

Mesmerizing adultery: *Così fan tutte* and the Kornman scandal

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Abstract: A notorious adultery scandal involving Guillaume Kornman (a co-founder and sponsor of the French mesmeric society) and Beaumarchais, who defended Kornman's unfaithful wife, should be considered one of the main sources of inspiration for *Così fan tutte*. A pamphlet war between the two broke out in 1787, when Salieri was living with Beaumarchais in Paris. Significantly, the earliest sources of the opera – Salieri's first unfinished setting of *La scola degli amanti*, Da Ponte's original libretto, and Mozart's autograph – all spell the name of Guglielmo as 'Guilelmo.' A study of this real-life Parisian drama helps to clarify several dramatic and musical elements of the opera, including the use of mesmeric references, which is more pervasive than previously recognized. In this new light, the opera appears to offer a political response to the radical ideas on the regulation of sexual and social matters disseminated by Kornman's mesmeric circle.

The representation of mesmerism in *Così fan tutte* has understandably received substantial attention.¹ Indeed, as Bruce Alan Brown has observed, 'the issue of the magnetic cure deserves to be considered seriously, as the episode is a turning point in the opera's plot.'² In addition, as is well known, Mozart had a personal connection with Mesmer. In 1768, ten years after Mesmer's degree in medicine at the University of Vienna and eight years after having been appointed physician to the Austrian royal family, he married a wealthy widow and settled down in a magnificent villa in the suburbs.³ At this time he met the twelve-year-old prodigy, and allegedly organized the performance of *Bastien und Bastienne* at his villa.⁴ The Mozarts maintained a cordial relationship with the Mesmers during the following decade as well. By the time of *Così fan tutte*, however, Mozart had lost contact with

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¹ Musicological contributions on the issue of Mesmer and mesmerism in relation to Mozart are Otto Erich Deutsch, 'Die Mesmers und die Mozarts,' *Mozart Jahrbuch* (1954): 54–64; Andrew Steptoe, 'Mozart, Mesmer and "Così fan tutte",' *Music & Letters*, 67 (1986): 248–55; Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Operas* (New York and London, 1992), 243–4; Bruce Alan Brown, *W. A. Mozart: 'Così fan tutte'* (Cambridge, 1995), 15–16, 40, 82–3, 151, 177; Werner Wunderlich, *Mozarts 'Così fan tutte': Wahlverwandschaften und Liebesspiele* (Stuttgart and Vienna, 1996), 30. A few contributions also come from Mesmer scholars, such as D[onald] M[unro] Walmsley, *Anton Mesmer* (London, 1967), chap. 5; Frank A. Pattie, *Mesmer and Animal Magnetism: A Chapter in the History of Medicine* (Hamilton, 1994), 11, 30–3.

² Brown, *W. A. Mozart: 'Così fan tutte'*, 15.

³ Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 9, 28.

⁴ Maynard Solomon, *Mozart: A Life* (New York, 1995), 74, implies that *Bastien und Bastienne* was composed explicitly in accordance with the tastes and ideological proclivities of Mesmer and his guests.

Mesmer and his family, and the doctor had lost his celebrity both in Vienna and in Paris (where he moved in 1778), and where over the course of the next decade mesmerism escaped his control completely.⁵

Despite Mesmer's decline in fame by the end of the eighteenth century, his theories were kept alive by several radical political activists, whose most prominent circle Robert Darnton describes as the 'the Kornman group' because its members met at the house of Guillaume Kornman, a wealthy manager of the Quinze-Vingts bank.⁶ This group grew out of an earlier connection between Mesmer, Kornman and Nicolas Bergasse: the *Société*, or *Ordre de l'Harmonie Universelle*, created in 1781 by Mesmer with the financial support of Kornman. The three had the idea of founding the society of harmony when, during summer 1780, they took their first trip together to Spa, the exclusive resort for curative mineral water. Kornman was seeking relief from his worries about his young, beautiful, and unfaithful wife; Bergasse was drinking only water while cultivating social relationships in hopes of finding a job, and Mesmer was suffering from his unfavorable reception in France.⁷ Bergasse, whom Darnton describes as 'a philosopher-lawyer-hypochondriac from a wealthy commercial family,'⁸ and who was deputed to represent Mesmer's theories in France, not only began to translate and disseminate Mesmer's scientific ideas, but, along with Kornman, also interpreted Mesmer's 'feelings,' turning them into politically radical theories in open conflict with Mesmer himself. Consequently, in 1785 both Bergasse and Kornman were expelled from the now disharmonious Society of Harmony.⁹ After this schism, the renegade mesmerists began meeting at Kornman's house, where, until at least 1787, they developed a mesmerist theory concerned more with politics and morality than with medicine. The leading members of this group (Kornman and Bergasse), as we shall see, intersected directly with Beaumarchais, and that intersection, I believe, had a direct influence on the composition of Mozart's last opera buffa.

Although the pseudoscientific writings in which Bergasse and the other members of Kornman's group manifested their political theories remained relatively obscure, their most politically charged and most plainly expressed ideas did spread widely in France and abroad (at least in England) through a series of poisonous but

⁵ Steptoe, 'Mozart, Mesmer and "Cosi fan tutte"' (see n. 1), 250–2; Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 66–7, 229–32. By 1787, Pattie writes (p. 229), 'the discrediting of Mesmer was so complete that books on animal magnetism were written without mentioning his name.'

⁶ Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, 1968), 3, 71–80, 107–25. Among the members of the Kornman group were political activists such as Nicolas Bergasse, the Marquis de Lafayette, Jean-Louis Carra and Duval D'Eprémesnil. As reported by Darnton (p. 80), according to a contemporary revolutionary leader, J.-P. Brissot de Warville (also member of the Kornman group), '“there is no denying that the efforts of Bergasse and those assembled in his [Kornman's] house have contributed singularly to speeding up the revolution.”'

⁷ Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 119–20.

⁸ Darnton, *Mesmerism* (see n. 6), 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 72. Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 121–3, 199–215.

entertaining pamphlets concerning the adultery suit of Guillaume Kornman against his wife.¹⁰ The above-mentioned intersection with Beaumarchais arose from his defense of the deceiving wife, at the request of Mme. Kornman's protectors Prince Nassau-Siegen (like Mme. Kornman a Protestant) and his second wife.¹¹ Although the Kornmans' case became public only in 1787, Beaumarchais' involvement began quietly as early as 1781, at which point he surely did not anticipate that six years after the trial Guillaume Kornman would attack him publicly in a 200-page *mémoire* (written by Bergasse), accusing him and other 'men in power' of being the evil people responsible for the corruption and destruction of his family.¹² This prompted a published response from Beaumarchais, and the exchange degenerated into a crossfire of accusations that soon entangled other important personalities, turning a private matter into a public affair. Robert Darnton and (later) Sarah Maza have pointed out that this pamphlet war, which involved a denunciation of the corruption of the whole sociopolitical body in the *Ancien Régime*, has to be considered, along with the dissemination of mesmerism among radical thinkers, as a paradigmatic example of French pre-Revolutionary propaganda:

Kornman's nonmesmeric wife had fallen prey to the aristocratic morality of the 'gens en place' (men in power), who had seduced her and destroyed her ties with her family. It was through the intimate mesmeric 'rapports' within the family that Bergasse hoped to regenerate France, and so Kornman's adultery suit against his wife from 1787 to 1789 furnished Bergasse with material for moralistic declamations that, in effect, put the Ancien Régime on trial. In a series of radical pamphlets disguised as legal 'mémoires,' Bergasse construed Mme. Kornman's degradation into a parable of the corruptness of French government. He pictured her being tucked into her love nests by the head of the Parisian police (the same Jean-Pierre Lenoir who had alerted the government to the dangers of mesmerism) while the evil spirit of Versailles lurked lecherously in the background, and he elaborated this picture in hundreds of sensational details, which brought out his main theme: the depraved 'gens en place' were using their positions to obliterate the 'rapports' of French families. It was the conclusion that Bergasse had reached in his mesmerist writings, but now he gave it life by adopting a sentimental style. His *mémoires* read like romantic novels. Kornman, their hero, suffered as an archetypal martyr of despotism, and his example stood

¹⁰ The dissemination of the pamphlets by Kornman, Bergasse and Beaumarchais in England can be inferred from M. Morande, *Lettre de M. Morande, auteur et rédacteur du Courier de l'Europe à M. de Beaumarchais* (Londres, ce Juillet 6 1787), 20, who informs Beaumarchais that in England people were continuously gossiping about the Kornman case in clubs, in the pubs, in the public parks, etc. To the best of my knowledge there is no published study on the dissemination of the Kornman *cause célèbre* outside France.

¹¹ Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Mémoire contre M. Guillaume Kornman, banquier de Paris, accusant sa femme d'adultère* (Paris, 1787), 15. See also George Lemaître, *Beaumarchais* (New York, 1949), 270.

