inevitable as Geronimo’s imminent arrival.

A climax occurs over a bass pedal on the dominant harmony; both Carolina and Paolino exclaim, “Embrace me once again!” in parallel thirds:

Carolina

Dam - mi, dam - mi.un al - tro.am ples - so,un al - tro.am ples-so...

Paolino

Dam - mi, dam - mi.un al - tro.am ples - so,un al - tro.am ples-so...

Figure 14: Cimarosa, “Io ti lascio.” Climax, mm. 86-91.

This is followed by a resolution to the tonic of C major, with more parallel thirds and unisons between the characters:

Carolina

Ah, pie - ta - de tro - ve - re - mo, ah pie - ta - de tro - ve - re - mo, se il ciel bar - ba - ro non è,

Ah, pie - ta - de tro - ve - re - mo, ah pie - ta - de tro - ve - re - mo, se il ciel bar - ba - ro non è,

Figure 15: Cimarosa, “Io ti lascio.” Resolution, mm. 103-109.

Although the seduction element in this plot is relatively weak, there is dramatic tension in this duet nonetheless, which is generated by the question of whether or not Carolina and Paolino will decide to stay together. This togetherness is significant on two levels. First, they must decide, in this specific instance with Geronimo’s footsteps approaching, whether to stay together and be discovered as lovers or to part ways and maintain their secrecy. On a larger level, their decision of togetherness is a decision between following through with the whole scheme of their secret marriage and giving up and capitulating to Geronimo’s plans for Carolina. They decide, on both levels, to be together. Carolina departs from their embrace immediately after the duet ends, and just in time to avoid Geronimo’s suspicion. There is little doubt, from the opening proposal and response section of the duet, that these two characters are on the same page, musically speaking. As listeners, we have little doubt that this “seduction,” early in the opera, will be successful. After all, the rest of the plot depends on it.

Martín y Soler, Una cosa rara (1786)

Premiered in the same year as *Le nozze di Figaro*, Martín y Soler's most successful opera, *Una cosa rara*, involves a pastoral setting and two pairs of lovers. First, there is the shepherd boy, Lubino, and his young lover, Lilla. The other couple is Lilla's brother, Tita, and his betrothed, Ghita. The plot centers on these four and the intricacies of their relationships. Both couples are plagued by suspicion in the typical ways; the ladies are distraught when their men come home late, and the men are jealous because their women are loitering around the palace where there are other amorous and much wealthier suitors. Two duets, one for each couple, deserve attention as seduction moments. Both fall into the category of duets between a couple who are already lovers and are trying to reconnect or make up in some way. The tension is slightly lessened because the characters know each other and have probably seduced each other before, but the emphasis on persuasion and dialectic technique is perhaps stronger. The same old tricks may take some extra tweaking for them to work on these seasoned lovers. I will focus on these two duets, "Un briccone senza core" and "Pace, caro mio sposo," as twisted manifestations of seduction topoi.

As we might expect from the title of Tita and Ghita's Act I Scene 6 duet "Un briccone senza core," this number is an irritated perversion of a love scene. Nevertheless, it provides an interesting point of comparison to Lilla and Lubino's "Pace, caro mio sposo." Tita and Ghita have been betrothed since the opening of the opera. It is unclear how long they have been together, but it has clearly been long enough for them to get under each other's skin. Aspects of the music hint at seduction, but only faintly. Each character gives an opening statement in an agitated, patter-like melody, with frantic

rhythms and plenty of repetition. The increasing overlap of sung phrases, which in more successful seduction duets denotes increased tension and arousal, here signifies increasing frustration and turn-off. Each is trying to present one side of the argument and to drown out the other. This utter dis-unity of musical line mocks the typical love duet:

The musical score consists of three systems, each with three staves. The top staff is for Ghita (treble clef), the middle for Tita (bass clef), and the bottom for piano accompaniment (bass clef). The music is in 2/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

System 1:
 Ghita: Non dir più ch'io son la Ghi - ta, se non graf-fio.a te.il mo - stac-cio, vil - la -
 Tita: Vil - la nac - cia, zit - to, zit - to, non dir piu ch'io so - no

System 2:
 Ghita: nac - cio, brut - to brut - to vil - la - nac - cio, vil - la - nac - cio, brut - to, brut - to, brut - to,
 Tita: Ti - ta se non ca - vo.a te que - gli.oc-chi. Zit - to brut - ta vil - la -

System 3:
 Ghita: brut-to vil - la - nac - cio, vil - la - nac - cio, as - sas - si - no, as - sas si - no,
 Tita: nac - cia, vil - la - nac - cia, ma - lan dri-na, brut-ta, brut-ta

Figure 16: Martín y Soler, “Un briccone senza core.” Phrase overlap section, mm. 56-64.

on each other the way long-time lovers sometimes do. Through musical manipulation and attention to dramatic situation, Martín y Soler imbues the established seduction topoi with nearly opposite meaning. In so doing, he creates a witty number that both shows the potential for harmony between the characters and emphasizes their outward denial. We, as listeners, tuck away these re-interpreted topoi and recall them an act and a half later, when Lilla and Lubino sing a much different duet.

