

Feminine Vengeance I: The Assailed/Assailant

Donna Anna

That's when things got out of control / She didn't want to, he
had his way / She said, "Let's go" / He said, "No way!" /
Come on babe, it's your lucky day. / Shut your mouth, we're
gonna do it my way.

Sublime, "Date Rape"

"Don't hope, unless you kill me, that I will ever let you escape" (1.1): with these words, Donna Anna responds to Giovanni's criminal trespass, vowing that she will bring him into custody or else die in the effort.¹ Though many of the characters chase after Giovanni at one moment or another during the course of the opera and eventually band together, Donna Anna is the first to articulate the idea of this pursuit. And while Donna Elvira sings about cutting out Giovanni's heart, it is Anna whose desire for vindication remains constant throughout the opera. Recounting to Don Ottavio the violent details of Don Giovanni's nocturnal visit to her room, Anna encapsulates perfectly her function in the drama: "I boldly follow him right into the street to stop him, and, assailed, I become assailant" (1.13). Donna Anna's haunted and haunting presence throughout the opera challenges spectators, performers, and scholars

alike. Her dual role—as both grieving victim and clarion-voiced agent of retribution—is one of many factors that keep *Don Giovanni* from fitting comfortably into the comic-opera category. From the violence and on-stage homicide of the *introduzione* to the final images of death and eternal damnation, this opera challenges the pleasure-oriented conventions of late-eighteenth-century opera buffa. And, in fact, *Don Giovanni*—the second Mozart–Da Ponte collaboration—boasts a dual heritage: it relies upon both the traditions of late-eighteenth-century opera buffa and the Don Juan story itself, a morality tale that was already more than 150 years old by the time Da Ponte and Mozart fashioned their own version. The figure of Donna Anna, too, is firmly rooted in this Don Juan tradition, and represents one of the legend’s earliest heroines. Likewise, in Mozart’s operas, she is a heroic component. Doubly injured by Don Giovanni’s aggression, Donna Anna grips us with her seriousness; from the opening *introduzione*, she implores us to witness her tragic circumstances. Unlike so many other blue-blooded ladies of opera buffa, however, Anna is not frozen in *seria* stasis in the middle of comic flurry. Rather, from her first appearance she staggers and bolts into emotional extremes that are fully justified by the tragic events of her life. Ravished and robbed of her father, Donna Anna injects fresh psychological possibilities into a formula-ridden genre.

It is puzzling, then, that many critics have reduced her, for the most part, to some form of the “hero’s enemy”—the repressed hypocrite, vengeful harpy, or humorless ice princess. In most cases this critical hostility stems from two distinct but related biases about what is appropriately “feminine” in opera (and perhaps also in the real world). First, there is the issue of Donna Anna’s demand for retribution, which, however justified, sets her apart from the sentimentally selfless and endlessly lenient feminine ideal so prevalent in the operatic canon. Second, Mozart and Da Ponte do not fully expose Anna’s amorous “soft” side, even in her exchanges with her betrothed, Don Ottavio, leading commentators to generate theories about her “real” feelings about Don Giovanni. Before introducing the main proponents of the ironic, hidden-passion reading of Anna’s character, it would be useful to consider Donna Anna’s literary predecessors in earlier versions of the Don Juan story, some of which evidently influenced Da Ponte’s libretto. I have selected a few of the most important sources, each of which paints not only the Donna Anna character type, but also her relationship with the most famous lothario in history in a different shade.

DONNA ANNA BEFORE DA PONTE:
(EN)COUNTERING DON GIOVANNI

In Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (1616?)—generally recognized as the original Don Juan story—there are two characters who might be seen as Donna Anna's earliest ancestors. The first, Duchess Isabela, is betrothed to Duke Octavio. The play opens with her bidding a discreet goodnight to a man she believes to be her fiancé. Perhaps nervous about having risked an amorous premarital tryst—a venturesome activity for a young noblewoman in seventeenth-century Spain—Isabela seeks assurance:

Isabela: Will you honor me with truths, promises and offerings, gifts and compliments, good will and friendship?

D. Juan: Yes, my dear.

Isabela: I wish to have a light.

D. Juan: But why?

Isabela: So that my soul may confirm what it is about to enjoy.

D. Juan: I will put out the light [if you bring one].²

Isabela realizes that she has been deceived, that she has not been romancing with the Duke. Though she initially cries out for help, her protests are abruptly silenced by the King's voice. Isabela knows that she has lost her honor, an unpardonable, even if unintentional, fault. Panic stifles her initial reaction—the desire to have her seducer punished—and she considers instead how to save her reputation at the Neapolitan court and, most importantly, her engagement to Duke Octavio. Isabela knows that if she loses these things, she might as well lose her life. She accepts as a matter of course that she will be found culpable and that a harsh judgment will be rendered: “How can I look at the King?”³ Indeed the King angrily censures Isabela, making it clear that her actions have personally affronted him and blemished his reputation. Indifferent to her distress, he turns his back on her, as he would on a criminal: “It is just and right to punish an offense committed behind my back by turning my back on the one who is guilty.”⁴ To avert personal disaster, Isabela accuses the innocent Octavio of being her accomplice in the illicit love-making, since her only hope lies in making her actions appear more legitimate. She is resourceful in her misfortune, using calculated reason to avoid social ostracism, the isolated austerity of convent life, or death by suicide, so commonly the dishonored woman's fate. There is not the

slightest ambiguity about Isabela's situation. Tirso makes it very clear that Don Juan has been successful, that Isabela—believing herself with the Duke—was a willing partner. Justice and retribution are of little concern to her: the pragmatic Isabela seeks only to protect what promises to be an auspicious and lucrative alliance with Duke Octavio.

Much closer to the Mozart–Da Ponte Donna Anna, both in name and character, is Doña Ana, the daughter of Don Gonzalo. She, too, is visited by Don Juan, now cleverly disguised as her beloved cousin, the Marquis. We know that Doña Ana's affection for the Marquis is genuine, for she requested a secret encounter with him in a letter, which Don Juan conveniently intercepts and uses to his advantage. From off-stage, we hear her cries:

D. Ana: Liar! You are not the Marquis, but have deceived me!

D. Juan: I tell you I am he.

D. Ana: Cruel enemy, you lie, you lie!

[Enter Don Gonzalo with his sword drawn]

D. Gonz: It is the voice of Doña Ana that I hear.

D. Ana: Will no one slay this traitor, murderer of my honor?

D. Gonz: Is such insolence possible? Her honor dead, she cries “Woe is me,” and her tongue tolls this for all to hear!

D. Ana: Kill him.⁵

Two details are especially notable in this passage. First, Doña Ana reacts far more violently to the insult to her honor than Isabela. Second, her bold and truthful public accusation—in contrast to Isabela's deceit—shocks her father, who is, initially at least, more distressed about Ana's “insolent” outcry than Don Juan's deception. Not only has his noble daughter been molested, but she is *telling everyone about it*. Doña Ana's indignation overrides modesty and social dictates. Still, Don Gonzalo's horror of public exposure demonstrates further the precarious position of any woman touched by sexual scandal, whether she was complicit or forced. Tirso makes a point, in fact, of keeping Ana above seventeenth-century Spanish reproach by having Don Juan admit to Don Gonzalo himself that she was untouched, for “she saw through my deceptions in time.”⁶ Skeptical commentators may reject this confession and conclude that the deed was done. Assuming that the Don spoke the truth, however, Doña Ana's reaction is even more intriguing, for it shows that Don Juan's *attempt* to seduce her was enough to warrant the harshest penalty. Moreover, we should remember that Doña Ana does not need nor want a Don Juan. Her love for the Marquis is in its first bloom: her

attraction to him lacks neither erotic appeal, nor the added incentive of material promise—two of Don Juan’s main lures. In this prototype for the Don Juan story, and for Donna Anna’s story as well, we meet an Ana who is capable of both affection and sensual feeling, but who is also a formidable and proud opponent against the man who would assault her honor.

As the Don Juan legend developed over the next two centuries, the relationship between Donna Anna and Don Giovanni prototypes frequently assumed central dramatic importance. Though Tirso’s Doña Ana never appears onstage, her fearless denunciation of Don Juan—who, unbeknownst to her, was once to have been her bridegroom in a politically arranged marriage—accelerates his damnation. In a slightly later version of the Don Juan story—Dorimond’s *Le festin de Pierre ou Le fils criminel* (1658?)—the Doña Ana character (named Amarille) is more fully realized, a remarkably vigorous personality whose disdainful account of Don Juan’s illicit visit to her room anticipates that of Mozart’s Anna: “He tried to force me, but I was able to break the course of both his words and his treacheries” (2.3). Considering Amarille’s “forceful and robust” temperament, Charles Russell remarks that “it is almost as if the legend, with an instinctive life of its own, were now beginning to realize that the heart of the drama lay in a deadly contest of personalities and wills between Donna Anna, pillar of public virtue, though privately not without hidden faults and hypocrisies, and Don Juan, scourge of public virtue, though privately not without a certain melting fascination. All extraneous matters were being cast away.”⁷ Highlighting the libertine’s weakness for the Donna Anna character type, Alonso de Córdova y Maldonado’s three-act play *La venganza en el sepulcro*, written in the last third of the seventeenth century, dramatizes Don Juan’s return to Seville after fifteen years of debauchery. At age thirty, he is finally ready to settle into tranquil domesticity. Approaching his hometown, he sees Doña Ana and immediately falls in love with her. The play centers on his attempts to marry her, though her father—not to mention her fiancé—is against the union. For her part, this Doña Ana remains faithful to her father and betrothed, but she also reveals a fascination with Don Juan, weeping when she hears of his death. Other playwrights developed this theme of mutual attraction, which was taken to rather incongruous extremes in Gioacchino Albertini’s 1783 opera produced in Warsaw, *Don Juan, albo libertyn ukarany* (Don Juan, or the libertine punished), in which Donna Anna and Don Juan are portrayed as doomed lovers.