¹² Guillaume Kornman [actually Nicolas Bergasse], *Mémoire sur une question d'adultère, de séduction et de diffamation, pour le Sr. Kornman contre la dame Kornman, son épouse; le Sr. Daudet de Joussan; le Sr. Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais; et. M. Lenoir, Conseiller d'Etat, et ancien Lieutenant Général de Police* ([Paris], 1787). Lemaître, *Beaumarchais*, 289–91, supposes that Kornman waited from 1781 until 1786 to take revenge against Beaumarchais by means of his *mémoire* because Beaumarchais' popularity started to decline only in 1786, after the Count de Mirabeau attacked him in a series of pamphlets related to a scandal of the Compagnie des Eaux de Paris, one of whose main stock holders was Beaumarchais himself.

as a warning that any honest bourgeois might share his fate. Bergasse's *mémoires* provided perhaps the most effective barrage of radical propaganda during the prerevolution.¹³

Beaumarchais' short but sharp response to Bergasse's *mémoire* makes fun of Kornman's diagnosis of his wife's proclivities for other men by emphasizing Kornman's use of the medical term 'désordre,' a condition (as the husband maintained) whose symptoms had been manifested since their first year of marriage.¹⁴ Beaumarchais then reveals how the 'disorder' was actually caused by her husband, at least in the episode cited by Kornman in his suit six years before, when he had obtained from the King a 'lettre de cachet' ordering his wife Catherine to be imprisoned in the Château de Charollais, a detention institution for prostitutes and unfaithful wives, after accusing her of having had a relationship with the Royal Syndic of Strasbourg, Daudet de Jossan.¹⁵ Indeed, Beaumarchais' willingness to be involved at all arose from his reading of several letters written by Guillaume Kornman to his wife and to her seducer Daudet, shown to him by the Princess Nassau-Siegen, which convinced Beaumarchais that Kornman had instigated the love affair between his wife and her seducer and thus that Mme. Kornman's unfaithful behavior was justifiable.¹⁶

In his *mémoire* Beaumarchais submits these letters to public attention (he had used them at first only 'confidentially' in order to obtain Catherine's freedom from the King). While quoting the letters in italics, Beaumarchais underlines the spicy details by capitalizing them, commenting in Roman font and in parentheses (sometimes as if whispering in the reader's ear, others as if shouting in Kornman's face), making the suggestive passages more explicit. For example,

¹³ Darnton, *Mesmerism* (see n. 6), 122–3. In his book Darnton does not mention Beaumarchais, notwithstanding his prominent role in the whole affair; the reason, as Darnton explained to me, is that his book focuses on mesmerism, and the French playwright never attacked mesmerism in his pamphlets against Bergasse and Kornman. Darnton gives a more comprehensive account of the affair in his unpublished dissertation, 'Trends in Radical Propaganda on the Eve of the French Revolution (1782–1788)', Ph.D. diss., Oxford University (1964), ch. 2. On the Kornman scandal see also Lemaître, *Beaumarchais* (see n. 11), 271–3, 291–3, 301–2; Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 139–41; and especially Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1993), 263–311. I consulted the original sources (the *mémoires* by Kornman, Beaumarchais and others) in the Kroch Library, Cornell University, where the almost complete documentation is preserved; I would like to thank the librarians for their great help.

¹⁴ Beaumarchais, *Mémoire contre M. Guillaume Kornman* (see n. 11), 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8–9. See Lemaître, *Beaumarchais* (see n. 11), 273 for more details on this detention institution. About the *lettre de cachet* Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 139–40, explains: 'Under the *Ancien Régime* it was possible for a private citizen to apply to the King for a *lettre de cachet* and request that the *lettre* authorize the detention in prison of a son, a wife, or some other member of the family who had misbehaved or was likely to bring discredit upon the family name. The term of the imprisonment was at the King's pleasure. . . . From a *lettre de cachet* there was no appeal except to the King.' Accordingly Maza, *Private Lives* (see n. 13), 271–81; 273, comments: 'the use of *lettres de cachet* . . . itself symbolized the excess of arbitrary government.'

¹⁶ Beaumarchais, *Mémoire contre M. Guillame Kornman* (see n. 11), 15–16.

here is one of Kornman's last letters (edited by Beaumarchais) to Daudet from Spa, where he was consorting with Mesmer and Bergasse while leaving his young wife in Paris with the addressee:

Spa, August 1, 1780

*I hope, MY DEAR FRIEND,*¹⁷ *that the present letter will find you still in Paris (next to his wife) . . . I am not going to tell you anything else about my wife: IT IS ENTIRELY UP TO HER, I am not an unjust man, AND I APPRECIATE HUMAN FOIBLES; by making my wife happy I fortify my own happiness (this is for her) and the happiness around me (this is for him). But I am a man; and consequently restricted by bounds (and within five years, wretched man! you will attack her for her adultery, and you will slander her after having had her imprisoned for the same domestic errors that yourself have devised . . .).*¹⁸

The alluring quality of this prose determined its extraordinary public fortune: the voyeur-reader could look over Beaumarchais' shoulder at private life. The personages are presented in their own words, as when Beaumarchais lets Catherine's candid soul emerge through her own *mémoire*, inspiring compassion and sympathy in spite of her reprehensible conduct.¹⁹

This story of infidelity is reminiscent of the story of *Così*, but it is only a partial resemblance, and one shared by fictional works of the period. In addition, with no demonstrated relation between Mozart or Da Ponte and Guillaume Kornman, there is no reason to see anything more than a coincidental resemblance. However, the interpersonal connections among the participants in this affair and the authors of *Così* are richer than this synopsis might suggest, and the plausible effect of this real-life narrative on the plot of the opera goes beyond a simple story of coerced seduction.

The Salieri connection

As Bruce Alan Brown and John Rice have shown, Da Ponte's libretto of *Così fan tutte* (*La scola degli amanti*) was originally not meant for Mozart, but for Antonio

¹⁷ Beaumarchais capitalizes all the expressions of affection and friendship used by Kornman towards Daudet to stress how the reality of his relationship with this man is in contrast with Kornman's first *Mémoire*, where he describes his attitude towards the slick Daudet as always circumspect and unfriendly.

¹⁸ Beaumarchais, *Mémoire contre M. Guillaume Kornman* (see n. 11), 41. A more explicit accusation to Kornman is at p. 23: 'Watch yourself, monsieur Kornman! People will say that you require two lovers to have some sense of decency in an intrigue you approved! Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6–13: The 'Mémoire adressé à M. le président Saron, par la dame Kornman, née Faech' begins with recounting her past as an orphan and as a teenage wife (she had married Kornman in 1774 when she was only fifteen), and ends with the recounting of her arrest and detention with madwomen and prostitutes. See also Catherine-Marie de Kornman, *Mémoire pour la dame Kornman, contre le sieur Guillaume Kornman son époux*: ([Paris], 1787).

Salieri.²⁰ Brown and Rice convincingly date Salieri's setting of the first two numbers of *La scola degli amanti* between October 1788 and early November 1789.²¹ When they speculate about Salieri's reason for abandoning the opera they suggest not only why he might have undertaken the project in the first place, but also a possible connection between Mozart's Vienna and Kornman's Paris via Salieri:

[Salieri's] decision to abandon *La scola degli amanti* probably had less to do with the quality of the libretto than with his state of mind in 1788 and 1789 . . . The first months of 1788 had represented a peak in Salieri's career. In January *Axur re d'Ormus* (by Da Ponte, after Beaumarchais) was performed for the first time in celebration of the marriage of Archduke (and later Emperor) Francis and Elizabeth of Württemberg. *Axur* became Joseph's favorite opera, performed often during the next two years; it was probably no accident that within a few weeks of the première Salieri attained the most prestigious musical position in Vienna, that of Hofkapellmeister [. . .] Salieri's twin achievements of 1788 were followed by several disappointments. One of these was the souring of the composer's almost brotherly friendship with Da Ponte early in 1789, on account of disputes connected with the librettist's pasticcio *L'ape musicale*.²²

Da Ponte's *Axur* is a free translation of Beaumarchais' *Tarare*, completed in 1784, immediately after *Le mariage de Figaro*.²³ During 1784 – 'the climatic year in the history of mesmerism'²⁴ – Beaumarchais became acquainted with Salieri, whose opera *Les Danaïdes* had been performed that year in Paris.²⁵ With *Tarare*, Salieri and Beaumarchais worked in close collaboration, aiming at a reform of opera beyond Gluck and Piccinni; for this purpose Beaumarchais invited Salieri to stay at his own

²⁰ Bruce Alan Brown and John A. Rice, 'Salieri's *Così fan tutte*,' *this journal*, 8/1 (1996), 17–43. That *La scola degli amanti* was first intended for Salieri was never a mystery, for Constanze Mozart informed the publisher Novello about it: Vincent and Mary Novello, *A Mozart Pilgrimage. Being the Travel Diaries of Vincent and Mary Novello in the Year 1829*, ed. Rosemary Hughes and Nerina Medici di Marignano (London, 1955), 127, quoted in Brown and Rice (*ibid.*), 20, who comment upon Constanze's witness: 'Neither Mozart's nor Salieri's biographers have taken much notice of Constanze's declaration.' The two musicologists found Salieri's incomplete setting of *La scola* in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, folder S.m. 4531. Rudolph Angermüller reports the existence of the ms. in his recent source book: *Antonio Salieri: Dokumente seines Lebens*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 2000), II, 185. About Salieri's *La scola degli amanti* see also Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera* (Chicago and London, 1998), 474–9.

²¹ Brown and Rice, 'Salieri's *Così fan tutte*,' 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 35; see also Rice, *Antonio Salieri* (see n. 20), 475. *L'ape musicale* was premiered in February 1789, and the demise of the friendship with Salieri can be deduced from Da Ponte, *Memorie e altri scritti*, ed. Cesare Pagnini (Milan, 1971), 166–7. Nevertheless, during the winter the two worked together again at *La cifra*, a *dramma giocoso* premiered at the Burgtheater on 11 December (a month and a half before *Così*), which suggests that their hostility should not be overstated.

²³ Lemaitre, *Beaumarchais* (see n. 11), 280–1.

²⁴ Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 19.