“Pace, caro mio sposo” is much slower and calmer. Lilla and Lubino have been fighting and are attempting to renew their love. The dramatic tension introduced at the beginning is seduced away into resolution at the end. At the opening of the duet, the lovers, rather than giving long-winded proposals and responses, dispense with such formalities and immediately begin exchanging very short vocal phrases. A variation to the straightforward imitation topoi occurs when Lubino’s responses invert the contour of Lilla’s statements, a more literal mirroring technique. This atypical call-and-response section could be interpreted either as a symbol of the two lovers’ complementarity or as a subtle reminder of disunity. Lilla’s short utterances end with deceptive motion, while Lubino’s outline more definitive, authentic cadences:

The musical score is set in 6/8 time. The top staff is for Lilla (soprano), the middle for Lubino (bass), and the bottom for the basso continuo. Lilla's part consists of two phrases: "Pa-ce, ca-ro mio spo - so!" and "Non sa-rai più ge-lo - so?". Lubino's part consists of two phrases: "Pa-ce, mio dol-ce.a - mo - re!" and "Non, non sa-rò, mio co - re.". The score includes dynamic markings of *p* (piano) and *sf* (sforzando) and shows the melodic contours of the vocal lines.

Figure 18: Martín y Soler, “Pace caro mio sposo.” Opening section, mm. 1-8.

The next short call-and-response section features questions, which, as in the Count and Susanna’s “Crudel! Perchè finora,” denote insecurity. The two lovers overlap texts, with each finishing the other’s sentences or answering their questions before they have even been uttered. We are reminded that these two know each other very well:

The musical score shows two vocal lines, Lilla (soprano) and Lubino (bass), with a basso continuo line below. The lyrics are as follows:

Lilla	Mi vorrai sempre...	Lubino	Mi sarai sempre...	Son la tua sola...	Ti serberai...
		Be-ne.	A-man-te.	...spe-me.	Co-stante.

The score is in 3/4 time and features a call-and-response pattern where the characters overlap their lines, creating a sense of intimacy and tension.

Figure 19: Martín y Soler, “Pace caro mio sposo.” Opening section, mm. 9-16.

The very brief segments of homorhythm between the two voices does not utilize parallel thirds; it instead features some contrary motion. An extended section of tight parallel thirds is missing, as is the tempo or meter change we would expect at a moment of resolution. This might inform the listener that these two simply do not need a resolution since they are already past the seduction stage in their relationship. Another interpretation is that the all-too-simple solution of trusting each other is not quite working for these two. Indeed, our foil couple, Tita and Ghita, have been engaged for some time and yet suffer from mistrust. Perhaps this foreshadows a grim future for Lilla and Lubino’s relationship. The unwillingness to adopt each other’s music and to sing in harmony with each other is indicative of uncertainty, hesitation, and mistrust. They are both trying to make up and seduce the other back into love, but they are also self-seducers, trying to convince

themselves that this relationship is right. No one wants to believe they have been a sucker.

The opera ends, as we might expect, happily ever after; Lilla and Lubino and Tita and Ghita all reunite, but we cannot ignore the music's voice in "Pace, caro mio sposo." The piece is uneasily short, the drama is resolved without a fight, and the musical symbols are missing or ambiguous. The 6/8 pastoral meter is present, but alternating sforzando and piano markings in every other measure turn this pastoral lilt into a seasick sway. The sweetness and innocence is exaggerated; too much sugar makes one sick to the stomach. The too-easy atmosphere is compounded by the extremely diatonic nature of this piece, written in the easiest of all keys, C major. There is only one accidental in the entire number, a B flat. We must then ask ourselves whether the emotion presented by Lilla and Lubino is false or at least compromised. Just as the couples are plagued by suspicion, so too is the listener, wondering about the sincerity of the text in light of the music.

Paisiello, La serva padrona (1781)

Giovanni Paisiello's version of *La serva padrona*, more famously set by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, details another male-female relationship where the two characters have a long and storied past. Serpina is obsessed with her master, Uberto, who took her into his house when she was a baby. His authority as both a master and a father figure makes for some awkward moments in their quasi-romantic numbers. Serpina tries to "seduce" him into loving her and taking her as a wife. She is determined to get her own way and employs various strategies to convince Uberto. She even takes a fiancé to make him

jealous. Uberto playfully indulges her ruses. A dowry dispute erupts, and in the end, it all turns out to be an elaborate joke for both of them. Serpina takes on the role of a female seductress, although she is actually in a weakened position in a number of ways. She is of lower class and is under both Uberto's care and authority as his ward and servant. She pouts and fusses like a child trying to get her way, and Uberto capitulates to her games in the spirit of appeasement. Thus Serpina is given the illusion of power when she really has none. The music makes this power relationship apparent.

From the very beginning of the duet "Lo conosco," it is clear that Serpina is harboring the illusion of being in control, but something is awry in the interaction of characters, text, and music. Like a typical seducer, Serpina gives a proposal statement. It is harmonically simple, in the key of G major, and is unusually long for a proposal statement. Nonetheless, Uberto exactly imitates her in a harmonically and melodically parallel 32-bar section of music. The mimetic technique of seduction appears to be working; Serpina is reeling in her prey. She is quite assuredly telling him, in a stable, diatonic idiom, that she is certain that he wants her; even though he is saying no, he is certain to capitulate. But Uberto's answer, while it responds musically, does not agree with but rather rebuts Serpina's text. He uses the same musical material to say that he, too, is self-assured of quite the opposite outcome.