Clearly, then, there was nothing new about a Donna Anna / Don Giovanni attraction at the end of the eighteenth century, though there was no standard formula for their relationship either. Only one point of consistency stands out: even the most pride-bound Anna, if she feels some flicker of amorous interest in Don Juan, reflects this unmistakably in her words and actions. This is no less true in one of the most celebrated eighteenth-century Don Juan plays, *Don Giovanni Tenorio* (1736), by acclaimed playwright Carlo Goldoni. His Donna Anna is not only enamored of Don Giovanni, but she also makes no secret of her aversion to her betrothed, Don Ottavio, who feels the same way about her. The pair never has a scene alone: all of their dialogue is formal and almost indirect. (In their first scene together [3.2], one can almost imagine the patriarchal chaperon Don Alfonso jabbing Don Ottavio in the ribs as he commands him to “say something nice to your new fiancée.”)⁸ Goldoni clearly spelled out the antipathy between the noble lovers and their respective attractions to others. Don Ottavio addresses his warmest comments to the Elvira-like Donna Isabella, while Donna Anna immediately recognizes the power of Don Giovanni’s sensual charm. She speaks about her desire for Don Giovanni with the same conflicted intensity that marks the recitatives and arias of Da Ponte’s Donna Elvira. For all of her aristocratic correctness, the Donna Anna of *Don Giovanni Tenorio* is a romantic. She acknowledges that filial duty and the promise of future power and riches (Ottavio will probably inherit the throne) should be enough to win her affection, but she cannot deny her heart’s passionate nature. Thus, in her first scene, Donna Anna counters Don Alfonso’s definition of conjugal love—an arranged affair, which first ignites from the affection for one’s parents and honor—with a far more personal vision:

I have heard tell of this love, and it seems to me,
 If I am not mistaken, it is that spirit
 That links two hearts in sweet affection.
 For a pleasing face, for the gentle
 Features of a knight, I have heard it said
 That a young woman can feel love;
 I did not learn, however, that an unknown,
 Perhaps hateful object would have the power
 To light an amorous flame in one’s breast. (1.1)

Strong-willed and ardent, Goldoni’s Anna is far more outspoken and demonstrative than her operatic descendant; nevertheless, she shares with Da Ponte’s Donna Anna a self-possession and conviction that, in the end, resists everyone who tries to control her, even Don Giovanni.

Though there are few exact parallels between these two characters, two soliloquies in Goldoni's play might reasonably be read as reflecting the private thoughts of the later operatic Donna Anna, who is unable to dispel the vision of her slain father from her mind. The first appears just after Donna Anna's encounter with Don Giovanni Tenorio. Left alone with the young nobleman, the lady is initially entranced by his handsome face and noble bearing, but she defies him when he grows too aggressive, and finally cries out for help when he draws his sword to kill her. Her father, the Commendatore, comes to her rescue, but he is murdered by the libertine. Left alone, Donna Anna is confused and self-damning:

If I was less strong,
 What would have become of me? Sacred honesty,
 How many enemies you have! In how many guises,
 How many insidious forms they appear to you! Oh dear father,
 You willed that I be left near the traitor;
 You pushed. . . . But no, I was the incautious woman.
 At the first wicked words, at the first
 Flattering glances, I should have,
 Fleeing, taken myself away. (4.5)

Finally Goldoni's Donna Anna responds to the world with words that might easily correspond to the trembling allusions and tearful outbursts of the operatic Donna Anna; she privately rebukes those around her who presume to understand her pain and who glibly urge her to go on with her life:

How effortlessly do those who do not feel pain
 Advise the afflicted to be pacified.
 No one could understand better than me
 How much I lost in my dead father. (4.9)

Goldoni's Anna expresses one of the basic truths about all of the Donna Anna characters of the Don Juan tradition: they suffer from a grief that *isolates* them from even their closest companions. This isolation—beginning with Tirso's offstage Doña Ana—is more than the social separateness that generally characterizes *seria* characters in comedies: this is a psychological isolation as well. Donna Anna's circumstances seem to demand some degree of reclusion, and playwrights and librettists have always had to grapple with the problem of how much Donna Anna should be seen or heard at all. Sometimes the solutions hearken back to almost Tirso-like invisibility. This is true, for example, of Giovanni Bertati's libretto for the one-act opera *Don Giovanni ossia il convitato*

di pietra (Don Giovanni or the stone guest), which premiered in Venice on 5 February 1787 with music by Giuseppe Gazzaniga and which was the direct model for the Mozart–Da Ponte *Don Giovanni*.⁹ Though Bertati’s Donna Anna makes a dramatic entrance, she removes herself from the action after scene 3, retiring without ceremony to the seclusion of a convent.

Mozart and Da Ponte rejected Bertati’s expedient but uninspired solution, creating instead what Hertz describes as arguably “the greatest *seria* role in all Mozart.” Bertati only sketches the bare bones of passion and reserve, the strong sense of purpose and the emotional devastation that stamp Da Ponte’s Donna Anna. Bertati, for example, confines Anna’s dismay at seeing her father’s corpse to three sentences; for the corresponding scene in his libretto, Da Ponte gives his Anna a dozen short utterances, the bewildered, gasping speech of a person in shock:

From Bertati’s libretto, scene 3:

D. Anna: Ah! the pallor of death is already painted on his face . . .
 His heart no longer beats . . .
 Ah, my father is dead!
[falls into the Duke’s arms]

From Da Ponte’s libretto, act 1, scene 3:

D. Anna: Ah! the assassin murdered him; that blood . . .
 that wound . . . that face . . .
 tinged and covered with the colors of death . . .
 He no longer breathes . . . his limbs are cold . . .
 My father . . . dear father . . . beloved father . . .
 I am fainting . . . I am dying . . .

Da Ponte echoes the main ideas and even some of the words of Bertati’s libretto, but he projects Anna’s anguish with far more color and energy. The punctuation he uses, especially the numerous ellipses, indicates an emphasis on the aesthetic of *sensibilité* rather than comedic conventions. As Stefano Castelvechi explains, “The experience of *sensibilité* seems to have a fragmentary and incomplete quality, reflected in the tendency to fragmentation and incompleteness within sentimental texts. The person overwhelmed by emotion is often incapable of continuous discourse; the amount of the unspoken (interrupted speech, silence, bodily signs) unveils the communicative limits of verbal and rational language.”¹⁰ Mozart carefully marks the emotional progression leading to her swoon (Ex. 1) with a series of striking musical progressions—diminished-seventh chords, chromatic voice leading, and unusual chord

EXAMPLE 1. *Don Giovanni*, No. 2, Recitative, “Ma qual mai s’offre, oh Dei!”

The image displays a musical score for a recitative from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The title is "EXAMPLE 1. *Don Giovanni*, No. 2, Recitative, 'Ma qual mai s'offre, oh Dei!'". The score is in G major and 2/4 time, marked "Allegro Assai". It consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows a vocal line (soprano) with lyrics: "pa - dre a - ma - to", and a piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: "io man - co . . . io mo - ro" and the piano accompaniment. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The score is written in a standard musical notation style with treble and bass clefs.

changes—culminating in the reeling harmonic sequence at “io manco . . . io moro.”¹¹ Mozart and Da Ponte elaborate on Anna’s whirling emotions in the duet that follows: awakening from unconsciousness, she drifts confusedly from horror and outrage to overwhelming sorrow. By contrast, Bertati’s Donna Anna abruptly turns from her woeful encounter with her father’s corpse and begins to describe—with remarkable self-possession and calm attention to detail—the events preceding the old gentleman’s slaying. Bertati’s version does not beg the question as to whether the seducer was successful. When this Donna Anna explains that she defended herself, causing the fiend to flee, the Duke immediately assures her that he will vindicate both daughter and father. The Duke also offers his betrothed the comfort of a “husband’s love,” but this sensible Donna Anna makes it clear that there will be no talk of marriage until the criminal is found and punished.