²⁵ Volkmar Braunbehrens, *Maligned Master: The Real Story of Antonio Salieri*, trans. Eveline L. Kanés (New York, 1992), 125–49; 128–9. On the composition of *Les Danaïdes* and Salieri's presence in Paris in 1783–1784 see also Rice, *Antonio Salieri* (see n. 20), 306–29.

house in Paris from December 1786 until a month after *Tarare* was premièred at the Opéra (June 8, 1787).²⁶ A letter from Salieri to Beaumarchais' daughter Eugénie testifies to the professional and friendly relationship between the two men:

You are still in front of my eyes, Madame, this lovely child, this pretty Eugène, full of spirit and grace. I was living with your famous father and your adorable mother who showered me with so many favors and attentions; at around noon you and I used to sit at the piano playing four-hand sonatas. At around two, M. or Mme. de Beaumarchais would come in and tell us "lunch is ready, children." After eating I used to go out for a walk, and spend some time reading gazettes, at the Palais Royal or in some theater. Habitually I went home early. When M. de Beaumarchais was not there I used to go to the second floor where my apartment was; sometimes I excused my servant, a German drunkard, letting him go to his bed; I would then go to my room and lie down on my bed from where, while working, I could admire the sunset every evening. At around ten, M. de Beaumarchais would come to me; I would sing for him the parts I had composed of our grand opera; he used to praise me, encourage me, and guide me as a father. Everything seemed to be so tranquil . . .²⁷

The end of this letter also shows Salieri's admiration for Beaumarchais' capacity to remain tranquil despite the many problems plaguing him at the time: 'everything seemed to be so tranquil. . .' but it wasn't. At that time the confrontation between Beaumarchais and Kornman was reaching the peak of publicity; a few reviews of *Tarare* even mentioned the Kornman affair.²⁸ In a letter to Salieri dated Paris 1787, his friend Nicolas François Guillard wrote: 'If I knew Beaumarchais better I would like to compliment him for *Tarare* and for his eloquent response to the *Mémoire de Kornman*. Beaumarchais' strong soul is like *Tarare*'s, nothing can trouble it.'²⁹ Notwithstanding Beaumarchais' 'bella calma,' he had feared that Kornman and his

²⁶ Braunbehrens, *Maligned Master*, 131–50. Salieri went back to Vienna in July 1787, after a year spent in Paris. A comprehensive study of this opera and the operatic reform it attempted is in Chapter 12 ('Between Paris and Vienna: *Tarare* and *Axur re d'Ormuz*') of Rice's *Antonio Salieri* (see n. 20), 385–420.

²⁷ Letter of Salieri to Eugénie Delarue born Beaumarchais, 5 October, 1805, quoted in Angermüller, *Antonio Salieri* (see n. 20), II, 439–40. The fatherly attitude of Beaumarchais towards Salieri seems slightly odd, if we consider that in 1786 Salieri was thirty-six, although Beaumarchais was eighteen years older. Rice, *Antonio Salieri* (see n. 20), 390–1, provides further evidence about the friendly and professional relationship between Salieri and Beaumarchais.

²⁸ La Harpe gives his addressee a fairly comprehensive account of the Kornman affair when writing about the first performances of *Tarare* in Paris (Summer 1787), saying that at the time the controversy between Beaumarchais and Kornman captivated the attention of the public as much as, or even more than Salieri's opera: Jean François La Harpe, *Correspondance littéraire, adressée à Son Altesse impériale* [. . .], depuis 1774 jusqu'à 1789[–1791], 6 vols. (Paris, 1804–07), VI, 188–91. Melchior Grimm in his critical report on *Tarare* also mentions the Kornman affair, but prefers to focus on the opera: Friedrich Melchior Grimm, *Correspondance, littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, etc., revue sur les textes originaux, comprenant outre ce qui a été publié à diverses époques les fragments supprimés en 1813 par la censure* [. . .], ed. Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols. (Paris, 1877–82), XV, 94 (June 1787). Even much later, in a long article about Salieri's *Tarare* published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (24 March 1819), G. L. P. Sievers recollects the troubles caused by Kornman to Salieri and Beaumarchais in 1787 (quoted in Angermüller, *Antonio Salieri* [see n. 20] III, 195).

²⁹ Letter quoted in Angermüller *Antonio Salieri*, II, 97.

friend Bergasse's violent attack on his reputation would be the downfall of the opera.³⁰ After the work's success, Kornman and Bergasse still did not give in, and used Salieri's music to offend Beaumarchais (and indirectly Salieri) by replacing the original text of famous arias with satirical words against the playwright and his works.³¹ Although Salieri preferred to stay out of the conflict, he must have resented the two mesmerists, who were doing their best to disrupt the Beaumarchais household, and who were also attacking Beaumarchais' works including *Tarare*, an opera which, as the French librettist generously wrote in his dedication to the composer, he conceived but Salieri made his own.³²

When Salieri went back to Vienna in July 1787, he started working on *Axur* with Da Ponte. It is conceivable that Salieri informed the Italian librettist (at the time his dear friend) about the scandal that had almost jeopardized *Tarare*. While writing *Axur*, Da Ponte was also collaborating with Mozart on *Don Giovanni* (as well as with Martín y Soler on *L'arbore di Diana*).³³ Considering that Da Ponte was also a good friend of Mozart, it is possible that even before the winter he had informed him about the Paris scandal involving their favorite playwright and the two renegade mesmerists (and Mozart might well have told Da Ponte his stories about his juvenile acquaintance with Mesmer himself). If so, the first idea for *Così* might have emerged during fall 1787, as a result of a *ménage-à-trois* of professional collaboration and friendly conversations between Salieri and Da Ponte, and between Da Ponte and Mozart.³⁴

Further evidence of this connection is the fact that Salieri's autographs spell Guglielmo as 'Guilelmo' or 'Guillelmo,' *à la française*, as do Mozart's autograph and

³⁰ Lemaître, *Beaumarchais* (see n. 11), 297. Beaumarchais expresses his disdain for Kornman's pamphlets even in his *Discourse Préliminaire de l'Opéra de Tarare* [. . .] (Ormus [i.e. Paris], 1787), in Angermüller, *Antonio Salieri* (see n. 20), II, 24–34: 34.

³¹ A few examples are in *ibid.*, 90–2.

³² Beaumarchais, *Tarare* [. . .] (Amsterdam, 1787), text of dedication reproduced in Angermüller *Antonio Salieri*, II, 34. Translated by Rice, *Antonio Salieri* (see n. 20), 391: 'My friend, I dedicate my work to you because it has become yours. I only gave it birth; you have raised it to the status of theatre. . . . If our work has success, I will owe it almost entirely to you. And when your modesty makes you say to everyone that you are only my musician, I, for my part, am honoured to be your poet, your servant, and your friend.'

³³ Da Ponte, *Memorie* (see n. 22), 155–6. *Don Giovanni* was premièred in Prague on 29 October 1787, and *Axur* in Vienna's Burgtheater on 8 January 1788.

³⁴ In his American memoirs Lorenzo Da Ponte says that immediately after the performance of *Don Giovanni* he started working at *Così* for Mozart and at *Axur* for Salieri. The chronology is not completely right (although it is justifiable insofar as the libretto of *Don Giovanni* was ready by the end of the summer), but it is significant that he associates the genesis of *Così* with his Italian adaptation of *Tarare*, i.e. with his activity during fall 1787: see Da Ponte, *An Extract from the Life of Lorenzo Da Ponte, with the History of Several Dramas Written by Him, and Among Others, 'Il Figaro,' 'Il Don Giovanni,' and 'La scola degli amanti' set to Music by Mozart* (New York, 1819; rpt. Milan, 1999), 61–2: '[immediately after *Don Giovanni*'s première] I did not neglect my favourite Mozart, and in less than three months I gave a tragicomic drama, entitled *Assur re d'Ormus* to Salieri . . . , an heroicomic to Martini, called *L'arbore di Diana*, and a comic opera to Mozart with the title *La scola degli amanti* . . .' For the chronology of Da Ponte's libretto of *Don Giovanni* see commentary by Giovanna Gronda in her critical edition of the libretto, *Il Don Giovanni* (Turin, 1995), 85–115.

the first edition of Da Ponte's libretto.³⁵ The persistence of this spelling in these sources suggests that it was original, and intended for (if not indeed conceived by) Salieri, most probably as a reference to Guillaume Kornman. Brown and Rice, like Alan Tyson before them, acknowledge this orthographic peculiarity, although, again like Tyson, they provide no satisfactory explanation.³⁶ This particular spelling also appears in other early printed scores and librettos and was normalized only when the reception of *Così* became detached from the original historical context.

Plotting infidelity

What kind of influence might the story of the Kornman scandal have had on *Così*'s plot? Let us consider a few details of the *mémoires* published in 1787, roughly when Salieri was in Paris 'reading gazettes' during his spare time, and see how a potential reader of Beaumarchais and Kornman's (or Bergasse's) pamphlets could have perceived this story of conjugal infidelity. In this way many aspects of the plot and characters of *Così* will come into view, especially when imagining the conflicting truths that emerge from the various pamphlets and converge in the mind of our hypothetical reader. In fact, if we take only Beaumarchais' (or only Kornman's) *mémoire* and the coincidence of names into account, we would have only a partial representation of the story and the analogy with *Così*'s plot would be inexact. Beaumarchais' Guillaume wanted to have his wife seduced, whereas Da Ponte's Guilelmo neither expects nor wants any such thing to happen. Equally distant from the operatic Guilelmo is Kornman's self-portrait (in his first *mémoire*) as a simple victim of an intrigue he had no part in. However, the real-life sentimental drama of the Kornman scandal involved, over a period of one year, an entire chain of attacks and counter-attacks, each recounting the story from a different perspective, adding details, claiming different truths, and redrawing the personalities of the 'characters.'

