
Introduction

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In the history of opera there is perhaps no moment of greater consequence than that of the opening of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Though written almost entirely in the buoyant joviality of the major mode, the opera's first D-minor chord strikes terror as it moves hauntingly toward an irrevocable cadence. Almost immediately revoked by the major mode, the minor opening is destined to return, and so it does. Having watched the Don's erotic romping and destructive rampage, the Commendatore finally appears to deliver his judgment. Entering as a statue of the eternally dead, he heralds the death of the Don. But the Don is not ready to die and invites the statue to dinner. The bravado of his invitation only confirms his lack of remorse. The statue arrives. Acting as if his power and success in life will not fail him even when threatened with the supernatural, the Don again refuses to repent and is accordingly engulfed by flames. Yet what follows seems to negate the intensity of the punishment. No character formerly wounded by the Don treads sadly upon his ashes. Each rather joins hands with the other to sing with what some think is merely a dripping falsetto cheerfulness of a world that has once more been made pleasant. During the nineteenth century this final scene struck some in the musical world as so obviously false that they omitted it entirely, believing the opera ended better perishing in D minor.

Others read the ending differently. Overall, that performers and directors felt (as they still do) they had the power to decide how the opera should end, that the ending posed a genuine question for the work as a whole, guaranteed for this work a fascinating reception and legacy.

On one reading the D-minor motif, or the so-called Don Giovanni chord, opens the opera to tell us that it is there also to close it, or at least to shut the pages of the book of life on a figure whose actions have been measurable in the size and scope requiring, in Nietzsche's words, "the seriousness of the 'Stone Guest' [to] leap out of the wall and shake the listener to his very intestines." Of course, the listeners only come to know this at the end. Still, what they learn on the way is that everything that happens—all the singing, seduction, and slaying—subsists on little more than voice and air. For while the opera unfolds or, one might say, for nearly as long as it takes Leporello to list his master's conquests, both the music and plot are propelled by an inexhaustible energy: the unrelenting drive of (musical) seduction. The Don is a figure too big to be curtailed, too significant merely to grow old and die in a mediocre and ordinary world. He is rather the absolute drive and scope of music itself. When the moralizing D-minor motif thus returns to interrupt his musical course, the audience now knows for whom the bell tolls and with what inexorable consequence. But to what ultimate end? Does this moralizing chord, this consignment of the Don to the flames, necessitate the reintroduction of morality in the form, as some have read it, of a banal conventionality? Or does it rather signal a settling of scores long overdue—even the raw return of something like oedipal justice? Or is the point yet different, that it symbolizes the fact that this opera must end, that even music's immortal voice cannot last forever, where to become immortal and then to die is, in the theatrical words of Eugene Ionesco, the very point of life? If this last thought captures something right, then the Don's death signifies less a moralizing restitution of the bourgeois green fields of happiness than a return to the condition of a much deeper conception of life and living.

Of life and living in *Don Giovanni*: this is the theme most perfectly discussed by Bernard Williams in his classic essay "Don Juan as an Idea." As a tribute, we as the editors decided early on to include this essay in the present volume as it has appropriately been included in others. Sadly, Bernard Williams's untimely death required us also to dedicate our volume to him in memoriam. We would have preferred, as we had originally intended, to dedicate this book as a tribute to a great thinker still in the throes of life.

Don Giovanni lives only so long as it is performed: it is known, as all opera is known, through the history of its interpretation and performance. Performances of *Don Giovanni* have been extraordinarily variegated, risky,

and audacious. Some present the Don's life as ahistorical; others situate him historically to try perhaps to counter the seeming universal significance of his acts. Some adulate the Don as a cosmic principle: irrepressible, magnificent, living out the true art of life. Think of the Don that Cesare Siepi created in the opera houses of Europe (especially the 1952 Salzburg, Furtwängler performance), with all his grand gestures, topped by a dazzling hat in the style of a Toulouse Lautrec. Others have presented the Don as a hopelessly craven neurotic, a man who cannot stop. Or, differently again, recall Joseph Losey's 1979 film with its strangely pallid and repressed Don, played by Ruggiero Raimondi, whose good looks are rendered sinister through excessive makeup and unexpected camera angles. At one moment Raimondi's lips are seen pressed tightly together to signify a kind of tension, perhaps a repressed homosexuality, a narcissism, or an impotence. Here the Don appears as physically vicious: his speech is violent, his demeanor and actions are exaggerated. But still there is a decaying and decadent luxury in which his fantasies are played out. Losey thus portrays him as an artifact of his morbid time. Or at least Losey seems to believe this about the time, given the Gramscian epigram, seen in his opening shot, scribbled on a wall as if it were graffiti.