The Mozart–Da Ponte Donna Anna strives at times to adhere to these stiff-backed conventions of the noble *seria* heroine but is not able to sustain it. Even her loftiest professions of anger and grief quiver with

fragility, as she tries to check a growing wave of hysteria. She does not invite us to feel the voyeuristic pity that Donna Elvira arouses. Rather, her sorrow and shame—for like all Donna Anna types, she partially blames herself for the scandal and murder—cause her to turn inward, making her less accessible to us. Yet she does not conveniently disappear from the stage after her first scene: she is a reminder that this opera has high stakes. Mozart and Da Ponte keep their Donna Anna in the spotlight; her cries for vindication reach all the way to the afterworld, driving the work to its apocalyptic finale. Elvira forgives, Zerlina forgets, but Anna does neither. Ultimately she is unable, mostly because of her gender, to be the actual agent of revenge, but she definitely invokes and sustains the concepts of justice and retribution. Ultimately her unswerving opposition to Don Giovanni—the man who assaulted her and killed her father—may account for a great deal of anti-Donna Anna critical reception. She fails to follow the well-worn path of so many favorite operatic heroines, both comic and tragic. She neither pines for nor pardons the “hero,” Don Giovanni. She says nothing about his charm, boldness, or diabolic vigor. Before she recognizes him as her father’s killer, he is simply a neighbor and a friend about whom she makes no remarkable comment: after her realization, he is the villain who took away her father and her peace. Even Don Giovanni himself sees the threat that Donna Anna poses to him. Alarmed at the thought of losing his anonymity, the fleeing libertine mutters, “Questa furia disperata / mi vuol far precipitar,” which might be translated as “This desperate Fury wants to make me do something rash,” or, more seriously still, “wants to bring about my downfall.” In fact, Donna Anna fills an essential dramatic purpose: she is the tangible reminder of Don Giovanni’s criminal behavior, a unforgettable connection between *Il Dissoluto* and that other eponymous character in the Don Juan tradition, the Stone Guest.

E. T. A. HOFFMANN AND BEYOND: ROMANCING RAPE

From the nineteenth century right up to the present, a formidable list of musicians, poets, playwrights, critics, philosophers, and scholars have put their own stamp on Donna Anna, filling in the spaces that Da Ponte and Mozart left blank and, in doing so, ignoring many details they made explicit. The Romantics were interested in updating Donna Anna (and Don Giovanni, for that matter) to reflect their own tastes in heroines and heroes. Probably the most famous “adaptation” of the story is E. T. A. Hoffmann’s “fantasy piece” on Don Juan, through which he

hoped to make the subject of the libretto more worthy of Mozart's ingenious music.¹² In Hoffmann's tale, Anna really does nurture a secret passion for her seducer, but she also represents the redeeming antidote to Giovanni's infernal actions:

Donna Anna, so highly favored by Nature, is thus set in opposition to Don Juan. Just as Don Juan was originally a wonderfully powerful, magnificent man, so is she a divine woman, over whose pure spirit the Devil has no power. All the craftiness of Hell could corrupt only her mortal part.—Once Satan has completed her ruin, Hell will be unable to delay the avenging forces from their task, which even Heaven has ordained.¹³

Hoffmann's Donna Anna is a passionate angel that has been ravaged by a demonic force ("the heat of a superhuman sensuality, glowing like Hell-fire, coursed through her and made all her resistance futile"), but whose soul remains pure. She is tormented by the infamy of the fatal encounter. And, of course, like all good Romantic heroines, she is doomed to die from the aftereffects of her "unholy passion":

As [Don Juan] tried to escape after the deed was done [seducing her], the thought of her ruin wound around her with racking agony like a horrible, venomous, death-spraying monster. Her father's demise at Don Juan's hand, her connection with the cold, unmanly, ordinary Don Ottavio, whom she once thought to love—even the raging love that, in the moment of highest pleasure blazed up to consume her innermost spirit, now burns with the ardor of annihilating hatred. Only Don Juan's undoing can procure peace for her frightened soul from its fatal torments; but this very peace will signal her own earthly demise.¹⁴

The spirit of Hoffmann's tale continues to loom large in modern productions of *Don Giovanni* and in commentary on the opera, though the value of its influence is open to debate, especially as regards the character of Donna Anna. Since the mid-twentieth century, critics and scholars have frequently asserted Donna Anna's shameful secret passion as fact, but they have replaced the poet's earnest sympathy for her plight with a disparaging cynicism. On the other hand, the hero worship that is so evident in Hoffmann's portrayal of Don Giovanni continues to thrive. As critical reception attributed more and more positive qualities to Don Giovanni—vitality, sexual prowess, charisma, independent thinking, endless potential, nonconformity, determination, and courage—it also began to view Donna Anna in increasingly antithetical—that is, negative—terms. Not surprisingly, many of these modern interpretations are scant on actual analysis of Donna Anna's words, actions, and music, amounting to dismissive and sometimes shockingly misogynistic

invention. In the early part of the twentieth century, Edward Dent set the tone for this kind of reading:

Anna has been made a tragic figure by later interpreters, but it may be doubted whether she is really anything more than self-absorbed and aloof. . . . [She] treats even Don Ottavio in so distant a manner that we cannot expect her to reveal her true self in a duet or trio. She seems to have been brought up from childhood always to conceal her real feelings and never acknowledge to herself any motive but duty and family pride. If she had been Italian and not Spanish, she might have been Fiordiligi in *Così fan Tutte*, and there seems every probability that she will eventually become first lady-in-waiting to the Queen of the Night. She is in fact a thoroughly unpleasant lady.¹⁵

And in 1977—in what might be called fictional slander—William Mann augments Dent’s complaints in a downright nasty attack:

Anna is an upper-class Spanish lady who has etiquette where her feelings and brains should reside. Duty and honor are her watchword [*sic*]. Towards all her fellow-creatures she presents a coldly correct personality. If she loves her father it is because the Bible told her so. Her censorious anger against others is a juvenile trait. All men, to her, are beasts, *and it would be beneficial to her personal growing-up if she had been pleasantly raped by Don Juan*. . . . Her upbringing has made her afraid of other people, and she has given most of her sincere outgoing emotion to lapdogs or possibly horses.¹⁶

A final example testifies to how this critical animosity toward Anna has persisted right up to the politically sensitive present. In his 1991 study *Così? Sexual Politics in Mozart’s Operas*, Charles Ford manages to camouflage the same brand of hoary chauvinism with a slick, progressive-sounding book title:

We never feel that we know Anna’s true feelings. . . . [She] is known only as her silhouette within a cameo of rejection, and this, her cardboard one-dimensionality, induces a curiosity concerning what seems to be an emotional secrecy. The implication that Anna is secretly in love with the man who violated her cannot be avoided. . . . Within the Enlightenment’s conception of femininity, the complicity of every rape victim must always be in doubt, for no woman can *naturally* resist the sexual intentions of a man, for she is nothing more than an object of his desire. Anna’s “un-natural” resistance towards Ottavio seems to demand explanation by way of her “natural” lack of resistance towards Giovanni, which adds to his greater glory as a damned, sexual hero. This is why critics feel compelled to establish Anna’s sexual complicity; and why William Mann suggests that she deserves to be pleasantly raped.¹⁷

By citing Mann, Ford demonstrates how ancient prejudices—especially the privileging of the masculine perspective—persist in the critical literature, including his own writings. His conclusion that “Anna’s whole fictive being is exhausted in the suspicion that she is guilty of ‘contributory negligence’” and his remark that “implications” about her secretly being in love with him “cannot be avoided” clearly indicate his own interpretive biases.¹⁸

Admittedly, these passages—especially Mann’s outrageous description—are extreme in their offensive language and lack of scholarly argument, but a general pessimism about Donna Anna turns up in rigorous critical analyses as well. Wye Allanbrook, for instance, evaluates Donna Anna’s musical language with evident skepticism:

Anna’s *opera seria* indignation betrays her immediately upon entrance . . . and so does the ambiguity of her first words to her seducer, “Non sperar, se non m’uccidi, / Ch’io ti lasci fuggir mai!” It would be merely insensitive to accuse Donna Anna of real ambivalence toward her enemy in her present fury; yet later, when she persists in directing all her ardor toward the pursuit of her seducer rather than toward marriage with her affianced lover, these words will afford a second meaning.¹⁹

Allanbrook’s reading is based on a fairly hard-line position—*seria* cannot be taken at face value in the context of *opera buffa*—and ignores the particular dramaturgical qualities of this hybrid work, an *opera buffa* on Don Juan, which mixes comedy and tragedy in its own manner. Traditionally, as we have seen, Donna Anna’s primary function is to counter Don Juan; whether she loves him or not is of secondary importance. Her demand for justice is expected and validated, and, to this end, a serious musical style is completely appropriate.