Kornman's *Second mémoire*, in reply to Beaumarchais, attempts to justify why in his letters (published by Beaumarchais) he seems to have encouraged his wife and her seducer Daudet to spend as much time together as possible, whereas in his initial account he had declared that since the first year of marriage he was worried by his wife's (pathological) unfaithfulness and had never trusted Daudet's ambiguous personality. Guillaume's endeavor sometimes produces unintentionally comic effects. He adjusts his diagnosis of Catherine: her attraction to a young man during their first year of marriage was due to her immaturity (she was only fifteen); but her congenital irritable sensibility ('une sensibilité qu'il est facile d'irriter') intensified as

³⁵ Alan Tyson, *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 185–6: 185. Tyson's guess about the original spelling of Guglielmo is that 'Guilelmo' might be a 'more literal rendering of 'Wilhelm.''

³⁶ Brown and Rice, 'Salieri's *Così fan tutte*' (see n. 20), 21, 31.

a result of her husband's suspicions.³⁷ Kornman also confesses that he manifested friendship to Daudet in his letters because Daudet was a man of power who could determine the success of his business, because he thought that Daudet's apparent sobriety would have had a good influence on the moody personality of his young wife, and because Catherine had convinced him with her tears that after her first escapade she would never again be attracted by another man.³⁸ Was Guillaume a good-hearted victim of a deceitful wife and 'a man in power'? Was he silly to trust his not-so-innocent wife? Or was he enough of a fool to induce his friend to tempt his wife, perhaps to convince himself that nothing would happen again (as he implies in his second *Mémoire*)? Guilelmo's character in *Così* thus seems to result from the superimposition of Kornman's self-portrait and Beaumarchais' rather different image of him, a portrait that retains the ambiguity of the various possible interpretations of the *mémoires*.

Similarly, the character of Don Alfonso comes into view as a result of the superimposition of Beaumarchais' self portrait and Kornman's attempt to damage that image. Even if Kornman's new argument remains unconvincing against the evidence of his own letters as quoted by Beaumarchais, the point of his second *mémoire* is to draw the attention to the evil puppeteer who deliberately misquoted and misinterpreted his letters in order to make his imagined plot believable.³⁹ After analyzing word by word the plotting of the 'clockmaker' who destroyed his family bonds through a clever editing of the letters, Guillaume concludes that Beaumarchais was the only person responsible for his separation from his wife, which makes him cry out like a wounded sentimental hero:

Ah! Rejoice over your work; come, contemplate the tears of blood that you make me pour; watch with your satisfied eye these children whom I wanted to render to their mother; hear them cry: *Oh my mother!*⁴⁰

As funny as it might sound today, this sentimental style was perceived as sincerely moving by a portion of the contemporary audience. If Beaumarchais was the

³⁷ Kornman, *Second mémoire du Sieur Kornman en réponse au mémoire du sieur de Beaumarchais* ([Paris], 1787), 15. The superimposition of the sentimental heroine emerging in Beaumarchais' account on the image of the hysterical woman depicted in Kornman's second *mémoire* suggests some points of analogy with the similarly manifold personalities of Dorabella and Fiordiligi, especially as the sequence of their solo arias shows them, while Despina's aria 'una donna a quindici anni' seems to disclaim Kornman's notion that a fifteen-year old lady is not yet a full developed woman. For an interpretation of these female characters as embodying female hysteria, see Gregory Salmon, 'Tutti accusan le donne: Schools of Reason and Folly in *Così fan tutte*,' *repercussions*, 1 (1992), 81–102: 93–102.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16–19.

³⁹ The bulk of Kornman's *Second mémoire* (see n. 37), 20–49, is a re quotation of all his letters inserting gigantic footnotes explaining what he meant and how Beaumarchais manipulated the truth.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 56. The writing ends by evoking a similar image of Catherine Kornman in tears, all alone, in need of her family, crying while holding the papers assembled by Beaumarchais to free her from the prison and at the same time to cut her family bonds. The final ten pages are a series of accusations against Beaumarchais, incapable of understanding love and family values: (57–8) 'Wretched man! What have you done. Cry! . . . Ah! If you could only cry! Listen. I know your entire life; it is execrable, your life . . . [. . .] intrigue, vileness, lies, slanders, conspiracy.'

consummate social climber, Kornman/Bergasse's mastery of the fashionable sentimental style reveals him as an equally skillful demagogue.⁴¹ In a pamphlet signed by 'the people' (probably written by Bergasse) and published by 'Our bourgeoisie,' the new target is Beaumarchais' anti-sentimental style, his irony, and especially the invention of Figaro, a canny barber at the service of the 'gens en place.'⁴² The public orator begins by saying that 'the people' initially did not write, not daring to confront with their plain style such an accomplished writer 'who manipulates language subtly, who knows how to make people laugh, and draws the laughers to his side.'⁴³ But after the skillful *écrivain* has used his sharp pen against the suffering Kornman, 'the people' could be silent no longer; it had become inexcusable for Beaumarchais to forgive the conduct of Kornman's cruel wife on the grounds that 'he loves women for what they are.'⁴⁴ The anonymous author goes so far as to accuse Beaumarchais not only of being the cause of Kornman's separation from his wife, but of having played a direct role in plotting Daudet's seduction of Mme. Kornman.⁴⁵ This conduct is presented as typical of Beaumarchais, who always served the Régime by means of his comedies and his plotting against public morality and domestic fidelity, acting as a courtly clown, pleasing the men in power and their courtesans.⁴⁶ Finally 'the people' open their eyes and recognize that Beaumarchais created Figaro in his image and after his likeness:

Under the name of *Figaro* you made your appearance on stage. I recognized you, monsieur, I did. Figaro shares your tact, your philosophy, your subtlety, or your haughtiness, according to the circumstances . . . When the ladies see him, they cry out, 'how lovely is this barber!'; and he certainly is. Well, ladies, he is the exact portrait of his master!⁴⁷

Beaumarchais finally acknowledges that the whole affair has turned into an explosive political issue,⁴⁸ but swears that his intention to help Mme. Kornman was only inspired by '*galanterie*' and '*ancienne chevalerie*,' and in so doing proclaims his aversion for the new demagogic rhetoric against traditional values.⁴⁹ He does not repent for having had 'thousands of escapades with women *à la mode*,'⁵⁰ but accuses the pamphleteers of having charged him with crimes he did not commit: he could not have broken the Kornman family bonds, because those bonds had already been

⁴¹ On the appeal of the sentimental style during these years see Stefano Castelveccchi, 'From *Nina to Nina*: Psychodrama, Absorption and Sentiment in the 1780s,' *this journal*, 8/2 (1996), 91–112.

⁴² *Lettre du Public Parisien à Pierre-Augustin Caron De Beaumarchais, Ou vie abrégée de notre Bourgeois* (A Kell, Aux dépens de notre Bourgeois, 1787). See also Maza, *Private Lives* (see n. 13), 308.

⁴³ *Lettre du Public*, 3–4. Finally, writes the 'people', Beaumarchais' sophisticated language is opposed to Kornman's language of feelings (ibid., 24): 'Son langage est celui du sentiment, l'accent de la douleur, l'expression de l'innocence.'

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6–13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

⁴⁸ Beaumarchais, *Réponse de Beaumarchais à tous les libellistes et pamphlétistes passés, présents et futurs* ([Paris], 1787), 5, compares Catherine Kornman to Helen of Troy: 'Non, jamais, depuis la guerre de Troyes, on ne vit une femme causer tant de troubles!'

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

broken.⁵¹ And about family bonds Beaumarchais had already professed his moral ‘belief’ in his first *mémoire*: ‘My religion is that, if an unfortunate woman has married a bad man, her place is to remain unhappy next to him, as the destiny of one who has lost sight is to remain blind.’⁵² Like Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, the resulting image of Beaumarchais is ambiguous: a libertine who (so claim his opponents) started the whole game, which (as in the opera) fractured the love bonds between the original couple(s) and led to the new ones; and yet (so he claims) a gallant defender of women; but also a man of experience who advocates the institutional value of marriage, irrespective of the (natural) attractions that (can) emerge between any man and any woman.

If ‘*Tarare* became Salieri’s own work’ – as Beaumarchais himself stated – by the same token his more controversial *Le mariage de Figaro* became Mozart’s own work (at least for Viennese audiences), and in *Le nozze di Figaro* Mozart and Da Ponte did their best to enhance rather than reduce the degree of ambiguity in the play. If it is not entirely clear why Salieri abandoned *La scola degli amanti*, it seems evident that Mozart was the best candidate to take it up. When read in relation to the Kornman affair, it seems that *Così fan tutte* not only reiterates the aesthetics of ambiguity already present in *Le nozze di Figaro*, but extends it beyond the fictional world by modeling the characters in part on the ambiguous behavior of the real persons involved in the Kornman scandal.

The comparison between the Kornman scandal and *Così fan tutte* cannot be stretched too far; the libretto remains the result of a pot-pourri of disparate sources.⁵³ Even if there are strong analogies between Don Alfonso and

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21. Maza, *Private Lives* (see n. 13), 310, explains that Beaumarchais had no direct involvement in Mme. Kornman’s subsequent divorce, which happened only in 1793 (although she had lived separately from her husband since 1781).

⁵² Beaumarchais, *Mémoire contre M. Guillaume Kornman* (see n. 11), 60.