In response, Serpina launches what seems to be another long-winded proposal, but this time in a more chromatically-inflected dominant area. Her melodic lines are more disjunct. In a 36-bar section, Serpina begins to experience some panic, uncertainty and insecurity. She questions him: "But why? Am I not beautiful? Charming? Witty?" With such questions, she is feebly trying to convince Uberto (and herself) that she is in fact

worthy. She demands, "Come, look, what grace, what spirit, what majesty" over a V/V pedal point. These statements imply some self-consciousness about class as well; even though a servant, Serpina believes that she can aspire to the majestic realm and meet Uberto's standards. On the word *maestà*, in an accordingly showy display of pomp and glitter, Serpina unleashes a twenty-measure melisma that centers on the tension-filled fifth scale degree, supported by a dominant pedal point in the bass. Underneath this melisma, Uberto interrupts with sarcastic asides that remind us of Serpina's weak position. When Serpina reaches her long-held D, she must wait for Uberto to finish his witty comments and join her in the fermata before the piece goes on:

Serpina
Mae - stà

Uberto
Oh, cos - tei mi va ten - tan - do

quan - to val che me la fa quan - to val, quan - to

val, quan - to val che me la fa quan - to val, quan - to val che me la fa.

Figure 20: Paisiello, “Lo conosco.” First climax, mm. 81-102.

Instead of compelling Uberto, Serpina is left waiting around; she is at the mercy of his musical whims rather than the reverse.

After a brief exchange of shorter phrases, the whole process begins again, as a formal recapitulation and a desperate second attempt on Serpina's part. The 32-bar proposition section is now divided between the two characters, trading vocal phrases. Uberto uses the imitation technique to mock even further. He answers her music exactly,

as a lover should do, but he simultaneously speaks words of denial. The dominant pedal point drama is repeated again, this time resolving into an extended tonic pedal in the recapitulation. Serpina's insistence on her majesty becomes even more intense, as she jumps up to a long-held high G against Uberto's almost laughing asides. Uberto's words, “Quanto val che me la fa” (“She's taken me as far as she can go”), are supported by the music; it has exhausted the dominant/tonic tension of the piece and can go no farther. The seduction is resolved unsuccessfully, and the music dissipates. A brief coda follows, where the two sing in parallel sixths but with radically different texts. She says, “You must marry me,” but his reply is actually an aside to the audience, which shows how little he wants to be a part of this seduction: “Oh, what a mess I am in.”

Serpina
 e dov - re - te spo - sar me, e dov re - te
 Uberto
 oh che'im - bro - glio'e - gliè per me, oh che'im - bro - glio'e -

spo - sar me, e dov re - te spo - sar me.
 gliè per me, oh che'im - bro - glio'e - gliè per me.

Figure 21: Paisiello, “Lo conosco.” Resolution, mm. 263-274.

The music reveals the extent of Serpina's delusion. She seems to be hearing the musical gestures, which mimic the topoi of seduction, but refuses to hear Uberto's ironic, mocking, and unwilling text.

Haydn, Armida (1784)

Haydn's *Armida* presents us with a much more potent and effective brand of female seductress. His title character is a sorceress from hell. In order to prevent the crusading knights from recapturing the city of Jerusalem for the Christians, the prince of hell sends Armida into their midst. Her task is to use her powers of seduction to distract the Christian knights. She goes after Rinaldo, the strongest and most formidable of the Christians. However, she unexpectedly finds herself falling in love with him and is finally unable to kill him. The idea of Armida as a creature from hell with supernatural powers of seduction makes her an apt female parallel to Don Giovanni, who also returns to hell in the finale of Mozart's opera. In the end, Armida's music successfully seduces both Rinaldo and the audience.

The Act I duet, "Cara, sarò fedele," is Armida's attempt to fulfill her duty not by killing Rinaldo, but, rather, by convincing him to leave the ranks of soldiers. She succeeds by accusing him of disloyalty and inducing guilt that persuades him to remain with her. Rinaldo gives the expository proposal, promising faithfulness. His seventeen-measure phrase is harmonically simple, emphasizing tonic of B flat major, but is left open-ended, concluding on the dominant, and thus requiring Armida's response for tonal closure. Her response is exactly imitative. After a very brief, two-measure section of overlapping phrases, Armida and Rinaldo sing in a homorhythmic, yet agitated section

where they both fret over each other's cruelties: "For that tyrannic heart cannot love like this." In the section that follows, the tempo changes to a quicker Allegro, over an extended modulation to the dominant. Oblique and contrary motion characterizes the two singers' lines here, as they speak of each other's infidelities:

The image shows a musical score for a homorhythmic section from Haydn's opera. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for Armida, the middle for Rinaldo, and the bottom for a basso continuo line. The lyrics are: "Che bar - ba-ro tor men - to, che bar - ba-ro tor men - to". The music is in a minor key and features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the basso continuo line. The vocal lines for Armida and Rinaldo are in parallel motion, with the same rhythmic pattern.