(UN)FEMININE RAGE AND RETRIBUTION

So why has Donna Anna become such a lightning rod for “bad press” and unsympathetic representations in productions? There are, naturally, historical factors. Revenge has long been considered a man’s business, and the Age of Enlightenment was no different in this regard. Mary Hunter explains that eighteenth-century notions about women made it “increasingly difficult to represent women out of control” and explains that rage arias, which often allude to vengeance, exhibit an “intensity of passion that is ill-suited to both the aesthetic and to the gender ideology of *opera buffa*,” which generally attempts “to control and rationalize

the potentially dangerous power of fury”²⁰ Examining versions of the Don Juan story from the eighteenth century, Charles Russell identified a related dramatic trend, nothing that “in the eighteenth century, it was wrong for a Donna Anna to assert herself too boldly, wrong for a Don Giovanni to be deeply disturbed by self-doubts. Those were erratic male and female patterns of behavior unbecoming to the spirit of the legend; they did not fit and were not retained, at least until reexamined and revised in light of new, nineteenth-century sensibilities.”²¹ It is true that many Donna Anna characters in the Don Juan story tradition exhibit some moment of expected feminine softness. Tirso avoided the problem by giving his Doña Ana only the briefest (though unequivocal) plea for vengeance before taking her out of the action altogether; Bertati and Gazzaniga adopted a similar solution. Goldoni’s Donna Anna expresses her outrage at Don Giovanni’s trespasses, but she also responds with an almost involuntary pity to his pleas for forgiveness. Her amorous, “womanly” heart is explicitly implicated in her reaction, for which she begs the pardon of her father’s ghost: “Shade of my father which wanders about me, forgive my weakness of heart. I am a woman at last . . .” (5.5).

Mozart and Da Ponte gave their Donna Anna a vulnerable side as well—seen best in her swooning grief for her father and in “Non mi dir,” her profession of love to Don Ottavio—but this does not include pity for Don Giovanni, which, in any case, is amply provided by Donna Elvira. Still, the act of forgiveness holds a special place in Mozart’s operas, where revenge usually serves as an unattractive foil to the more perfect gesture of clemency: the juxtaposition of the Queen of the Night’s “Der Hölle Rache” and Sarastro’s “In diesen heil’gen Hallen” in *Die Zauberflöte* is a clear example.²² The related category of anger is tricky, too, in the context of opera buffa. As Hunter points out, “pure” rage arias (which often speak of revenge) are “a clear and frequent category of opera seria,” but they are generally transformed within the opera buffa repertoire, so that “the arias that express rage can often be assimilated into other aria types. Noble rage shades into expressions of pride, nobility, haughtiness, or a demand for sympathy, while the rage expressed by comic characters turns into sputtering *buffa* displays.”²³ Mozart used *seria*-derived musical idioms to convey very different meanings (and degrees of seriousness) depending on the dramatic situation, and his treatment of the theme of vengeance is no different. Looking at some examples of “revenge” music in other Mozart operas may help us to evaluate the particular dramatic context and musical language of Donna

Anna's rage-revenge numbers, specifically the duet section of No. 2, "Fuggi, crudele," and the aria No. 10, "Or sai chi l'onore."

At one end of the spectrum, there are the two rage-revenge arias in *Le nozze di Figaro*: Dr. Bartolo's puffed-up *buffa* aria "La vendetta," and Count Almaviva's bravura number "Vedrò mentre io." Both the Count and Bartolo want revenge against Figaro, who at one time or another has duped each of them. Both Bartolo's and Almaviva's arias aspire to the exalted *alla breve* mode, but neither of them is effective as a true rage aria. Musically, Bartolo manages only a tone of pretentious bluster, while the Count is far more convincingly indignant in his recitative than in the aria itself, which is a little too lyrically self-pitying until the last section. Nor does the drama rouse much sympathy for their complaints. Bartolo, the scheming troll aspiring to the ranks of the powerful, has always played the tyrant in his limited arena of control, while the duplicitous, womanizing Almaviva exemplifies the self-indulgent arrogance of class privilege. Both the nobleman and the doctor believe they have been injured, but their own overbearing actions are to be blamed. Their threats of vengeance thus become just another unattractive feature of their abuse of power.

In other cases the distinction between hypocritical vindictiveness and righteous anger is not so straightforward. In two of Mozart's most famous rage arias—Elettra's aria "Tutto nel cor vi sento" in *Idomeneo* (I.6.4) and, ten years later, the Queen of the Night's "Der Hölle Rache"—the character's resentment is understandable, but not entirely honorable or without innocent victims. Both of these arias are in D minor; they also share a common tempo indication (*allegro assai*) and meter (common time). Furthermore, both arias allude to the darker side of vengeance, the madness that can distort a legitimate affliction. The Queen of the Night and Elettra are both driven to rage by the perceived betrayal of a loved one who holds the key to their ambitions and happiness. With Pamina's submission to Sarastro and the Initiates, the Queen of the Night's permanent expulsion from "humanity" grows more certain. In the case of Elettra, her vengeful passions grow out of unrequited love and a genuine anxiety about her ultimate fate. As is typical of rage arias, the language suggests a potential for violence:

Tutte nel core vi sento,
Furie del crudo Averno
Lunge a sì gran tormento,
Amor, mercé, pietà.
Chi mi rubò quel core,

I feel you all in my heart,
furies of cruel Avernus,
keep love, mercy, pity
far from such a great torment.
She [Ilia] who stole that heart,

Quel, che tradito ha il
mio,
Provin' dal mio furore
Vendetta, e crudeltà.

that one which betrayed mine
[Idamante],
may they feel my fury,
vengeance, and cruelty.²⁴

Elettra never actually harms Idamante or her rival Ilia. She hopes to exploit Idomeneo's decision to send Idamante away with her (and, consequently, away from Ilia), but she manages only to increase her own unhappiness. In the end, deprived of her heart's desire, she longs for death. Elettra's music speaks more of an internal battle, a self-destructive emotional unhinging, than a concrete plan of revenge. The only thing she shares with the Count and the Queen of the Night is pride of rank: more than once she stresses the difference between herself and the "slave," Ilia. Nevertheless, the anguished sentiments of this aria are fundamentally personal, not a matter of station. Expressing Elettra's crazed passion, the music combines common rage/revenge elements, such as conspicuous dynamic alternations, *sforzandi*, and tremolos, with harmonic peculiarities that betoken the princess's eventual descent into despair. Once past the triadic, almost martial, introductory line and mythic references ("Tutto nel cor vi sento / furie del crudo Averno"), Elettra suddenly grows doubtful and checks herself, seeking refuge in an aimless chromatic line that finally disintegrates into sobs, the result of her "gran tormento" (mm. 31–37). Her rage derails the return of the primary material: expecting the tonic D minor to be reestablished, we hear instead C minor (at m. 77). Elettra is (harmonically) lost in frenetic emotions. Even after the harmony stabilizes, her tempestuous feelings are captured by the two pairs of horns with their squally fanfare on the final "provin' dal mio furore, vendetta e crudeltà."

How does Donna Anna's appeal for retribution compare with that of Elettra or the Queen of the Night? Why does she end up singing in the *lieto fine* while they are excluded from any kind of happy ending? The difference might lie in part in the "righteousness" of Donna Anna's accusation. The Queen has been injured, but she also injures others: more than the struggle for her daughter, her desire for power over Sarastro drives her actions. Elettra has been abandoned, in a sense, by the object of her affections, yet she focuses most of her punitive energy on her innocent rival, Ilia. Donna Anna, however, blames only Don Giovanni, who openly brags about his transgressions. There is nothing exaggerated about her allegation against him: at the very least, Don Giovanni violated her privacy, attempting an illicit and deceitful seduction, and then killed her father. As Maynard Solomon points out, "the cardinal crimes in the

Da Ponte operas and *Die Zauberflöte* are those aimed against virtue, in the first place seduction and rape. Indeed the threat of sexual violation is central to all of Mozart's opera buffas and singspiels from *Zaide* to *Die Zauberflöte*. . . . The threat of seduction or rape provides a backdrop of menace in these operas, which is quite at odds with their comic surface."²⁵ He identifies the main themes of Mozart's operas as "the critique of power, the protest against injustice, and the safeguarding of innocence" in front of which the composer's "main question is, 'How do we make things right?'"²⁶ In general, Mozart's operas have more faith in forgiveness than in retribution, but the Don Juan legacy presents a special problem. The story relies heavily on the ending, the spectacular downfall of a remorselessly dissolute aristocrat: everyone waits for the "bad guy" to meet a theatrically satisfying end. From his origins through the eighteenth century, Don Juan had usually been punished. Mozart and Da Ponte did not stray from the narrative convention, emphasizing the fact that Don Giovanni rejects and despises forgiveness and remorse. Then again, Mozart, who so often celebrates the act of forgiveness, humanizes Donna Anna's vindictive feelings through a compelling musical language, endowing her righteous anger with its own positive dramatic value while never letting it deteriorate into bloodthirsty madness.