⁵³ Most of the studies on the sources of the libretto show various aspects of Da Ponte’s multifarious synthesis of several literary sources: Georges de Saint-Foix, ‘Quelques observations sur le livret de *Così fan tutte*,’ *Revue de Musicologie*, 34 (1930): 93–7; Kurt Kramer, ‘Da Ponte’s *Così fan tutte*,’ in *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen aus dem Jahre 1973*, I (1973), 3–27; Daniela Goldin, ‘Mozart, Da Ponte e il linguaggio dell’opera buffa,’ in *La vera fenice. Libretti e librettisti tra Sette e Ottocento* (Turin, 1985), 77–148; Cornelia Kritsch and Herbert Zeman, ‘Das Rätsel eines genialen Opernentwurfs – Da Pontes Libretto zu *Così fan tutte* und das literarische Umfeld des 18. Jahrhunderts,’ in *Die österreichische Literatur: Ihr Profil an der Wende vom 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert (1750–1830)* (Graz, 1979), 355–76; Steptoe, ‘The Sources of *Così fan tutte*: A Reappraisal,’ *Music & Letters*, 62 (1981): 281–94; John Stone, ‘The Background to the Libretto,’ in *Così fan tutte*, English National Opera Guide 22 (London and New York, 1983), 33–45; Marc Vignal, ‘*Così fan tutte*. Sources, composition et créateurs,’ *L’Avant-scène opéra*, 131–2 (May–June 1990): 6–15; Christophe Pirenne, ‘Où il est question des origines littéraires de *Così fan tutte*, ossia *La scuola degli amanti*, et d’observations étonnantes sur ce chef-d’oeuvre de Mozart et Da Ponte,’ *Art et fact*, 10 (1991): 87–94; Salmon, ‘*Tutti accusan le donne*’ (see n. 37), 81–8; Edmund J. Goehring, ‘The Comic Vision of *Così fan tutte*: Literary and Operatic Traditions,’ Ph.D. diss. Columbia University (1993), 14–8; Wunderlich, *Mozart’s ‘Così fan tutte’* (see n. 1), 11–27; Brown, *W. A. Mozart: ‘Così fan tutte’* (see n. 1), chap. 4, ‘The Sources of an “Original” Libretto.’ Even the studies about one single source for *Così* acknowledge the coexistence of many other sources: Ernst Gombrich, ‘*Così fan tutte* (Procis included),’ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 17 (1954): 372–4; Ann Livermore, ‘*Così fan tutte*: A Well-Kept Secret,’ *Music and Letters*, 46/4 (1965): 316–21; Susanne Vill, ‘Das psychologische

Beaumarchais, or between Guillaume Kornman and Guilelmo, there is no precise correspondence between Catherine Kornman and Fiordiligi (or Dorabella), and none between Despina or Ferrando and any person involved in the Kornman scandal. Like many movies inspired by recent true events, *Così* implicitly warns the audience that ‘this is a work of fiction; any resemblance of the characters to persons living or dead is merely coincidental.’

Mesmerism in *Così fan tutte*

In his pamphlets against Kornman, Beaumarchais was courteous enough to leave his and his defender Bergasse’s mesmerist faith aside. Conversely, in Da Ponte’s and Mozart’s opera, while Kornman’s adultery case becomes a ‘coincidental’ reference, mesmerism turns into a primary target. The circumstantial connections between the French radical mesmerism and *Così* are strengthened by a more pervasive use of mesmeric references in the opera than has hitherto been recognized. The ideological implications of the lampooning of mesmerism, to which I shall turn at the end, involve a critique of the sexual politics promoted by Kornman’s group.

Bruce Brown calls Despina’s ‘cure’ of the men in the Act I finale the ‘turning point’ of the opera, but he also acknowledges that he is relatively alone in his view of the dramatic importance of the mesmeric cure, defining it as a ‘stumbling block for directors and spectators alike during much of the opera’s history.’⁵⁴ Brown is entirely right that this scene is a turning point, but the question remains why mesmerism should be used for this dramatic function. The other question concerns the accuracy (or not) of Da Ponte’s and Mozart’s representation of mesmerism and the authors’ attitudes to it.

The concept of ‘turning point’ implies the existence of (at least) two phases of the drama. The first one is the wager, testing the men’s willingness to subject their fiancées to Don Alfonso’s theory. Until the first-act finale, the action unfolds as a series of unsuccessful attempts to corrupt the two virtuous sisters. The second dramatic trajectory shows how the test of the women’s fidelity, which the men had at first considered a safe game, runs out of control, disrupting all four lovers’ peace of mind, notwithstanding Don Alfonso’s final restoration of the original pairings. Despina’s magnetic cure (scene 16) can be considered a turning point between

Experiment in de Laclós’ *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* und in Mozarts *Così fan tutte*,’ in *Aufklärung: Studien zur deutsch-französischen Musikgeschichte im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Wolfgang Birtel and Christoph-Hellmut Mahling (Heidelberg, 1986), 132–42; Alessandro Di Profio, ‘Le regole dell’inganno: *Così fan tutte* e la lezione goldoniana,’ *Studi Musicali*, 23/2 (1994): 312–28; Carlo Caruso, ‘*Così fan tutte*, o sia la scuola dell’*Orlando furioso*,’ *Il saggiautore musicale*, 1/2 (1994): 361–75; Dorothea Link, ‘L’arbore di Diana: A Model for *Così fan tutte*,’ in *Wolfgang Amadé Mozart: Essays on his Life and his Music*, ed. Stanley Sadie (Oxford, 1996), 362–76; Bernhart Russell, ‘The Two “Albanian Noblemen” in “*Così fan tutte*,”’ *Mitteilungen der Internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum*, 46/1–2 (1998): 38–41.

⁵⁴ Brown, *W. A. Mozart: ‘Così fan tutte’* (see n. 1), 15.

these two trajectories for at least two reasons: first, it takes place in the middle of the first finale, which is also the middle of the entire opera; second, the mesmeric treatment can be seen as a magic practice,⁵⁵ which – fake or not – often works as a catalyst of dramatic change in buffa operas.⁵⁶ This cure in *Così*, however, does not consist exclusively in the magnetic treatment alone. The change it is supposed to bring about – namely, turning the ladies' affections towards the 'wrong' men – actually begins during the preceding scene (scene 15), when they are left alone together with the poisoned men while waiting for the doctor's arrival. The physical events during this scene in fact tell us something about Da Ponte's understanding of mesmeric practices. Before leaving, Despina instructs Fjordiligi and Dorabella on how to give the men first aid:

à 3 DOR., FIOR., D. AL.:	Cosa possiam mai far?
DESPINA:	Di vita ancor dan segno Colle pietose mani Fate un po lor sostegno, E voi con me correte; Un medicò, un antidoto Voliama a ricercar. ⁵⁷

[DOR., FIOR. D. AL.: Whatever can we do? / DESP.: They still show signs of life; / with merciful hands / support them for a little while. / (*to Don Alfonso*) And you, come quickly with me: / let us fly to seek / a doctor, an antidote.]⁵⁸

The two ladies timidly approach the men during a tonally ambiguous, rapidly modulating passage until they finally follow Despina's recommendation: at m. 246 Dorabella and Fiordiligi put their *pietose mani* on the men's heads, then check their pulses (see Ex. 1). This passage ends on a prolonged G sonority as dominant of C minor, audibly linked to the following scene in G major, in which Despina *in maschera* performs the rest of the cure.

⁵⁵ Darnton, *Mesmerism* (see n. 6), 52: 'It was widely believed that mesmerising was a sort of sexual magic . . .'

⁵⁶ As, for example, in Carlo Goldoni's *Il mondo della luna*; Giambattista Lorenzi's *Socrate immaginario*; or Giuseppe Palomba's *La quacquera spiritosa*.

⁵⁷ All quotations from Da Ponte's text, when not otherwise indicated, are from the original edition of the libretto: Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Così fan tutte o sia la scuola degli amanti*, dramma giocoso in due atti da rappresentarsi nel teatro di corte l'anno 1790 (Vienna, 1790); facsimile reproduction in *The Librettos of Mozart's Operas*, ed. Ernest Warburton, 7 vols. (London and New York, 1992), III, 193–278 (hereafter abbreviated as Da Ponte, *CFT*). In the passage mentioned above (Da Ponte, *CFT*, I: xv, 37), note that the word *medico* (doctor) presents an accent on the last vowel ('medicò'), likely a subtle joke by which Da Ponte seems to imply that the quack doctor is going to be a French man. The listener to the opera, though, will miss the detail, since Mozart set the word in rapid eighth notes, and the last vowel, falling on the third downbeat of the measure, results in a tie to the vowel of the following word.

⁵⁸ English translation by William Weaver, insert in Angel record of *Così fan tutte*, (S) 3631 D/L (1963).

238 FIORDILIGI *(si accosta un poco)*

FI. *Pos-siam*

DORABELLA *(si accosta un poco.)*

DO. *Che fi - gu-re in-ter-es - san-ti!*

243

FI. *far-ci un po - co a-van-ti.*

DO. *Ha fred-dis - si-ma la*

248

FI. *Fred-da fred-da è an-co - ra que-sta.*

DO. *tes-ta.*

Ex. 1: *Così fan tutte*, Act I Finale, mm. 238–65.

253

Fl. *Io non gliel sen - to.*

DO. *Ed il pol - so? Que - sto*

258

Fl. *Ah se tar - da an - cor l'a -*

DO. *bat - - te len - - to len - to.*

262

Fl. *i - ta, ah se tar - da an - cor l'a - i - ta, spe - me più non v'è di -*

DO. *Ah se tar - da an - cor l'a - i - ta, spe - me più non v'è di -*

cresc.