Figure 22: Haydn, "Caro, sarò fedele." Homorhythmic section, mm. 50-54.

With the return of the tonic recapitulation, we hear the clearest and most consistent use of parallel thirds, indicating musically that the lovers will stay together, even though they are still stuck on the text from the last section about infidelity:

Armida
 a u - n'al - ma fi - da a man - te do - ver - ad - o - gni i - stan - te, do -

Rinaldo
 a u - n'al - ma fi - da a man - te sen - tir - si ad o - gni i - stan - te, sen -

- ver ad o - gni i - stan - - - -

- tir - si ad o - gni i - stan

Figure 23: Haydn, "Caro, sarò fedele." Parallel thirds, mm. 65-76.

The music screams for unity and harmony between the lovers, even as they speak of divisiveness. In this way, the music comments on the dramatic situation by contradicting it and foreshadowing a different conclusion.

The number does not end here. Rinaldo makes a re-exposition, this time much more harmonically adventurous, and less metrically regular. Several fermatas and jagged, chromatic melodies interrupt the flow of this section. The first fermata falls on the climactic high A flat, followed by a downward leap of a major seventh to B natural. This interval, which paints the word “resisto,” is not only dissonant, but harmonically strange in the key of B flat major:

Figure 24: Haydn, “Caro, sarò fedele,” mm. 104-106.

By drawing such attention to “resisto” and its instability, Haydn reveals that resistance of Armida is futile. It requires a different resolution. Armida’s responses of “Ferma!” “Ferma!,” wittily decorated with more fermatas, beg Rinaldo to stay, both textually and musically:

Figure 25: Haydn, “Caro, sarò fedele,” mm. 110-112.

A section of consistent and homorhythmic parallel thirds in 4/4 time follows, leading to a more sprightly 2/4 where they both succumb to their desires.

Salieri, La grotta di Trofonio (1785)

My final case study is drawn from Antonio Salieri's *La grotta di Trofonio*, which mixes magical, fantastical plot elements with the everyday relationship situations that are the stuff of eighteenth-century *opera buffa*. The plot is complicated: Aristone has two daughters, Ofelia and Dori, and he decides that it is time for them to marry. Ofelia is bookish and shy. Dori is quite the opposite; she is outgoing and sociable. Aristone pairs them with lovers who share their dispositions. Artemidoro is matched with Ofelia and Plistene with Dori. As in *Così fan tutte*, the two pairs of lovers are subjected to an experiment in order to see how their relationships respond. The two men wander into a cave where a magician, Trofonio, switches their personalities. They then return to their women, who are confused to find themselves turned off by their lovers' new dispositions. The men re-enter the cave and are returned to their normal selves, but then the women are transformed in the same way by Trofonio, and the saga begins anew. "Quel muso arcigno e burbero" is a duet sung by Artemidoro and Ofelia, after she has been changed into a high-spirited extrovert. The dramatic question here is whether or not Ofelia and Artemidoro can remain in love despite their suddenly incompatible personalities. In the end, they decide that they cannot.

This A major number is dominated by Ofelia, who sings for a total of 105 measures in comparison to Artemidoro's 43. This imbalance serves a dramatic purpose. Ofelia, much to her fiancé's chagrin, has recently become more loquacious than her usual

self. She gives the opening proposal, but Artemidoro does not imitate her in his response, indicating his confusion. She continues with a long-winded reply over the dominant harmony. When Artemidoro is finally given a chance to speak again, he is much more abrupt and to the point; furthermore, Ofelia cannot help but to interrupt him as he speaks. After none of the usual imitative or phrase-trading techniques, Artemidoro poses a question: “From what strange paroxysm is my bride suffering?” He is holding onto the hope that a temporary fever of some sort is causing his fiancée’s strange behavior. Ofelia chatters on in a brief recitative section that represents a kind of climax. Here, she denies his diagnosis of mental illness and says that she now finds him overly melancholy and boring.

RECITATIVO
Ofelia

Di qual de-li-rio bron-to-li? Tu me vorresti invol-gere con queste tue scempiaggini a de-li-rar con te?

Figure 26: Salieri, “Quel muso arcigno e burbero.” Recitative section, mm. 53-57.

After this recitative section, the duet returns to the first tempo, never achieving parallel thirds or harmonious union of musical line. The only time that Artemidoro and Ofelia utter even close to the same words together is in the last few measures of the number. Here at last is the change of tempo and texture that we expect of the resolution section of a seduction duet. But it is so short and disjunct that it is hardly a resolution at all:

Ofelia Allegro

O can - gia d'a - mor, o can - gia d'a - mor, can - - gia d'a - mor.

Artemidoro

Can - gia - sti, can - gia - sti d'u - mor, can - - - gia - - sti d'u - mor.

Figure 27: Salieri, “Quel muso arcigno e burbero.” Parallel thirds section, mm. 139-145.