The key of D (both minor and major modes) is central to this opera. It is the key of the overture, with its slow, eerie D-minor introduction that returns in the scene of Don Giovanni's cataclysmic fall, and it is also the key of Donna Anna's revenge numbers. (In contrast, the Queen's "Der Hölle Rache" stands in jarring dissonance to the E-flat tonality of *Die Zauberflöte*.) Donna Anna's first call for revenge occurs shortly after she sees the corpse of her father and realizes that he has been murdered while defending her honor. It is an intense and terrible moment of drama, one that Da Ponte and Mozart knew would inspire the sympathy of the audience, especially since the fatal stabbing occurs onstage, with the hemorrhaging body of the Commendatore in plain view. Wracked by the anguish of both her own encounter with Don Giovanni and its bloody consequences, Donna Anna makes a tearful plea to Don Ottavio to avenge the night's ghastly events. Her desperation is of the utmost importance to understanding the entire third scene. During the recitative where she urges Ottavio to hurry to her father's aid, she is still the *furia disperata* in frenetic shock, hoping to capture the intruder. When she sees her father lying on the ground, blood surrounding his body, she slowly begins to collapse. The vigorous energy of her struggle with Don Giovanni dissipates. The forceful *alla breve* of her

first entrance—with the martial dotted rhythms and strident, patterlike outbursts of “come una furia disperata”—is temporarily silenced. For, despite her bravest efforts, the villain has escaped and her father is dead. Her sung reaction—with its gasping phrases and disorienting series of diminished chords—is devastating, a masterly depiction of assailed sensibility. The *recitativo obbligato* passage that precedes “Fuggi, crudele” totally contradicts the allegation that Donna Anna lacks sincerity or vulnerability, being “as high in its pathos as the preceding [dialogue between Leporello and Don Giovanni] was low in its comedy.”²⁷

Donna Anna swoons, then, recovering her senses to some extent, she launches—*disperatamente*, as indicated by the stage directions—into the duet. Her words suggest delirium: she has either taken Don Ottavio for her attacker or else lashed out at him in blind anguish.²⁸ As with the “io manco . . . io moro” passage discussed above, the emotional confusion and broken speech that characterize Donna Anna’s music in the first part of the duet, before she demands revenge, are consistent with the expressive conventions of *sensibilité*. At the same time, however, Donna Anna reassumes the exalted *alla breve* style, reminding us of her *seria* origins.²⁹ The *alla breve* is also the language of her family, so to speak. In the context of the opera, we could say that she “inherits” this style from her father; the Commendatore utilizes the same idiom during the trio following his fatal injury and again during the supper scene. In response to Donna Anna’s outburst—with its mixture of expressive idioms—the imperturbable Don Ottavio gently commands his beloved to listen and to look at him; at the same time, his music smoothly shifts the harmony away from D minor toward more tranquil F major. Still shaken, Anna returns to the fragmented phrasing of the preceding recitative. Recognizing her beloved (“mio bene”), she asks his pardon, her melodic phrase coming to rest briefly on F major as well (m. 88). When she asks for her father, however, the harmony begins to slip downward once more. Don Ottavio hesitates, attempting to avoid another collapse; he urges her to “forget these bitter memories,” his music gently insisting on F-major consolation. Remembering now what happened, Anna turns to thoughts of vengeance, signified by the descending, staccato motive in the bass at measure 124.³⁰ Overcome with emotion and a sense of helplessness, Anna begs Ottavio to avenge the bloodshed “if he can.” Ottavio swears on their love to do so, and the two lovers, united by this pledge, return to D minor and the *alla breve* tempo for “Che giuramento, oh Dei.”

Ratner describes this duet as consisting of a double presentation of three affects: 1) Anna’s sorrow and despair; 2) Ottavio’s consolation;

and 3) their resolution for vengeance. Yet, for the most part, these affects can best be heard in the preceding accompanied recitative and in the moments of the duet where Anna demands that Ottavio swear revenge and Ottavio obliges her (see mm. 125–33 and mm. 155–67). Strikingly, in the passages of the duet where they sing together, Anna and Ottavio do not elaborate on their rage or on possible punitive actions. Instead, their united hearts and minds agitated with “a hundred different emotions,” they reflect on what a “terrible moment” it is that incites “such an oath.” The accompaniment well illustrates their trepidation with a pulsating dominant pedal and *piano* dynamics that suddenly explode with *sforzandi*; the two lovers are breathless as they gasp out the words “fra cento affetti e cento,” rising shrilly on the final word, suggesting something between urgency and dread. This is not ruthless, cold resolve, but rather a relatively conflicted, self-conscious “vengeance” that is essentially a demand for justice. Only after Donna Anna recognizes Don Giovanni as her assailant does her will harden into the unflinching directive of “Or sai chi l’onore.”

Another revenge duet—that of Vitellia and Sesto in the opening scene of *La clemenza di Tito*—offers a useful comparison. Like Elettra, Vitellia resents a would-be suitor, in this case Emperor Tito, for choosing another bride; like the Queen of the Night, she has a royal title and believes that her rightful claim to power has been usurped. Complicating matters further, Vitellia is betrothed to Sesto, for whom she apparently feels nothing. Enslaved by his passion, on the other hand, Sesto suffers Vitellia’s thoughtlessness with a mixture of self-pity and self-sacrifice. When the ireful princess concocts a plan to redress the snub to her pride, she enlists Sesto as her aide, bullying him into submission by threatening to release him “from every promise” (1.1). In the end, he agrees to do what Vitellia asks:

<i>Sesto.</i> Come ti piace imponi: Regola i moti miei. Il mio destin tu sei; Tutto farò per te.	Command as you please: rule my every movement. You are my destiny; I will do everything for you.
<i>Vitel.</i> Prima che il sol tramonti, Estinto io vò l’indegno. Sai ch’egli usurpa un regno, Che in sorte il ciel mi diè.	Before the sun sets, I want the unworthy man dead. You know that he usurps a kingdom, which heaven destined to me.
<i>Sesto.</i> Già il tuo furor m’accende.	Already your fury ignites me.
<i>Vitel.</i> Ebben, che più s’attende?	Well, what more do you await?

<i>Sesto.</i> Un dolce sguardo almeno Sia premio alla mia fè!	Let one sweet glance at least be the prize for my faith!
<i>a2.</i> Fan mille affetti insieme Battaglia in me spietata. Un'alma lacerata Più della mia non v'è.	A thousand emotions together battle relentlessly within me. There is not a soul more torn than mine.

Musically, this duet resembles “Che giuramento, oh Dei” in several ways. Both sections, the opening Andante and the Allegro that joins the two characters, are *alla breve*. The piece is set in the seemingly more benign key of F major, but it hints at D minor at the transition between the two sections. Both duets end with a section using detached syllabic settings to reflect the wave of tumultuous emotions with which the characters are overcome (see, for instance, mm. 37–42 in “Come ti piace imponi” and mm. 147–50 in “Che giuramento, oh Dei”). In *Tito*, however, we find a more convincing example of the steely, imperious femininity and malleable, lovesick (read “weaker”) masculinity that so many writers attribute to Donna Anna and Don Ottavio.³¹

Donna Anna reveals a far more sensitive personality than does Vitellia. Her anguish both tempers and feeds her fury, trapping her in a cycle of fragility and indignation. The *introduzione* vividly presents the violent events and personal agony that impel Donna Anna and Don Ottavio to their pact of retribution. Vitellia, on the other hand, has already formed her plan by the time we first meet her in *Tito*. She is true *seria* royalty, whose “injury” is as much political as it is personal. Only when she fears that death may be waiting for her does Vitellia reconsider her murderous designs. Additionally, though Vitellia and Sesto comment in a general way about their warring emotions, Donna Anna and Don Ottavio specifically connect this idea to their awareness of the ugly nature of revenge: what a “barbarous” oath they have been compelled to make. It is this very sense of conscience that Vitellia lacks and Sesto disregards until, much later in the opera, fear and guilt lead them to regret their actions.

“BUT DONNA ANNA, WHAT DID SHE ASK FOR?”

The theme of retribution returns dramatically in Donna Anna’s first aria, No. 10, “Or sai chi l’onore.” On the surface, this aria might seem a mere showpiece for the singer in an old-fashioned *alla breve* meter and style; after inciting Ottavio to vengeance once again, Anna makes an opera *seria*-style exit. But the dramatic importance and musical weight of “Or

sai chi l'onore" must be considered in context, as the culmination of a crucial scene of *discovery*. Dressed in mourning, Donna Anna and Don Ottavio encounter Don Giovanni and ask him for help in their difficult situation. Giovanni plays the cavalier with Donna Anna, offering his consolation with fabricated tenderness. At that moment, Donna Elvira rushes in and warns Anna of the treacherous nature of "quel barbaro." Listening to Elvira plead her case in the quartet "Non ti fidar, o misera" (I.12), both Donna Anna and Don Ottavio are struck by Donna Elvira's "noble" and "majestic" characteristics. Seeing that the couple show an interest in the poor woman's complaints, a nervous Don Giovanni bids Elvira to be quiet lest she bring criticism on herself. Elvira snaps back furiously that she is not concerned about this, but desires only "to reveal to everyone your guilt and my state." While neither Anna nor Ottavio can hear clearly what Elvira is saying to Giovanni, both of them notice Giovanni's change of color at the distraught young woman's words. Their suspicions are aroused and gain substance throughout the quartet. Sensing their misgivings, Giovanni makes a hasty exit, but not before offering assistance to "bellissima Donn' Anna": "If I can serve you, I await you at my home."