Ex. 1: *Continued.*

mesmerism was about magnetism it had to involve the therapeutic usage of mineral magnets.⁶¹

DESPINA: Non vi affannate,
Non vi turbate
Ecco una prova
Di mia virtù: (*tocca con un pezzo di calamita la testa ai finti infermi, e striscia dolcemente i loro corpi per lungo.*)

DORABELLA, FIORDILIGI: Egli ha di un ferro
La man fornita,

DESP.: Questo è quel pezzo
Di calamita
Pietra Mesmerica,
Ch'ebbe l'origine,
Nell'Allemagna
Che poi si celebre
Là in Francia fu.

à 3

DOR., FIOR., DON ALFONSO: Come si muovono
Torcono, scuotono
In terra il cranio
Presto percuotono

DESP.: Ah lor la fronte
tenete su

à 2

DOR., FIORD.: Eccoci pronte (*metton la man alla fronte dei due amanti.*)

DESP.: Tenete forte [. . .].⁶²

[DESP.: Don't be worried, don't be upset; / here is a proof of my power (*with part of the magnet she touches the heads of Ferrando and Guglielmo, then draws it gently along their bodies*) / DOR., FIOR., D. ALF.: He has taken an iron implement in hand. / DESP: This is that piece of magnet, / Mesmer's stone / that originated in Germany, / then was so famous / there in France. FIOR., DOR., D. ALF.: How they move, writhe, stir! / Soon they will strike their skulls on the ground. / DESP.: Ah, hold their foreheads up. / DESP, FIOR.: Here we are, ready! / DESP.: Hold on tight [. . .].]

⁶¹ Mesmer generally preferred 'organic' magnets (those located in the human body, or magnetized trees and water) to mineral magnets. He wrote in *Mémoire sur la Découverte du magnétisme animal* (Paris, 1779), trans. George Bloch, *Mesmerism: A Translation of the Original Scientific and Medical Writings of F. A. Mesmer* (Los Altos, CA, 1980), 50: 'The repeated writings of Father Hell on this subject [the use of therapeutic mineral magnets] inspired the public, which is always eager for a specific against nervous disorders, with the ill-founded opinion that the discovery in question consisted in the mere use of the magnet. In my turn I wrote to refute this error, by publishing the existence of animal magnetism, essentially distinct from a magnet; however, the public, being predisposed to a man of high repute, remained in its error.' (On the same issue see also *ibid.*, 25–8, 33–6, 56–7, 69, 109; and Darnton, *Mesmerism*, 48).

⁶² Da Ponte, *CFT*, I: xvi, 39–41.

400

FI. *(Metton la mano alla fronte dei amanti.)** Ec - co - ci pron - te, ec - co - ci pron - te.

DO. Ec - co - ci pron - te, ec - co - ci pron - te.

DE. su. Te - ne - te for - te!

404

DE. Te - ne - te for - te,

407

DE. for - te, for - te! Co - rag - gio!

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 400-403) features three vocal parts: Flute (FI), Duet (DO), and Deaf (DE). The Flute part has a performance instruction: *(Metton la mano alla fronte dei amanti.)**. The piano accompaniment consists of a continuous string tremolo in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern in the left hand, with dynamics *cresc.*, *f p*, and *cresc.*. The second system (mm. 404-406) continues the vocal lines and piano accompaniment, with dynamics *p*, *cresc.*, and *p*. The third system (mm. 407-409) shows the vocal lines and piano accompaniment, with dynamics *cresc.* and *f*.

Ex. 2: *Così fan tutte*, Act I Finale, mm. 400–09.

Mozart stresses the effect of holding the heads tight by repeating the word ‘forte’ three times; meanwhile the string tremolos and repeated crescendo–decrescendo dynamics convey a sense of the intensification and then smothering of the convulsions (see Ex. 2).

The use of ‘antimagnetic’ women to stop violent convulsions is paralleled in an eighteenth-century report of a mesmeric musical therapy involving the

glass-harmonica, although in this case Mesmer makes the antimagnetic woman touch the chest and not the head of the patient:

Mr. Mesmer then seated near the harmonica; he had hardly begun to play when my friend was affected emotionally, trembled, lost his breath, changed color, and felt pulled toward the floor. In this state of anxiety, Mr. Mesmer brought in a maid who he said was antimagnetic. When her hand approached my friend's chest, everything stopped with lightning speed . . .⁶³

Besides the head, the other body pole naturally irradiated by magnetic force was located in the feet. In scene 11, when Ferrando and Guglielmo are first introduced to Despina as the Albanian suitors of her mistresses, Guglielmo sings the aria 'non siate ritrosi' (set by Mozart in G major, same key as the Act I magnetic cure), in which Guglielmo allures the ladies with the beauty of his and his friend's (unmovable) body poles, namely the feet and the nose:

GUIL.: Guardate, toccate,
il tutto osservate:
Siamo forti e ben fatti,
E, come ognuno vede
Sia merito o caso,
Abbiamo bel piede,
Bell'occhio, bel naso;⁶⁴

[GUGLIELMO: Look at us, touch us, observe us completely; / we're two lovable madmen, / we're strong and well built / and as all can see – whether through merit or chance – / we have a fine foot, / observe, a fine eye, / touch: a fine nose.]⁶⁵

In this context also the mention of the eye and of the act of watching together with the act of touching ('guardate, toccate,' 'osservate,' 'come ognuno vede') could be interpreted as a reference to the theory developed by Mesmer in Paris that the act of watching had to be considered as an extension of the act of touching.⁶⁶

The mixed accuracy of these possible mesmeric references suggests that Da Ponte's notions of mesmeric practices and of their effect derive not from the rather inaccessible writings by Mesmer himself and his followers, but rather from anti-mesmeric satires published in Paris mainly in 1784, which, as mentioned above,

⁶³ Reported by J. de Harsu (ed.), *Recueil des effets salutaires de l'aimant dans les maladies* (Geneva, 1782), 172–200; quoted by Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 73.

⁶⁴ The aria 'Non siate ritrosi' (no. 15) replaced 'Rivolgete a lui lo sguardo' (no. 15a), published in the original libretto (Da Ponte, *CFT*, 29–30). This previous aria presents no reference to mesmerism and was set in a different key, namely in D major. See Brown, *W. A. Mozart: 'Così fan tutte'* (see n. 1), 36. Note also that in Act I, scene 11, Ferrando and Guglielmo are first introduced to Despina as the Albanian suitors of her mistresses, which means that Guglielmo is not following Despina's instructions at this stage. In other words he has a previous knowledge of mesmerism acquired independently from the servant girl. Indeed, it is more logical to think that Despina has been instructed in mesmeric practices by one of the men, rather than the opposite.

⁶⁵ In his translation Weaver (see n. 58) follows the word order in Mozart's score.

⁶⁶ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis historique des faits relatifs au magnétisme-animal jusques en avril 1781* (London, 1781), 102–4; trans. Bloch, *Mesmerism* (see n. 61), 135: 'One should realise that the microscope is to the eye what the eye is to the sense of touch, an extension of the eye.' See also Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 119.

Frank Pattie defines as ‘the climactic year in the history of mesmerism.’⁶⁷ In the spring of this year the King appointed a commission of scientists, including Benjamin Franklin, to test mesmeric theories and practices. During some of the tests performed in Passy, not far from Paris, Franklin, his secretary, his relations, and an American officer felt nothing, while others who volunteered for the experiment experienced a state of trance. Similar results obtained by other scientists independently led the commission to conclude that ‘magnetism has no effect on people of elevated rank or of enlightened understanding,’ and therefore that in the cases of positive results, ‘the crises and the effects are the product of imagination.’⁶⁸ The negative evaluation of the Royal Commission was immediately followed by a massive anti-mesmerist campaign. A few months later the Comédie Italienne staged two sharp satires in verse and music against mesmerism: *Les Docteurs Modernes* and *Le Baquet de Santé*, which ridiculed the allegedly sexual implications of the treatment as well as the greed of the mesmerists.⁶⁹ These comedies, together with an impressive number of pamphlets and other kinds of easy-to-read anti-mesmeric publications, disseminated, with satirical intent, distorted mesmeric notions such as the practice of touching the unmovable body poles, the use of mineral magnets, and the belief that mesmeric practices had erotic effects. Jean-Jacques Paulet’s *L’Antimagnétisme* also appeared during that year.⁷⁰ Paulet’s method of discrediting mesmerism is subtle: he pretends to give an objective account by quoting allegedly first-hand sources, implanting in so doing the germ of doubt in the reader’s mind. In a chapter entitled ‘Catéchisme du magnétisme animal’ we read that the mesmeric clinician is supposed to magnetize the patient’s nose (also called ‘bridge’ in mesmeric theory), forehead, and feet with his hands.⁷¹ In contrast to Guglielmo’s ‘Non siate ritrosi,’ this procedure is presented in a context which does not involve explicit seduction. Paulet’s satirical style in his second anti-mesmeric book, *Mesmer justifié*, also consists of suggestion rather than explicit statement.⁷² Here again he pretends to defend mesmerism while ridiculing it:

On sexual matters . . . the latest precaution taken by Mr. Mesmer should completely reassure the public about the alarms sounded by some pious people and jealous husbands about the risks which the virtue of women would incur there. . . . I protest to you that, although it is true that men magnetize women there in private, these ladies and gentlemen are so

⁶⁷ Pattie (*ibid.*), 159.

⁶⁸ On the royal commission see Walmsley, *Anton Mesmer* (see n. 1), 128–39; Darnton, *Mesmerism* (see n. 6), 62–5: 63, shows a cartoon representing Franklin holding the royal commission report by which he confounds the mesmerists, who fly away from him straddling brooms like witches. The Report was almost immediately translated into English: *Report of Dr. Benjamin Franklin, and other commissioners, charged by the King of France, with the examination of the animal magnetism, as now practised at Paris* (London, 1785).