Artemidoro concludes that Ofelia is changed (“cangiasti d’umor”); she is no longer the same person. At the same time, Ofelia says that Artemidoro must change lovers (“cangia d’amor”) if he does not care for her anymore. Salieri’s clever juxtaposition of the past indicative and imperative forms of the verb “cangiare” (“to change”) and the words “umor” and “amor” emphasizes the fact that the former lovers are, both literally and figuratively, no longer speaking the same language to each other.

Mozart, Don Giovanni (1787)

In light of these analyses, we can now return to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The literary tradition of the Don Juan myth dates back to the early seventeenth century, and in every manifestation it focuses on the Don's special and enviable talent for seducing women. His name alone is a character type. Even today, prolifically amorous young men are labeled as "Don Juans." In Mozart's opera, Don Giovanni's characterization depends on his ability to manipulate women as a master seducer. His seduction of Zerlina in the duet "Là ci darem la mano" is not a crucial plot moment; it simply represents another feather in the Don's cap, or to look at it another way, another strike against him on his divine moral scorecard. Because of this explicit focus on seduction, Da Ponte's libretto for *Don Giovanni* was criticized at the time for being a vulgar farce.⁴⁹ Several numbers, such as the Don's catalogue aria, the trio "Ah taci, ingiusto core," and the duet between the Don and Zerlina, "Là ci darem la mano" focus on seduction as a theme in its own right.

Leonard Ratner, Wye J. Allanbrook, Mary Hunter, James Webster, and Kristi Brown-Montesano are just a handful of analysts who afford "Là ci darem" a special place in the repertory as a point of comparison for other seduction duets.⁵⁰ Brown-Montesano calls this the "great" seduction scene in Mozart opera with the Don as subject and Zerlina as object, and claims that other seduction scenes, such as "Fra gli amplessi" and "Il core vi dono" point back to the "mold" set up by "Là ci darem."⁵¹ Typically, "Là ci darem"

⁴⁹ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 209.

⁵⁰ See the following in particular: Hunter and Webster, eds., *Opera buffa*, 347; Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 262; Ratner, *Classic Music*, 406; Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 237, 255.

⁵¹ Brown-Montesano, *Women of Mozart's Operas*, 237, 255.

has received special attention in this way as a formal and dramatic model. It is not difficult to see why this would be the case. Mozart's setting of "Là ci darem" outlines a simple form that is self-contained and easily mapped out for analytical purposes. The temptation is for the analyst to become seduced by the apparent simplicity of the piece, casting aside more nuanced interpretations in order to paint "Là ci darem" as simply the paradigmatic seduction duet. Allanbrook acknowledges this struggle when she says that "all irony and cynicism must be suspended in the face of the sheer beauty of this dialogue of seduction and acquiescence."⁵² Irony and cynicism are certainly present, but they tend to get overshadowed by the insistence of seduction topoi.

Arthur Lourie calls this setting of "Là ci darem" "the most seductive and ingratiating music that has ever existed."⁵³ His impression is likely a result of the melodic and structural ideas that inject a certain sensuousness into the whole number, in other words, the use of seduction topoi. The musical setting here narrates the story of seduction, and the underlying form is extracted in Figure 28:

⁵² Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 262.

⁵³ Arthur Lourie, "Variations on Mozart," *Music & Letters* 11 (1930): 23.

Section	Proposition	Response	Shorter Phrase Imitation	Overlap/ Intensification	Climax	Resolution
<i>Characters, length</i>	Giovanni, 8 mm.	Zerlina, 10 mm.	Both 11 mm.	Both 17 mm.	Both 3 mm.	Both 33 mm.
<i>Meter, tempo, key</i>	2/4, Andante A major, tonally closed (I → I)	Cadence extended 2 extra bars	V (Dominant key area)	I (tonic) leads to extended dominant preparation	V Fermata	I 6/8, Allegro Simple tonic/dominant drone harmonies
<i>Other information</i>		Imitates proposition but with rhythmic alterations and ornamentation	Giovanni: triadic, diatonic Zerlina: stepwise, chromatic	Vocal lines gradually inch on top of each other.		Tight parallel 3rds
<i>Text</i>	“There we shall join hands / There you will say yes to me ...”	“I would, yet I would not ... He may be deceiving me ...”	He: “Come ...” She: “My strength is deserting me ...”	Both: “There we shall join hands ...”	Both: “Let’s go!”	Both: “Let us go, my dearest, to assuage the pangs of innocent love.”

Figure 28: Form of Mozart’s “Là ci darem la mano.”

Mozart’s musical setting is an appropriate extension of Don Giovanni’s characterization. Both Don Giovanni and Zerlina have agency in this number, but so does their music, pushing and pulling them in different directions and revealing their vulnerability. Allanbrook even suggests that this number could be almost a diegetic moment in the opera, where the characters are aware of the musical accompaniment. The excessive and ingratiating setting, therefore, may be a part of Don Giovanni’s courtship ritual.⁵⁴ But we might also interpret this excess as mockery of the Don’s excessively indulgent personality or as a parody of seduction in general. In either case, the apparent ease and simplicity of the music and text must be accounted for dramatically.