The present volume focuses less on the debate about how best to produce the work than on the complexity of its reception. Sometimes with a brush of adulation, sometimes with that of lambaste, the contributing authors investigate how far this opera as a work of embodied myth redefines the relationship between art and morality. Power, seduction, judgment: these are the main themes. Many of the essays show that the work assumes a kind of limit or condition for art that cannot coherently be surpassed: that one can only go so far in the art of seduction before being interrupted by the moral voice. Such a view, not incidentally, is confirmed also by Losey in his film, where he shows that the propensity of this work to define for itself an absolutely sui generis field of glory is among its chief illusions. The play between the aesthetic and the moral, or the dynamics of the work's erotic power, is intended, furthermore, to challenge the (professed) allegiances of an established Viennese bourgeoisie.

This volume is not so much about the work that is *Don Giovanni* itself; it is about the works written in the opera's shadow. The contributing authors thus concentrate on the many appropriations, rewritings, and retellings of *Don Giovanni* in the form of other, and sometimes at first sight unrelated, works. They attend to works that stand to *Don Giovanni* in a special and interesting relationship, perhaps of influence, analogy, or competition. That the source work itself is about paternity (in the figure of the Commendatore) and about the refusal of paternity (in the figure of the Don) justifies the interest in its

progeny, in works written in tribute to it, in works that have wanted to acknowledge or even to move beyond this parental master(piece).

Not wanting to step on the pages of the enormous body of musicological literature on this opera, or repeat the findings, the contributing authors were chosen to write predominantly from the perspectives of philosophy and literature. Their explorations range from the dramatic contributions of Byron, Grabbe, Hoffmann, Kierkegaard, Mörike, and Shaw to the operas or music dramas of Wagner and Strauss. Some essays place Don Giovanni or Don Juan in comparative context, as a competitor to other figures of heroic status in German Romanticism and Modernism. No better and no closer competitor, so at least one author argues, can be found than the disobedient figure of Faust.

We are of the impression that “the Don Giovanni moment”—the D-minor chord—returns so often in the subsequent history of opera as to have virtually defined its own minilegacy: hence the title of the present volume. It may not even be unwarranted to claim that this moment becomes for modern opera overall the way to symbolize fate, judgment, and learning, recalling perhaps Aristotle’s key moment of recognition and reversal in his theory of tragedy (and comedy). Furthermore, the mellifluous insinuations of a Giovanni aria are found so often in subsequent poetry and literature as to serve as a kind of inspiration from which the sensuous-seductive voice of a writer wishes to draw breath. This genuflection before the opera is utterly commanded by its themes: it is exactly what the Don requires of every woman who comes close. They will love him, so demands the music. They must submit, as we apparently are to submit, to its seductive power—or not. For perhaps this opera teaches us about our ability to resist and transcend its power to seduce in the move toward moral consciousness. As Kierkegaard writes, and as many of our authors discuss, it is not merely the man that demands submission but the Idea, and we may not want to be taken in by it. The power of the music is intended, according to a developing nineteenth-century aesthetic, to allow Don Giovanni as seducer to be transfigured by his own music into the very idea of seduction. But that this transfiguration is not allowed fully to succeed leaves us with a deep conflict between the work’s aesthetic power and its implied judgment or morality, with what Bernard Williams often liked to describe as a state of uncertainty or indeterminacy. The conflict in this opera is, for many of the contributors to this volume, about the confrontation that the aesthetic poses to the moral and the moral to the aesthetic. The Don Giovanni moment cannot be only a moral moment; a moral moment must rather coexist with the albeit conflicting aesthetic drive. The moment thus lasts much longer than the time it takes for the Commendatore to issue his judgment; it lasts for

the entire run that is Giovanni's aesthetic, seductive, and erotic life. As with Aristotle, the moment of recognition demands the entire form and unfolding of the action as a whole.