⁶⁹ The only thing that these comedies have in common with *Cosi fan tutte* is the anti-mesmerist satire; see Steptoe, *The Mozart–Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural and Musical Background to Le nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Cosi fan tutte* (Oxford, 1988), 137–8; and by the same author, ‘Mozart, Mesmer and “Cosi fan tutte”’ (see n. 1), 254–5.

⁷⁰ Jean-Jacques Paulet, *L’Antimagnétisme, ou origine, progrès, décadence, renouvellement et réfutation du magnétisme animal* (London, 1784).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 113–20, trans. Bloch, *Mesmerism* (see n. 61), 79–85.

⁷² Paulet, *Mesmer Justifié* (Konstanz and Paris, 1784).

honorable that one may be sure that nothing has ever happened there which is against decency or modesty.⁷³

Nevertheless, when Paulet explains how men magnetize women using ‘rods’ his sexual satire becomes less indirect: ‘These gentlemen were armed with a rod [*verge*] of iron (sometimes of other material) about ten inches long, straight and blunt.’⁷⁴ In a similar ‘blunt’ fashion, several anti-mesmeric cartoons unearthed by Darnton in the Paris National Library satirize the erotic effects generally produced on young women during mesmeric treatments. One represents a promiscuous communal therapy (or ‘mesmeric chain’) in which ‘patients grapple for the “poles” of surrounding bodies’ (feet and heads), while the mesmerist, portrayed in the usual iconography of a man with an ass’s head, simultaneously magnetizes two ladies and a gentleman with his feet, plus a man’s eye and another man’s ear using fingers of both his hands.⁷⁵

If Da Ponte had access to this kind of French anti-mesmeric material (pamphlets, cartoons, comedies, and Paulet’s books) rather than to writings by Mesmer and his followers, the mesmeric unorthodoxies represented in *Così* should be considered as a representation of mesmeric procedure, certainly disrespectful, but accurate to the best of the librettist’s knowledge. In other words, the act of magnetizing heads and feet was presumably understood by Da Ponte as standard mesmeric practice, a practice that both anti-mesmerist satire and official institutions denounced as a social and political threat.⁷⁶

In addition to these questionably mesmeric practices, another device represented in both satirical anti-mesmeric sources and in *Così fan tutte* is hypnosis. A cartoon, eloquently entitled ‘the magic finger,’ shows a woman hypnotized by a mesmerist; the subtitle (‘an ape is always an ape’) suggests that the satire is directed against Mesmer’s imitators, rather than against Mesmer himself (see Fig. 1).⁷⁷ During her trance, while still trying to focus on the ‘magic’ finger of her hypnotist, the woman has a vision seemingly about an angel chasing a siren, and at the same time she touches her groin with her left hand. The smart ass, represented here with his

⁷³ *Ibid.*, quoted and translated by Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 191–4: 194.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Pattie also reports that ‘the story of the erotic massages was perpetuated by J.-J. Virey, ‘Magnétisme animal,’ in *Dictionnaires des sciences médicales* (Paris, 1818): ‘Mesmer had chosen as magnetizing assistants young men as handsome and robust as Hercules.’ Although in a late source, this description of male mesmerists echoes Guglielmo’s description of himself and Ferrando as ‘strong and handsome’ (See quotation above from ‘Non siate ritrosi’).

⁷⁵ Darnton, *Mesmerism* (see n. 6), 5. See also the cartoon reproduced on p. 7, and entitled ‘Le bacquet de M. Mesmer’ in which a gentleman shows his foot to a group of ladies sitting around a table, while another gentleman puts his hands on a lady’s ‘common sensorium’ (upper abdomen).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 86, reports that the chief of the Paris police, Jean-Pierre Lenoir, wrote in his private memoirs (Bibliothèque municipale, Orléans, ms. 1421): ‘“In 1780 the vogue of mesmerism began in Paris. The police were concerned with this ancient practice [sic!] because of its bearing on morality.”’ Darnton (*ibid.*), 62, quoting the *Journal de Bruxelles* (1 May 1784), 36, informs us that the Royal commission was attended in 1784 because ‘“the Paris police had submitted a secret report that some mesmerists were mixing radical political ideas in their pseudoscientific discourse.”’

⁷⁷ The illustration is reproduced in Darnton, *Mesmerism* (see n. 6), 53, who unearthed its original in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



LE DOIGT MAGIQUE
OU LE MAGNÉTISME ANIMAL
Simius semper Simius

Fig. 1: 'Le Doigt Magique,' cartoon originally in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and reproduced in Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism* (see n. 6).

pocket full of money, does not establish any physical contact with his patient, but controls her mind through hypnosis.⁷⁸

In *Così fan tutte*, there are two moments in which the fake Albanians seem to try to hypnotize Dorabella and Fiordiligi in order to seduce them. The first occurs when Guglielmo and Ferrando are introduced to the two sisters as Albanians (Act I, scene 11). In order to calm the furor of the two ladies, who are shocked to find male strangers in their house, Don Alfonso reassures them that the Albanian visitors are friends of his; thereafter the two young men declare their love in an accompanied-recitative passage, of which both text and music are fairly unusual:

GUIL.: Ai vostri piedi
 Due rei, due delinquenti, ecco Madame!
 Amor . . .
 FIRD.: Numi! che sento?
 FER.: Amor il Nume . . . (*le donne si ritirano, essi le inseguono.*)
 Si possente per voi, qui ci conduce.
 GUIL.: Vista appena la luce
 Di vostre fulgidissime pupille . . .
 FER.: Che alle vive faville . . .
 GUIL.: Farfallette amorose, e agonizzanti . . .
 FER.: Vi voliamo davanti . . .

 GUIL.: Ed ai lati, ed a retro . . .
 FER.: Per implorar pietade in flebil metro!⁷⁹

[GUGL.: At your feet, behold ladies, two culprits, two criminals! Love . . . / DOR.: Gods! What do I hear? / FERR.: Love, the all-powerful deity brings us here, on your account. / GUGL.: As soon as we saw the light of your gleaming eyes . . . / FERR.: . . . with their lively sparks . . . / GUGL.: . . . like butterflies, dying with love . . . / FERR.: . . . we fly before you . . . / GUGL.: . . . and at your side, and behind you . . . / FERR., GUGL.: . . . to implore mercy in plaintive measure!]

To begin, Guglielmo calls himself and his friend first ‘rei’ – a poetic term for ‘guilty’ – and then ‘delinquenti,’ which has a less poetic and more colloquial connotation, denoting someone who is guilty of an illegal or immoral action; the

⁷⁸ On Mesmer’s pioneering usage of hypnosis see Stefan Zweig, *Mental Healers: Franz Anton Mesmer, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud* (New York, 1932), 3–100; Margaret Goldsmith, *Franz Anton Mesmer: The History of an Idea* (New York, 1934); Robert C. Fuller, *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia, 1982), 12, 31, 187, 191; John Hughes and Andrew Rothovius, *The World’s Greatest Hypnotists* (New York and London, 1996), 1–60; Alison Wintler, *Mesmerized: Power of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago and London, 1998), 184–5, 288–9, 348. The hypnotic technique devised by the mesmerists usually also involved the performance of soft music, generally played by Mesmer himself on the glass-harmonica. About Mesmer’s use of music during his therapies, his eleventh proposition of animal magnetism states that animal magnetism is communicated, propagated and intensified by sound: Mesmer, *Dissertation on the Discovery of Animal Magnetism* (ed. of *Le Magnétisme Animal*, 1779), trans. Bloch, *Mesmerism* (see n. 61), 41–76: 68. James Wyckoff, *Franz Anton Mesmer: Between God and Devil* (Englewood Cliffs, 1975), 86–8, reports an interesting eighteenth-century account of a mesmeric chain session where Mesmer used the glass-harmonica. The recount also testifies about the belief that women were better predisposed than men towards hypnosis.

⁷⁹ Da Ponte, *CFT*, I: xi, 27.

former word belongs to the vocabulary of opera seria, while the latter is more a buffa term. Like the money in the pocket of the hypnotizing ass of the cartoon, it is a comic detail revealing the wicked intention of the action performed. After Guglielmo mentions love ('Amor'), Fiordiligi invokes the gods in order to protect her from the assault of the men, using a classical term for 'divinities' ('numi') which Ferrando artfully changes into the god of love previously invoked by his fellow ('Amore il Nume'). The sequel is even more manipulative, although it might appear at first glance to be mere clumsiness of the two men who seem not to be able to finish their sentences. It is instead a well-rehearsed performance, as it is evident from the fact that the men's sentences perfectly complement one another. It would be sufficient, indeed, to eliminate the ellipses at the end of each line and let a single character deliver all the lines to eliminate the effect of fragmentation, and to reassemble a text presenting the degree of syntactic complexity and of internal cohesion of a magic formula, delivered by the two suitors in antiphonal alternation. The content has little to do with the god of love; instead, it induces the women to focus their pupils (mentioned at the beginning of the 'formula'), on moving targets, i.e. the figurative 'butterflies flying in front, to the side and behind.' The presumed intent is to disorientate the ladies with the help of the soothing rhythm of the voice ('flebil metro'), hoping to bring them in a state of trance similar to that reached by the woman in the cartoon, who seems to be still trying to focus her eyes on the swinging finger of the mesmeric ass. This is only one possible interpretation of this text, and a performance could either clarify or obscure this reference. Although we cannot tell how this scene was staged two centuries ago, the music seems to permit, perhaps even to encourage, an explicit 'staging' of hypnosis. Indeed, Mozart's scoring (see Ex. 3) features strangely 'hypnotic' traits, such as the long sustained chords (starting with a two-measure long G minor sonority), the *arioso* quality of the vocal lines, the echo effect produced by the alternation of the male voices, the final imitative passage: traits so unusual as to make it sound 'out-of-style' in an eighteenth-century comic opera, as an evocation of a distant operatic world.⁸⁰

The second-act duet involving Ferrando and Fiordiligi (Act 2, scene 12, no. 29, mm. 66–75) can be interpreted as another case of seductive hypnosis, performed by Ferrando. Here (see Ex. 4) he repeats the formula 'cedi cara' ('Surrender, my dear') to Fiordiligi four times during a harmonically tense section. The first two times Ferrando commands Fiordiligi to yield are sung as a descending diminished-seventh leap from F to G \sharp , harmonized as vii $^{\circ}$ of A minor, the third repetition ends on the dominant of A and the fourth is sung as an ascending augmented fourth ending on D \sharp (an augmented-sixth chord), after which Fiordiligi can only implore the gods to help her in a short phrase ending on E ('Dei consiglio!' – 'Gods, counsel me!'), the last one before the following A major section. This passage suggests hypnosis for two reasons. In the first instance the repetition of the formula 'cedi cara' entails a

⁸⁰ One could compare this scene to the episode in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, Act III, when Orfeo hypnotizes Charon, making him fall asleep ("Posseute spirito"). Here, more explicitly, the long G minor harmony, the *arioso*-like accompanied recitative and echo effects (between the voice and the instrumental parts) signify trance-inducing music.