He should have remained silent: the lascivious twist of his voice identifies him unmistakably to Donna Anna as her attacker. She shares this terrible revelation with Don Ottavio in the extended accompanied recitative that introduces "Or sai chi l'onore": "Don Ottavio . . . I am dying! This recitative, one of Mozart's most dramatic, is organized into three main sections: 1) the identification of Don Giovanni as the Comendatore's killer (Allegro assai, mm. 1–23); 2) the detailed description of what happened in Donna Anna's room (Andante, mm. 24–53, with a brief recall of the *Primo Tempo*); and 3) the conclusion of the Donna Anna's account, focusing on her escape and her father's death (*Primo Tempo*, mm. 54–69), leading directly (*attacco subito*) to the aria. In the introductory Allegro assai of the recitative, the music staggers into C minor—the same key, incidentally, of the passage in which Donna Anna saw her father's dead body. A lurching double-dotted motive in the strings signals Anna's alarm, the suffocating swell of adrenaline that comes with an appalling revelation (mm. 3–4ff.). She cries out to Ottavio to help her, her voice rising in barely suppressed panic, "Oh Dei, oh Dei!" She names Don Giovanni as her father's murderer, a forceful cadence in C minor punctuating her shocking disclosure.

After the initial recitative, Donna Anna regains her fragile composure and relates the previous night's devastating events. Her speech is slower

and more regulated now, though she brings in the unusual key of E-flat minor.³² The harmony descends (in thirds) through various other minor keys: her mistaken belief that the cloaked figure she beheld was Ottavio (E-flat minor), her terrified realization that it was a stranger (B minor), and his attempts at physical intimacy (G minor). When Donna Anna mentions her scream for help, the music suddenly bolts into the original allegro tempo and anxious, double-dotted motive. The passage is similar to the earlier one in which she identified Giovanni as the assassin, and it seems likewise to be heading to another decisive cadence, now emphasizing the key G minor, which Mozart often used for anguish or distress. But her forlorn “non viene alcun” (“no one came”) leads only to a new diminished chord, and the tempo returns to andante. As she describes her fear of being overpowered (“che già mi credo vinta”), the harmony slips another third to E minor. The urgent leaps in the violin parts (mm. 49–51) simulate Anna’s vigorous fight—“torcermi, e piegar mi” (twisting and bending myself)—to break from Don Giovanni’s grasp.

Hearing of her successful escape, Don Ottavio (characteristically) tries to see the happier side, heading off Donna Anna’s A minor with a relieved deceptive cadence toward his preferred key of F major (“Ohime, respiro”). His musical sigh of relief has often been seen as ridiculously sunny and gullible. Alfred Einstein’s reading is typical in this regard. He concludes that Don Ottavio’s response has a “tragicomic flavor” for “every understanding listener,” since it was generally understood in the eighteenth century that Don Giovanni has “reached the summit of his desires” with Donna Anna, and that she discovers the “terrible truth of her betrayal” just after the quartet.³³ In this way Einstein harnesses Don Ottavio’s relief to a scenario that owes more to Hoffmann than Da Ponte. But the recitative is focused on Donna Anna, and there is nothing silly about her narrative or about the “horror of the infamous attack” in her bedroom. What she has described to Don Ottavio, after all, is not seduction, not a betrayal, but an attempted rape: “with one hand he tries to stifle my voice, and with the other he clutches me tightly, so much that I think I am already overcome.”

There are numerous libertines in the Don Juan literary tradition who cross (or are willing to cross) the line between seduction and force, and Da Ponte’s Don Giovanni is no different: after all, Zerlina’s screams in the finale to act 1 are not ecstatic, but fearful. Both in the Mozart–Da Ponte opera and in the Bertati–Gazzaniga *Don Giovanni*, the Leporello

character insinuates that his master would willfully steal what was not offered freely. In the Bertati libretto, the servant Pasquariello offers sardonic congratulations to Giovanni: “Bravo! Two heroic deeds. Donna Anna violated, and to her father a thrust of the sword” (1.2). Echoing Pasquariello, Leporello also implies that Don Giovanni’s “seductions” could be heavy-handed: “Bravo: Two pretty feats! *Force* the daughter, and kill the father” (1.2).³⁴ To Don Giovanni’s retort that the Commendatore “asked for it,” Leporello snidely responds, “But Donna Anna, what did she ask for?” For whatever reasons, Don Giovanni is uncomfortable with this remark. Rather than gloat over his good fortune (as he does when he later recounts his success at seducing Leporello’s girlfriend), he brusquely orders his servant to shut his mouth unless he “wants something as well.” Whether Don Giovanni forced Donna Anna or had to flee before he could enjoy her, Leporello’s sarcasm rankles. The debacle was not to the libertine’s credit. Don Giovanni himself remarks on his poor luck just before he meets up with Donna Anna and Don Ottavio (and just after Elvira has broken up his tryst with Zerlina): “It seems to me that the devil is amusing himself by opposing my pleasant dealings; they are all going badly” (1.11). For a man who generally does not want more of an entrée that he has already tasted, Giovanni seems more than amenable to a meeting with the lovely Donna Anna at his house, perhaps hoping for a second chance. And so, as Solomon concludes, “despite imaginary efforts by commentators to convert Don Giovanni’s failures into offstage conquests, it is fairly unambiguous that he is literally thwarted in carrying out five attempted seductions.”³⁵

Considering what might have happened, Don Ottavio takes Anna at her word and, understandably, breathes again with relief, though this hardly breaks the tension. Transfixed by her grim memories, Donna Anna continues with her story, for her escape did not end the night’s outrages. The allegro tempo and double-dotted motive return and the harmony continues to linger in the minor mode as she recalls her renewed cries for assistance and her attempts to impede and unmask Don Giovanni. When her father appeared on the scene he, too, wanted to know Don Giovanni’s identity, but, unlike his daughter, he was silenced forever. In this way, Donna Anna laments, the “iniquitous man added to his crime.” Her aria “Or sai chi l’onore” follows immediately, an impressive alla breve rage aria cast in a modified da capo form: the D-major “A” section sets forth Anna’s confident accusation and righteous anger, while the “B” section (in D minor) conjures up the pathetic mood associated

with the Commendatore's gaping wound and spilled blood. In both of these sections, Anna urges Ottavio to vindicate her slain father:

Or sai chi l'onore
 Rapire a me voles
 Chi fu il traditore
 Che il padre mi tolse;
 Vendetta ti chiedo,
 La chiede il tuo cor.
 Rammenta la piaga
 Del misero seno,
 Rimira di sangue
 Coperto il terreno
 Se l'ira in te langue,
 D'un giusto furor.

Now you know who
 wanted to steal my honor,³⁶
 who the betrayer was
 that took my father from me,
 I ask you for vengeance,
 your heart asks for it.
 Remember the wounding
 of that poor breast,
 behold again the ground
 covered in blood
 if the righteous anger
 languishes in your heart.

"Or sai chi l'onore" shares fundamental characteristics with the earlier revenge duet, namely the key of D (now the major mode) and the *alla breve* style. Allanbrook describes the aria as "the prototypical march of the *opera seria* heroine." She views the musical style of the aria as both its greatest strength and, in the context of *Don Giovanni*, its greatest liability, remarking that the suppleness of comedy "subtly undercuts the monolithic intensity of the heroic style." Accordingly, Donna Anna, whose "emotions and gestures are as noble—and as monochromatic—as the affections of the most queenly of *seria* demigoddesses," loses a dramatic edge in what Allanbrook believes is fundamentally a *buffa* context.³⁷ But this is *Don Giovanni*, not *Le nozze di Figaro*, where the most serious injury we see is Cherubino's scratch or Figaro's feigned sprained ankle. The Countess may shed tears in her room, but *Don Giovanni* presents a veritable parade of weeping or screaming women. It is true that *opera seria* style is commonly parodied in eighteenth-century *opera buffa*, but, as Hunter notes, "the high style is used both seriously and for parodistic purposes," so that "musical context rather than content almost always determines the tone of the moment."³⁸

Donna Anna is a singularly affecting *seria-in-buffa* heroine, a synthesis of *Empfindung* and exalted styles. As in the case of her previous *seria* moments ("Fuggi, crudele" and "Che giuramento, oh Dei" in the duet No. 2), "Or sai chi l'onore" comes after a substantial, sensibility-laden preparation: overwhelmed by emotion, Donna Anna impulsively adopts the controlled language of her noble station, imitating her father's commanding rhetoric, at least for the opening section. Nevertheless, Mozart sustains, or even intensifies, the same dramatic tension between indignation and horrified grief of the recitative. The shuddering

EXAMPLE 2. *Don Giovanni*, No. 10, “Or sai chi l’onore,” early sketch of opening melody from autograph score



EXAMPLE 3. *Don Giovanni*, No. 10, “Or sai chi l’onore,” revised final version of opening melody



accompaniment, the gasping effect of the melodic repetitions, and the hint of D minor (mm. 116–18) provides a contrast to the broad gestures of the main material and invests the return of the “vendetta” material with new urgency. Interestingly, Mozart was not satisfied with his original idea for the opening melody (Ex. 2) and revised it in the autograph score. The new melody not only corresponds better to the text accentuation, but it also makes more striking use of the registral plunge and echo of dissonance between the top and final notes of each phrase (Ex. 3). The result is an edgy imperiousness that alternates with the pathetic passages, in which Donna Anna implores Ottavio to remember the Commendatore’s gory wounds.