Let us first explore some of the structural features of “Là ci darem” that inform an analytical interpretation of exaggerated seduction topoi. It is a duet (or rather, a

⁵⁴ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture*, 262.

“duettino,” as it is labeled in the score) for a male and a female character, and it is in the key of A major. By choosing his “love key” of A major, Mozart creates an important subtext to “Là ci darem.” Don Giovanni’s adoption of the lover’s musical setting shows his complete confidence in the success of his venture, in effect denying the complexity of the seduction process. For Don Giovanni, it is as carefree, simple, and easy as a love duet where the game is already won. That this confidence is presented early in the opera, about midway through the first act, is essential to the characterization of Don Giovanni and plays an important role in his eventual downfall.

The overall form of this number is ABA' plus coda. Importantly, there is no orchestral introduction before Don Giovanni’s proposal. This immediate entrance underscores his confidence in the venture and enhances the “shock value” of his insincere proposal of marriage.⁵⁵ Imitative phrase structures characterize the A sections, while contrasting musical ideas for Zerlina and Don Giovanni characterize the B section. It should also be noted that Don Giovanni’s baritone voice stands in opposition to the normal male tenor represented in many love duets. The fact that Zerlina, a soprano, must mold her musical line to that of a baritone necessarily pulls her range downwards. This underscores the way Mozart empowers the character of Don Giovanni to take control of the seduction situation and draw the female character into his music, both in terms of range and melody. But at the same time, these vocal ranges allow Zerlina to end up “on top” in the parallel thirds of the resolution section. She is not merely a passive victim, but the degree of her agency, as communicated in the musical setting, is somewhat ambiguous.

⁵⁵ Brown-Montesano, *Women of Mozart’s Operas*, 67.

Don Giovanni's opening statement employs a simple melody and a square, eight-bar phrase structure. Zerlina does not exactly repeat Don Giovanni's musical statement, and significantly, her alterations are rhythmic rather than melodic:

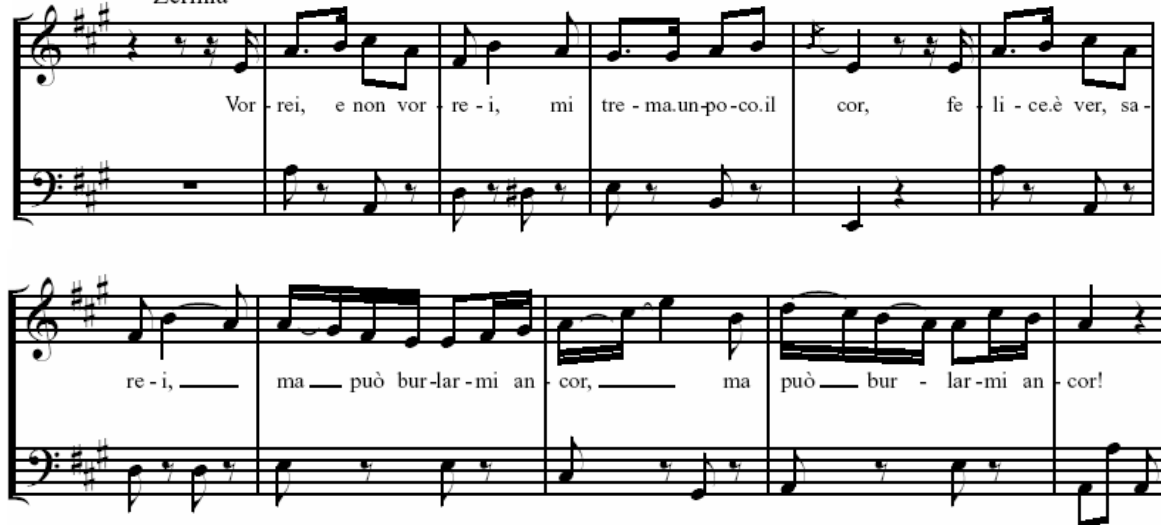
Don Giovanni



Là ci darem la mano, là mi di-rai di si; ve-di, non è lon-ta-no, par-tiam, ben mio, da qui.

Figure 29: Mozart, "Là ci darem la mano." Don Giovanni's proposal, mm. 1-8.

Zerlina



Vor-rei, e non vor-re-i, mi tre-ma.un-po-co.il cor, fe-li-ce.è ver, sa-re-i, ma può bur-lar-mi an-cor, ma può bur-lar-mi an-cor!

Figure 30: Mozart, "Là ci darem la mano." Zerlina's response, mm. 9-18.

These slight changes mirror the uncertainty expressed in her text. Where Don Giovanni declaims his text beginning on the downbeats and with square rhythms, Zerlina has upbeat attacks, dotted rhythms, and appoggiatura ornaments. She also closes her first eight measures of response with a weaker cadence on a tonic chord in first inversion and then extends the phrase an extra two bars. The distinction is clear in the music: Don

Giovanni is balanced and self-assured, while Zerlina is hesitant, off-kilter, and vulnerable.