In the interrelated essays by Lydia Goehr and Daniel Herwitz, the conflict between the aesthetic and moral is made to work self-reflectively, to bear on the very nature and medium of opera, music, and art. Drawing on Kierkegaard's claim that *Don Giovanni* is "the only classic example of its kind," Goehr argues for a contender in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. She explores two concepts, first that of the absolutely musical, in contradistinction to that of absolute music, and second that of an *Erlebnis*, to sustain a relationship between the absolutely musical experience that is the work and the absolute demand the work makes upon the listener. As Kierkegaard places himself as a lover of the opera that is *Don Giovanni*, so Wagner's *Tristan* makes a seductive claim upon its audience, to deceive, to seduce, to draw them away from a world that is real toward one defined by the "purely aesthetic." Goehr pursues the political and moral dangers of the erotic drive of the "absolutely musical" in terms of a promise that is also a curse. Herwitz draws on Kierkegaard's work to ask how philosophy itself becomes not only seductive but also operatic. He sets his Kierkegaardian-inspired reading against a consideration of the opera's sexism—loving as a woman, acting as a man. He concludes that the dialectical preoccupation with gender in the work stands in an inextricable relation to the aesthetic and moral tensions evident in Kierkegaard's own operatic style of writing philosophy.

Ernst Osterkamp's essay begins the chronological unfolding of *Don Giovanni*'s legacy. He explores Goethe's relationship to *Don Giovanni* as it affected the creation of *Faust* and thus the deep interaction between these two great literary myths. His discussion focuses on how both figures came comparably to engage in a constant border crossing between knowledge and learning, on the one hand, and pleasure and desire, on the other. Each was driven by music, the force of which, so Osterkamp maintains, was deeply rooted in Goethe's development of modern individualism. Many of Goethe's followers—Lord Byron, Nikolaus Lenau, Christian Dietrich Grabbe—then tried to produce works in Goethe's shadow. The attempts were not always successful, but together they demonstrated that the attempt to merge the drama of *Faust* with that of *Don Giovanni* was at once impossible although somehow, after Goethe, unavoidable.

Richard Eldridge's essay interprets E.T.A. Hoffmann's classic short story on Don Juan. It explores the musical, dramatic, philosophic, and sexual preoccupations of its protagonist to establish a central trope of German Romanticism, namely, as Eldridge argues, that we are drawn toward a kind

of surrender to uncontrollable passion as the fullest realization of earthly action, but therein also pulled toward death in the refusal of all reciprocity and acknowledgment.

Thomas S. Grey traces the Byronic and Gothic elements of the Don Juan figure as an archetype in German Romantic opera, drama, and poetry. He focuses on Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* and Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan* to show an emerging paradox, to wit, that at the same time that the figure of the Don becomes Gothicized and vampirized it became also domesticated, which is to say, adapted to a postrevolutionary and specifically German *Vor-märz* bourgeois sensibility. Grey views Wagner's *Dutchman* as a completion of this adaptive process.

Boris Gasparov explores a particular trope of European Romanticism through the work of Pushkin. Whereas some Romantics such as Byron and Hoffmann showed a fascination with Don Juan as a figure belonging to a pre-Romantic past, unburdened by reflection and self-doubt, Pushkin pulled his hero, from which he was personally unable to distance himself, fully into the Romantic or self-reflective domain. In his early work, Pushkin gave his Don Juan figure a double identity, reflected in his paradoxical attempt to cross over from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* to Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*. In his later work, however, the figure came increasingly to be identified with the authoritative figure of the Commendatore and by extension with the authority of the Russian autocracy. The Commendatore's seeming immobility and eventual triumph was exemplified in the late Pushkin's fatalistic view, as Gasparov describes it, of Tzar Nicholas's Russia.

That the subsequent appropriation by other operas may improve or render more explicit the thematic character of *Don Giovanni* is a claim made by Philip Kitcher and Richard Schacht in their shared investigation of Wagner's *Ring*. Placed in comparison with *Don Giovanni*, they argue that Wagner's work revolves around questions of authority and judgment: who makes what kinds of judgment and with what authority? Considering how these questions arose first in *Don Giovanni* and then in the larger canvas of the *Ring*, the authors read the latter as having taken up one of the challenges of *Don Giovanni* with more variation and complexity, the challenge specifically of confronting how and whether a human life achieves or holds onto meaning in a world that constantly turns.

In, as it were, the final gasp of Romanticism at its most self-conscious phase, Brian Soucek argues that although Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal made explicit the fact that two of their collaborations stood in analogy to two of Mozart's operas, they did not mention arguably the best analogy of all, namely, *Ariadne auf Naxos's* relation to *Don Giovanni*.