CAUGHT BETWEEN “PADRE E SPOSO”: DONNA ANNA AND LOVE

A proponent of the “unholy passion” hypothesis, Charles Ford concludes that “Or sai chi l’onore” does nothing “to resolve the violent passions of the recitative which were induced by Anna’s identification of Giovanni.”³⁹ Intent on finding hints of Anna’s hidden love, Ford overlooks the resolution that “Or sai chi l’onore” provides, a resolution that is both dramatic (Anna has identified the perpetrator and can now call for revenge against him) and musical (the return to the opera’s keynote). The rhetorical-musical tone of “Or sai chi l’onore” appeals to Don Ottavio—and the audience—in two ways. First, it is a simply riveting aria. Donna Anna’s charge to Don Ottavio rings with the kind of “presentational power” that Hunter identifies in *seria* statements of nobility, which command respect even when set off by the distancing effect of

comedy.⁴⁰ More importantly, perhaps, “Or sai chi l’onore”—a perfect example of a rhetorical aria—is an effective appeal for sympathy: Donna Anna speaks to Don Ottavio in the manner most likely to make him take action. The trembling umbrage of the opening section and the plaintive chromaticism of those gruesome, sanguinary images are meant to move Don Ottavio and remind us that, despite the comedic undertone, serious wrong has been done.

It is interesting, then, that while Donna Anna directs *all* of her important musical numbers to Don Ottavio, a great deal of critical reception has focused primarily on her failure to embrace his optimism and her unwillingness to think about their nuptial plans. Ford, for example, insists that “the only intention for which Anna is given musical credit is her rejection of Ottavio.”⁴¹ As an example, he indicates the noble lovers’ exchange in the second-act sextet No. 19, “Sola, sola in buio loco.” Following the amusing interaction between Elvira and Leporello (disguised as his master), which begins the septet, Don Ottavio enters with Donna Anna (m. 28), interrupting the B-flat tonality with the sudden brightness of D major, complete with trumpets and drums. They are dressed in mourning: perhaps they have returned from the burial of the Commendatore. Ottavio urges Anna to wipe her eyes and ease her suffering, so as not to distress the ghost of her father with her grieving. With its chromatic ascent to a brilliant high G, Ottavio’s melody—which, coincidentally or not, is strikingly similar to the first theme of the overture Allegro—is both heroic and pathetic.⁴² But Anna cannot dispel her anguish so easily, in so short a time: it seems to her that grief will follow her to the grave. She begs him, “Grant to my pain this meager solace; only death, my treasure, will end my tears.”⁴³

It is true that Donna Anna shuns Ottavio’s bright D-major tonality, shifting abruptly to D minor—with a motivic reference to “Fuggi, crudele”—returning briefly to the original key of B-flat major, and finally cadencing in C minor.⁴⁴ Analyzing this dialogue in the context of the sextet, Allanbrook remarks, “in the meditative twilight of the ‘bujo loco’ E flat is the tonic and D the unstable degree,” so that “Ottavio’s and Anna’s public tableau of wooing and withstanding is the mode which strikes a false note.” Of course, from a global harmonic perspective, it is poor Elvira’s favorite key of E-flat major that stands at odds with the opera’s keynote of D.⁴⁵ There is certainly a harmonic friction between the tonality of the sextet and the D-major entrance of the noble couple, but it is specifically Don Ottavio who “strikes the false note”; Donna Anna instead moves the harmony back into the sextet’s tonal framework, mov-

ing quickly to dominant B-flat major before settling on the relative minor, C. She is refusing something, but is it Don Ottavio himself or his ebullient consolation? Not even well-meant gestures of love can dispel profound sorrow in a matter of hours: like her counterpart in Goldoni's play, this Donna Anna cannot be cajoled out of her grief. However, she tries to speak to Don Ottavio in a way that he will understand and accept. Still, Donna Anna's constant deferment of marriage—even in the conventional *lieto fine*—disappoints time-honored opera buffa expectations. In terms of Don Juan literature, however, it is Don Ottavio—and his courteous insistence on an *amoroso* cure-all—that is out of step. Very few of the earlier Don Juan plays and operas feature Donna Anna making wedding plans, even when she is plainly in love with someone; many times she does not even appear in the final scenes of the opera to witness or hear about the seducer's demise. Her place in the tradition is that of catalyst, her sorrow the most unwavering reminder we have of the damage caused by Don Giovanni's amoral indulgence of his sexual appetite.

The obvious exception is her final aria, No. 23, “Non mi dir, bell'idol mio,” which offers a glimpse of Donna Anna's amorous side and the happiness she enjoyed before her father's murder. During the simple recitative that begins the scene (2.12), Ottavio finally loses patience with his fiancée. This is a revealingly human moment, important in its implications, but one that critics generally gloss over: “Is it that you would like to increase my sorrows with new delays? Cruel one!” Now it is Don Ottavio who turns to D minor; his miserable cry of “Crudele!” is punctuated by an emphatic dotted motive and restless diminished-seventh harmonies (the section marked *Risoluto*) that recall the tense accompanied recitative introducing “Or sai chi l'onore.” His reproach triggers a response, Donna Anna's accompanied recitative for No. 23. Alarmed at Ottavio's accusation, Anna realizes—as intimated by the sudden appearance (mm. 3–5) of what will be the main melody of the aria's slow section—that he needs reassurance. Grieving, she has forgotten *his* need for the same compassion he so generously offers to her. She explains to him how difficult it is for her to put off their souls' desire; her melody embraces his preferred key, F major, as the strings play another fragment of the “Non mi dir” melody (mm. 7–9).

But the world—the now-painful demands of filial love, family honor, and justice—imposes itself once more: “Ma il mondo, oh Dio.” Allbrook dismisses these exclamations as vague, “unconvincing excuses mostly to do with respectability,” but the return at this point to a rheto-

EXAMPLE 4. *Don Giovanni*, No. 23, Recitative, “Crudele! Ah no, mio bene!”

The image shows a musical score for a recitative. It consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics written below it: "Ma il core del sensibile mio". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a prominent melodic line in the first violin part. The bottom staff is the basso continuo line. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

ric of *sensibilité*—and emotional turmoil—is unmistakable. The text explicitly confirms this: “non sedur la constanza / del sensibil mio core!” (“do not tempt the constancy of my sensitive heart!”). Even as she reaches out to her lover, Donna Anna cannot forget what she owes her slain father. The harmonic ambiguity at measure 10 underlines the dramatic conflict (Ex. 4). Besides the dissonant crunch between Donna Anna’s melodic F and the diminished-seventh chord of the accompaniment (“oh Dio!”), the melodic sequence in the first violin makes a startling harmonic downshift, seemingly from D minor (Donna Anna’s revenge key) to B-flat major; later, this same melodic motive will conspicuously reappear in the aria accompaniment, precisely at the moment when Donna Anna speaks of her love for Don Ottavio (Ex. 5). Donna Anna is caught, musically and dramatically, between the conflicting demands of her father’s unavenged murder and Don Ottavio’s romantic devotion. The recitative ends on D minor, but Anna’s desire for happiness with Ottavio radiates warmly in the last vocal phrase. The caressing Neapolitan harmony at measure 13, an ethereal vocal line that extends itself gracefully to its upper boundaries, introduces Donna Anna *amorosa*: “Rest assured that love speaks to me for you.” Finally we hear the gentle melody of the *Larghetto* in its entirety, its slow tempo and long-breathed beauty unmatched in the opera. She abandons her usual D (-minor inflected) tonality, favoring the happier key of B-flat major. Clarinets, an essential instrument in Donna Elvira’s music, make their first appearance in Donna Anna’s solo music, their rich sonority replacing the sharper resonance of the oboes that accompanied “Or sai chi l’onore.”⁴⁶ Though her words still reflect some reserve, her music

EXAMPLE 5. *Don Giovanni*, No. 23, Rondo, “Non mi dir, bell’idol mio”; mm. 28–30

caresses Don Ottavio with refreshing—nonaggressive, nonsatirical—familiarity:

Non mi dir, bell’idol mio	Do not tell me, my beloved idol,
Che son io crudel con te	that I am cruel to you.
Tu ben sai quant’io	You know well how much I loved
t’amai,	you,
Tu conosci la mia fè.	you know my faithfulness.
Calma, calma il tuo tormento,	Calm, calm your torment,
Se di duol non vuoi ch’io	if you do not wish that I die of
mora!	sorrow
Forse, un giorno il cielo ancora	Perhaps one day Heaven will again
Sentirà pietà di me.	feel pity for me.