The text confirms this musical analysis. Don Giovanni uses the future tense in his proposal, thereby already assuming a positive response from Zerlina and a successful seduction: “There we *shall* join hands, then you *will* say yes to me” (emphasis mine). The motif of the hand is an important symbol of power in this opera. To ask for someone’s hand or to take it by force indicates a superior position. To give the hand to another is a symbol of trust, devotion, or consent, as in giving one’s hand in marriage. Don Giovanni’s demand for Zerlina’s hand at the opening of this number emphasizes his powerful role in the scene. He takes what should be a very genuine gesture, and makes it an instrument of deception. Finally, at the end of the opera, the situation is reversed, as the Commendatore demands Don Giovanni’s hand in a final attempt to get him to repent and ask forgiveness before snatching him down to hell. This motif appears at key moments in the drama and ties Don Giovanni’s seductions and exploits to his eventual downfall.

The next section of the duet continues the distinction between the over-confident Don and the tentative Zerlina. Don Giovanni asserts his command, “Vieni!” with square rhythms, downbeat attacks, and a melody that outlines the dominant triad. He promises to raise Zerlina out of the servant class through marriage. Zerlina answers with continued expressions of concern for herself and her fiancé. Her comments often have the character of asides to the audience, or at least thoughts that she expresses only to herself. This use of aside, presumably unheard or ignored by the other character in the seduction, is present in other seduction duets, notably Paisiello’s “Lo conosco.” Musically, Zerlina’s responses

and asides with upbeat attacks and a fluttery, stepwise, chromatic line, that is once again extended, or imbalanced:

The image displays a musical score for the duet 'Là ci darem la mano' from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. It is divided into two systems. The first system shows Don Giovanni's vocal line in the bass clef and Zerlina's vocal line in the treble clef. Don Giovanni's lyrics are 'lo can-gie-rò tua sor-te!' and Zerlina's are 'Pre-sto non son più'. The second system continues the duet with Don Giovanni's lyrics 'for-te non son più for-te non son più for-te!' and Zerlina's 'Vie-ni! Vie-ni!'. The score includes vocal lines and piano accompaniment in three parts (treble, bass, and a lower bass part) across two systems.

Figure 31: Mozart, “Là ci darem la mano.” Phrase-trading section, mm. 23-29.

Zerlina’s statements are also supported by a less stable harmony, the V/V, which requires resolution to Don Giovanni’s dominant. Musically, she indicates weakness and signals that the seduction will in fact be successful. Long before Zerlina gives in verbally, she makes her decision clear through her appropriations of and interactions with the Don’s music.⁵⁶

At this point, the music and text from the opening of the duet return. This time, however, instead of a full eight-bar proposal by one character followed by the other’s response, the call-and-response is broken into shorter units of two measures. These

⁵⁶ Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 155.

shorter melodic units indicate an intensification of drama and herald the approaching climax. What happens next is more adventurous. After an extended tonic cadence, Don Giovanni and Zerlina continue to trade short phrases for six measures, but their entrances inch closer and closer to one another. Beginning in measure 34, they enter first at the distance of a quarter rest, then an eighth rest, then overlapping by a sixteenth note, then an eighth note, then a quarter note, and so on.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the opera 'Le Nozze di Figaro', specifically the 'Là ci darem la mano' duet. Each system consists of three staves: a vocal line for Zerlina (top), a vocal line for Don Giovanni (middle), and a piano accompaniment line (bottom). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines, with some words split across measures. The first system shows Zerlina's entrance in measure 31, followed by Don Giovanni's entrance in measure 32. The second system continues the phrase trading, with Zerlina's line starting in measure 33 and Don Giovanni's in measure 34. The third system shows further phrase trading, with Zerlina's line starting in measure 35 and Don Giovanni's in measure 36. The piano accompaniment provides a rhythmic and harmonic foundation for the vocal lines.

Zerlina
Vor - rei, e non vor - re-i, Don Giovanni Mi tre - ma.un po-co il cor;
Là mi di-rai di sì, par-tiam, ben mio, da
Ma - può bur-lar - mi.an - cor. Mi fa - pie - tà - Ma - set - to; pre -
qui. Vie - ni, mio bel di - let - to! io can-gie-rò tua
- sio non son - più - for - te non son - più - for - te non son - più - for - te!
sor - te.

Figure 32: Mozart, “Là ci darem la mano.” Phrase-trading section, mm. 31-46.

Don Giovanni moves in on his prey; their musical utterances inch closer and closer together until they are literally on top of each other, representing Don Giovanni's literal and figurative goal as a dramatic character in control of the action.

After these musical exchanges and repetitions, the two characters' musical styles diverge for a moment. Don Giovanni continues to forcefully outline triads while Zerlina gets ever flightier and more chromatic, always with weak-beat attacks. Like many other female characters presented here, Zerlina hints at her eventual capitulation by musically growing more unstable. At this point in the drama, Zerlina uses the same words as Fiordiligi, "non son piú forte" ("my strength is failing"), set to a descending, chromatically inflected line.

Finally, the mutual cry of "Andiam!" seals the deal. The seduction is successful, and we are launched into the new section. Mozart marks this change with a quicker tempo (*Allegro*) and a new time signature (6/8). This 6/8 meter and the simple, musette-like pedal-point harmonies on the tonic represent the carefree sensuality of the pastoral environment. The parallel thirds are regular throughout this section, breaking only at the ends of phrases where they sometimes open to octaves.