Both operas stem from many of the same sources, include a parallel mix of comedy and tragedy, exist in two significantly different versions, and, since their beginnings, have been subject to similarly divergent interpretations. But if, as Soucek further argues, *Ariadne* is an analogue to *Giovanni* then it is a self-conscious one. Not only does it inherit the interpretative problems of Mozart's work; it also assumes a reflective stance on those very problems.

And then enters that wag of a wit, George Bernard Shaw, whose *Man and Superman: A Comedy and a Philosophy* (1903) does not, so argues Agnes Heller, actually rewrite Don Juan; it rather deconstructs the very myth. Heller explores the sense of the comic by comparing Shaw to earlier versions of the Don Juan figure, as seen, say, in Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla* (1630) and Moliere's *Don Juan ou Le Festin de pierre* (1665). Mozart's music contrarily endows the figure with a kind of grandeur incompatible with the comedic. Heller shows the complexity of Shaw's transition, how he returns the legend to the comic genre by employing the language of prose drama and reversing almost all the traditional roles. Through the extended lens of Wagner and Nietzsche, Shaw was able to produce in the form of art something approximating a reflective "essay" of contemporary social relevance, one that bore significantly on the then prevalent forms of nihilism, socialism, and feminism.

In his essay Hans Rudolf Vaget aims to recover Mörike's interpretation of Mozart's creative process as described in his famous novella of 1855, *Mozart's Journey to Prague* (en route to attending the premiere of *Don Giovanni*). Against the blanket condemnations of many nineteenth-century interpretations of the opera by critics such as Edward Dent and Albert Einstein, Vaget argues for the value of Mörike's interpretation, in particular, by drawing on the identification of Mörike's own creative process with that of Mozart. In Vaget's essay the identification of authorial process is sustained by a comparison not of biography or intention as such but on the basis of the works.

The philosopher and musician Theodor W. Adorno also sought to recover Mozart's opera, not only by paying tribute to Kierkegaard but also by producing a small vignette on and explicitly in homage to Zerlina. The final two essays of this volume explore this homage. Berthold Hoeckner offers both a translation of Adorno's piece as well as a philosophical commentary upon it, illustrating a dialectical turn away from the figure of Don Juan toward a more neglected character. The small vignette and the small character fit Hoeckner's reading of Adorno's dialectic between the absolute, explosive, and intensive moment and the work as an extended whole. Nikolaus Bacht's essay situates Adorno's homage in a broader context of Adorno's lifelong engagement with the opera, in particular with his response to an early Klemperer performance.

In this response Bacht finds a typically Adornian play of dialectics between freedom and pleasure, on the one hand, and reconciliation and fate, on the other.

One thing this volume wants to show is that it is a clearly a sign of the power of *Don Giovanni* that it has prompted such diverse reimaginings and interpretations. Our ordering of the essays follows a roughly chronological pattern, although it begins in an unexpected place. It starts at a moment in fact before the start, with a deeply culinary essay by Ingrid Rowland on the origins of the Don Juan figure in an ancient Mediterranean cult of magical statues and necromancy. Although, as Rowland argues, it was Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla* that marks the first appearance of Don Juan as a full-blown figure, a more significant development of the cultish aspects of the figure was found in the sixteenth-century Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno, whose dialogue *La Cena de le Ceneri, The Ash Wednesday Supper*, presented parallels to the portentous supper that led Don Juan to Hell—and us, as listeners, to possible intestinal damage.

We wanted the D-minor chord to ring with as much brawn as Zerlina's aria rings with its own *certo balsamo*. The arguments of this volume's essays envisage an opera whose terms of reference are as forceful and overwhelming today as they were two centuries ago, when Mozart journeyed to Prague to the opening of his work that would survive a Europe increasingly overrun with statues and cemeteries the more it pulled itself into hell. The legacy of *Don Giovanni* is that of a world in which we would be lonely without its main character, thus the arguable tediousness of the final reconciliation scene after his death. But the legacy is also of a world that forces us to live, when we must live within the ambit of its authority, in some sort of constant state of rebellion. Studying some part of the immense range of this opera's influence, as these essays do, is a way to reassess the opera and to appreciate its scope. We venture to say that the legacy of *Don Giovanni* is the road back to the opera itself, the very road in reverse that Mozart's carriage traversed to bring him to the beginning of its afterlife. We think it therefore notable that, for all the extensive writing on this opera, there has never been, as far as we can tell, a collection of essays specifically about its legacy as shown in works other than itself. We hope this collection will inaugurate others to be produced so that, over time, another list may be unfolded in a different key.

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