She speaks of a relationship to which we have not been privy: “You know well how much I loved you; you know my faithfulness.” There have been several instances in the opera where Anna’s words and actions have hinted at her affection for Don Ottavio. She runs to him when her father needs help, and she confides in him after the murder. When Ottavio and Anna, along with Elvira, enter Don Giovanni’s house in act 1, scene 19, she expresses her concern that Ottavio, her “caro sposo,” might be in danger. Now, in the *Larghetto* of “Non mi dir,” Donna Anna addresses Don Ottavio with uncharacteristic calm, reassuring him of her faithfulness and begging his patience. Only when she refers to her own unhappiness at seeing Don Ottavio’s doubts (“se di duol non vuoi ch’io mora”) does Anna slip into the unpredictable harmonic progressions, minor-key inflections, and chromatic writing of grief. At measures 42–47, for instance, the melody is fairly quiescent, but the syncopation of the upper strings and grumbling flourishes of the violas and bassoons

evinced an underlying distress. Donna Anna's struggle to reconcile her feelings becomes even more obvious with the abbreviated repeat of the initial material. The violin sequence that first punctuated Donna Anna's exclamation of "Ma il mondo, oh Dio" in the recitative and later ornamented her expressions of love ("tu ben sai quant'io t'amai") in the aria now reappears, extended, with a different text (mm. 55–57): "Calma, calma, il tuo tormento." Twice it reaffirms the tonic key, F major, but by the third iteration ("se di duol non vuoi ch'io mora") it begins to sink again, tracing the tonic minor (C–A-flat–F) as Donna Anna begs for her lover's leniency (Ex. 6).

The ensuing *Allegro moderato* features more *seria*-style vocalizing: lengthy coloratura passages, leaps of an octave or more, and an expansive range. Yet there are noticeably odd details that work against this default musical idiom that Donna Anna assumes when she is beyond the limits of her emotional threshold. The frail-sounding, predominantly treble sonority of the orchestral prelude and Donna Anna's first phrase hovers without a stabilizing anchor, the resolute strength of purpose that she demonstrated in her rage aria. The melodic line and harmonic progression are also quirky: the sudden descent to the subdominant B-flat major (mm. 66–68, 74–76) following the half cadence of the first phrase sounds almost like the sort of harmonic "error" that Mozart used to depict Elettra's emotional disorientation. (The vocal part in measures 75–76 is especially striking, picking up a tritone below where it left off.) Even the coloratura passage, with its repeated high tones, demonstrates a shaky balance between exultant hopefulness and hysteria. Certainly measures 101–4 express how close to the surface Anna's "torments" lie: she stammers ("forse . . . il cielo . . . un giorno . . ."), her sequence of appoggiaturas collapses in alternation with that of the orchestra, and the tonic minor appears briefly before the cadence. The last two measures of the vocal section offer a poignant, earnest finish; the final melodic gesture, intensified with a sudden crescendo, and the parallel fall of the woodwinds' thirds and sixths (mm. 111–12) recall the end of Zerlina's endearing aria "Vedrai carino."

There are many musical markers of intimacy, conflict, and feeling in the *scena* of "Non mi dir," including the warmer orchestration (more sensual, with the addition of the clarinets) and tonality (F major, a conciliatory gesture for Don Ottavio), as well as the overt references to Donna Anna's love for Don Ottavio. Nevertheless, critics have regularly bashed the aria as an example of musical (and sexual) frigidity. Dent concludes that "the scene has no reason whatsoever for its existence, ex-

EXAMPLE 6. *Don Giovanni*, No. 23, Rondo, “Non mi dir, bell’idol mio”; mm. 55–59

The image displays a musical score for the Rondo "Non mi dir, bell'idol mio" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, measures 55-59. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system features a vocal line (soprano) with lyrics: "così bel - lo, cal - do, cal - do, ma il tuo - so - no - ven - to, ar - di". Below the vocal line is a piano accompaniment consisting of a treble and bass clef staff. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: "L'è - so, non so - no, che ma - ra". The piano accompaniment continues below. The tempo marking "Allegretto" is visible at the beginning of the first system.

cept to give Donna Anna the opportunity of singing a set aria.” He concedes that “Non mi dir” is “certainly beautiful,” but adds that it is also “singularly cold and unemotional.”⁴⁷ Allanbrook, too, hears a fundamental lack of warmth and envisions Donna Anna as unattractive, even repellent, at this moment: “On Anna’s face is frozen an ambiguous grimace. The victim turned huntress, the ‘assaulted turned assailant,’ as she describes herself, pursues her prey in an access either of righteous anger or of unholy passion. It will always be a question whether her outstretched hand is a sign of menace or of desire. If desire, its urgings are buried too deeply within her for her to admit them even to herself. Certainly she thrusts Ottavio away both often and instinctively. ‘Non mi dir,’ her last aria, and a singer’s showpiece, is a chilling affair.”⁴⁸ Allanbrook’s almost exclusive focus on the *alla breve* section of the aria helps to sustain the concept of an emotionally static *seria* “voice” at odds with

the comic framework, and even with the other characters. But the extended accompanied recitatives and *amoroso* Larghetto are essential components of the role. If Anna expresses her feelings of outrage with the imperious control of a *seria* queen, she does so only after having succumbed to her own version of *sensibilité*, marked by a convulsive, changeable musical and textual rhetoric. Her weeping, fainting, moments of disorientation, and cries of horror are crucial to a comprehensive understanding of her temperament.

“Non mi dir” does *not*, however, make Donna Anna into one of Mozart’s arguably more beloved sentimental heroines such as Donna Elvira and the Countess Almaviva. Generally, the appeal of an operatic heroine depends greatly on her efforts to maintain, even to the point of self-destruction, an explicit emotional connection with a male character, usually a lover or a husband. It is precisely this *apparent* forgetting of self, the steadfast attachment to love and the beloved, that makes these heroines so admirable to opera lovers. Thus, citing the correspondences between “Non mi dir” and the Countess’s “Dove sono,” Allanbrook explains her preference for the latter aria. In the slow section of “Dove sono,” the Countess languishes in self-pity, but she transforms this emotion into hope and resolve in the more florid, expansive Allegro section, so that the coloratura becomes “an integral part of her passionate $\frac{4}{4}$ march affect.” The Countess assuages her pain by reaffirming her constancy: she will help convince the Count of his love through the strength of hers. Donna Anna expresses love, reassurance, and, finally, hope in “Non mi dir,” but, Allanbrook concludes, she cannot “get out of herself”; her coloratura is thus seen as “mere icy ornament.”⁴⁹ The comparison is not entirely fair, since the dramatic circumstances are so different. Donna Anna is not lamenting a husband’s philandering or a lover’s indifference: this will be Donna Elvira’s role. Instead, Donna Anna is a casualty of Don Giovanni’s violence, dramatizing the conflict between two loyalties. Her responsibility to her father comes first: he died defending her honor, and she must do the same if necessary. Until she has obtained justice for the Commendatore, she cannot give her hand and heart fully to Don Ottavio.

In many ways, this conflict between *padre* and *sposo* defines Donna Anna and sets her apart. In both opera buffa and opera seria, romantic love generally takes precedence over filial love should a conflict between the two arise. In Mozart’s serious opera *Idomeneo*, for instance, the Trojan princess Ilia mourns her father and brothers cut down in the war by Idomeneo, king of Crete; her anger and hatred, however, must contend

with her growing love for the Cretan prince, Idamantes. The strength of her amorous feelings is apparent from the outset; her emotional transfer is complete early in the second act. She gives herself over to her love for Idamantes, and even accepts Idomeneo as her new father: “Now I no longer remember anxieties, troubles. Now Heaven has granted me joy and contentment, compensation for my losses” (2.2). Resolution does not come so easily to Donna Anna. Her struggle with the demands of two different loves, two different men—three, if you count her would-be seducer—extends beyond the last finale. Her refusal to forget everything that has happened and to join Don Ottavio in an expeditious happy ending has provoked charges of inflexibility, emotional coldness, ulterior motives, and even narcissism. It is possible, however, that critics find Donna Anna’s “unnatural” behavior disturbing because it is also, paradoxically, the most realistic in the opera. Her drama reads against opera’s favorite truism: love heals all—and quickly. Comparing Donna Anna’s painstaking progress toward happiness with Ilia’s more rapturous transformation, we must ask which comes closer to human experience. Far from being a plaster demigoddess, Donna Anna is, in many ways, one of Mozart’s most flesh-and-blood creations.