Figure 33: Mozart, "Là ci darem la mano." Climax and resolution, mm. 46-51.

A typical reading of this resolution section focuses on Don Giovanni's ability to adopt the musical signifiers of his victims. Zerlina is of a lower class, and so Don Giovanni sings in a pastoral idiom and a dance meter that would be familiar to her. In this way, he builds a sort of musical rapport with Zerlina and gains her trust and affection. This reading, however, assumes that Don Giovanni alone determines the course of the music. Zerlina's voice and the voice of the accompaniment itself are perhaps overlooked. It is, after all, Zerlina's "Andiam!" in mm. 48-49 that affirms the seduction and ushers in the new section.

The text of this *a due* resolution section is ironic on many levels. It at the same time suggests sex – "assuaging the pangs" of their attraction – and insists that their love is simple and innocent. The three-line stanza ("Andiam, mio bene / a ristorar le pene / d'un innocente amor!") is repeated twice, and on the third time, the order of the phrases is switched as if the words are almost meaningless and interchangeable.⁵⁷ This again points to the over-the-top and exaggerated nature of the entire situation. Much like the cut-aways in the erotic novel tradition discussed in Chapter 1, this scene leaves the audience unsure if the seduction is consummated or not; Donna Elvira comes onstage to intervene once the number is complete. However, the music gives a strong enough signal to imply sex even without any visual confirmation.

One possible reading of "Là ci darem la mano" focuses exclusively on the characterization of Don Giovanni. The woman involved is very much replaceable; it could have been any woman besides Zerlina. The fact that she was engaged to another man was all the better for Don Giovanni, because it allowed him to showcase his seduction skills in an even more challenging situation. His character thrives on this type

⁵⁷ Let us go, my dearest / to assuage the pangs / of innocent love!

of entanglement and enjoys the challenge of “staking everything on the cards, of proving his powers, and, come what may, of winning the game on this occasion.”⁵⁸ An alternate reading gives Zerlina more agency as a knowing and willing participant. Zerlina’s responses, rather than being induced by the male figure, are carefully chosen, and the adoption of the peasant-pastoral musical setting shows that Zerlina has drawn Don Giovanni into *her* world rather than the reverse. He convincingly lures her into the world of and pastoral bliss, but Zerlina, as a peasant, is at home in the pastoral idiom, so it is possible that she is the manipulator in this instance. The naivety of both parties in this seduction, as evidenced by both their text and music, suggests elements of humor and exaggeration. Given the past histories of their characters, neither can expect this ruse to be anything more than a game.

Far from being a “model” of male persuasion of a female victim, this seduction moment is rich in double meanings, irony, and hyperbole. Both characters seem to have motivations beyond the texts they proclaim. “Là ci darem” is thus more about power, ego, and manipulation than love or sex. Don Giovanni is calling on the genre of the love duet and its A major “soundworld” to laugh at it. The simplicity and lightness of this number, as the only one given the diminutive name of “duettino” in the opera, reveal his attitudes about love: it is easy and merely a game to be won. We, in turn, laugh back at him. The Don may be winning the game, but he is losing the war, and this gross exposition of egoism sets the stage for his eventual demise. But an interpretation in which Zerlina is completely serious and Don Giovanni is all fun and games would be too simplistic. Zerlina may stand to gain from Don Giovanni’s “victory” as well. She earns status and style points for her relationship with a member of a higher class, and it is

⁵⁸ Lourie, “Variations,” 23.

certainly possible that she, too, is simply in search of a no-strings-attached good time. “Là ci darem,” far from being paradigmatic, is yet another case study in exaggeration for dramatic ends. “Là ci darem” might even be considered parodic, either for comic effect or to undermine the Don’s character: the duet is over the top in nearly every way.

* * * * *

This study has shown a very narrow slice of Enlightenment sexuality by tracing cultural strands through a very specific artistic genre – the seduction duet in late eighteenth-century Italian opera. In the operas of both Mozart and his contemporaries, complex dramatic requirements often leave an ambiguous answer to the question of “Is this a seduction, or not?” Indeed, the line between love and seduction is tenuous, and many of the musical characteristics overlap. The main difference, I maintain, is the resolution of dramatic tension within the musical number itself. But again, this level of tension can range from very little (i.e., all signs point to one outcome) to a great deal (i.e., music, words, and gesture all pull the audience in competing directions, and the outcome is unclear). Notions of parody make the situation more complex still. As a result, there is a huge diversity of seduction situations in this repertory, and each requires analysis on its own terms. Listeners and analysts must therefore beware of applying simple musical models to dramatic situations that are usually not so simple. The analyses presented here show several strategies for manipulating the musical vocabulary of seduction to create either an important subtext or contradictory narrative to the spoken drama, to foreshadow

the eventual resolution of the drama, or even to poke fun at the conventions themselves. As a sort of language, spoken by late-eighteenth century opera composers and understood by their audiences, the networks of meaning embodied in the music of seduction enhanced the multi-faceted experience of opera. As a third voice in the drama, music interacts with text and gesture to tell a nuanced story of seduction.

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