27 **DORABELLA** **FERRANDO**

GU. DO. FE. *rei, due de-lin-quen-ti, ec-co, ma-da-me. A - mor... Nu - mi! Che sen-to? A -*

Archi *p*

(Le donne si ritirano; essi le inseguono.) *sempre a tempo colla parte*

30 **GUGLIELMO**

FE. GU. *mor il nu-me... si pos-sen - te, per voi qui ci con-du-ce. Vi-sta ap-pe-na la*

33 **FERRANDO**

GU. FE. *lu - ce di vo-stre ful-gi - dis - si-me pu - pil - le... che alle vi - ve fa - vil - le...*

f p fp

36 **FERRANDO**

FE. *...vi vo - lia - mo da -*

GUGLIELMO

GU. *...far - fal - let - te a - mo - ro - se, e a - go - niz - zan - ti...*

38

FE. *van - ti... ..per im - plo - rar pie -*

GU. *...ed ai la - ti ed a re - tro... ..per im - plo - rar pie -*

fp

Ex. 3: *Così fan tutte*, Act I, scene 11, mm. 27–39.

66

FI. *son, non son più for - te - ah non son, non son più for - te! Dei con-*

FE. *Ce - di, ca - ra... ce - di, ca - ra...*

70

FI. *si - glio! Ah non son più for - te!*

FE. *ce - di, ca - ra... ce - di, ca - ra...*

74 **Larghetto**

FI. *Dei con - si - glio! (tenerissimamente)*

FE. *Vol - gi - a - me - pie -*

simile *f*

Larghetto *fp* *p*

Ex. 4: *Così fan tutte*, Act II, scene 12, mm. 66–77.

psychological command: Ferrando orders Fiordiligi to shut down her will to resist him, or – to play with Freudian terms – to neutralize her superego, which is not only censuring her subconscious desire for the foreign suitor but also telling her to join

her fiancé Guglielmo in the battlefield.⁸¹ Mozart increases the effect by charging Ferrando's repeated 'cedi cara' with harmonic tensions whose compelling tonal function is to resolve where (and what) Ferrando wants Fiordiligi to resolve. In the second instance, Ferrando's command is followed by the $\frac{3}{4}$ A major *Larghetto*, where Ferrando uses the power of sight on her by telling Fiordiligi to look at him ('volgi a me pietoso il ciglio'). Slightly later she finally accepts defeat and tells Ferrando that she is his ('Fa di me quel che ti par').

Contagious poisoning

If Ferrando mesmerizes Fiordiligi successfully, his emotional involvement indicates that he is not immune to the magnetic attraction he has unleashed between him and his best friend's fiancée. This duet is also the peak of the second dramatic trajectory, during which Guglielmo and Ferrando lose control of the seduction trial. The sub-theme of the men's loss of control over their own feelings is an important element in Mozart's and Da Ponte's critique of attempts scientifically to regulate human feelings and sexual behaviors, epitomized by the French radical mesmerists' theories. The music Mozart wrote for the two love duets, both expressing authentic erotic attraction, actualizes the opposite of this scientific regulation; namely the *mutual* attraction of the 'wrong' couples. But as always, Mozart's settings are justified by a larger-scale dramatic context. In this case that context is defined by the backfire of the mesmeric procedures whose undesired results propel the second dramatic trajectory. And they are undesired because Ferrando and Guglielmo probably assumed that an attraction between their fiancées and any other man was impossible (as did Guillaume Kornman, according to his own *mémoire*).⁸² This would account

⁸¹ It is also possible to speculate that by wearing Ferrando's uniform Fiordiligi already gets mesmerized by Ferrando's animal magnetism. According to the version of mesmeric theory disseminated by Paulet (who quotes an allegedly first-hand source, a letter by Mesmer), any object of any material can be charged with animal magnetism and transmit it: 'Lettre de M. Mesmer, Docteur en Médecine à Vienne, à M. Unzer, Docteur en Médecine, sur l'usage médicinal de L'Aimant,' in Paulet, *L'Antimagnétisme* (see n. 70), 49–59, trans. Bloch, *Mesmerism* (see n. 61), 25–9: 27–8: 'I observed that magnetic material is almost the same thing as electrical fluid, and that it is propagated by intermediary bodies in the same way as is electrical fluid. Steel is not the only substance that attracts the magnet; I have magnetized paper, bread, wool, silk, leather, stones, glass, water, different metals, wood, men, dogs – in a word all that I touched – to the point that these substances produced the same effects on the patient as does the magnet.'

⁸² The hypothesis that mutual attraction between people, or sympathy, is a phenomenon of animal magnetism is by (spurious) Mesmer, 'Discours de M. Mesmer sur le Magnétisme,' quoted by Paulet, *L'Antimagnétisme* (see n. 70), 59–71, trans. Bloch, *Mesmerism* (see n. 61), 33–9: 35: 'Could not one propose, without offending probability, that sympathy – which is nothing other than an inclination, a pleasant impulse we carry towards one another as two magnets are attracted to each other reciprocally – consists of these reciprocal and mutual attractions?'

for the fact that the men switch the object of their desires: the ‘magnetic’ test, indeed, would have proved nothing if the men in disguise had merely tried to seduce their original girlfriends.⁸³

The seduction game starts to escape the control of the seducers during the two complementary scenes 15 and 16 of Act I, one representing the disease, the other the cure, both of which significantly stage the two men not as active mesmeric practitioners but, on the contrary, as (passive) patients. The portion of scene 15 during which the two men pretend to poison themselves is a notoriously puzzling case for its ‘wrong key signature’: the initial section of the scene (mm. 62-137) is written with a G major key signature, although it is in G minor. The G major signature does not emanate from the preceding section (in D major), nor does it anticipate the key of the following one (E^b major).⁸⁴ A possible interpretation could be that the ‘wrong signature’ betrays the falseness of the poisoning. Dorothea Link, for example, writes: ‘*Così* debunks magic when it presents Dr. Mesmer’s magnetic cure in the same equation as the pretended arsenic, in other words, as a fake remedy for a fake malady.’⁸⁵ The only problem is that, as the libretto clearly shows, the treatment is intended to cure not merely the arsenic poisoning, but the psychological state that caused the men to take it (against which, in any case, Despina’s magnet is of little use), and although the malady is fake, its cause, as I will show, slowly materializes as real. After Don Alfonso, Fiordiligi and Dorabella ask the quack doctor the remedy for the men’s sickness (‘Signor dottore / Che si può far?’), the doctor replies that first it is necessary to know the cause of the poisoning, and then the nature of the poison, and the dosage.⁸⁶ The three witnesses inform the doctor about the nature of the poison (arsenic), the fact that they swallowed it in one gulp, and most importantly, the reason they took it (love): ‘La causa è amore.’⁸⁷ The idea of lovesickness as the primary cause of the men’s temporary illness evokes the conflation, used by French mesmerists, of physiological and psychological (and even moral) disturbances.⁸⁸ Most pertinent to the interpretation of this scene as *the* dramatic turning point is that the men do in fact become lovesick after this episode. Da Ponte moves from representing a ‘realistic’ (though fake) poisoning to using poison as a metaphor for lovesickness: the poisoning, fake or not, is a symptom of

⁸³ Andrew Steptoe, ‘The Sources of *Così fan tutte*’ (see n. 53), 284, points out that ‘the transposition of lovers, in which each officer attempts his comrade’s mistress rather than his own’ represents a substantial discrepancy from the Ovidian myth of Cephalus and Procris, about which see Gombich, ‘“*Così fan tutte*” (Procris included)’ (see n. 53), 372–4.

⁸⁴ Hans Keller, ‘Mozart’s Wrong Key Signature,’ *Tempo* 98 (1972): 21–71, is an essay entirely devoted to this notational oddity and interprets the G major signature as an expected but avoided ‘cosmic’ dominant of the entire ‘C major’ opera (p. 26).

⁸⁵ Link, ‘*L’arbore di Diana*’ (see n. 53), 371.

⁸⁶ Da Ponte, *CFT*, I: xvi, 49–40.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Nicolas Bergasse, ‘Lettre à un médecin de la Faculté de Paris à un medecin du Collège de Londres,’ first published in 1781 and soon rpt. in Mesmer et al., *Recueil des pièces les plus intéressantes sur le magnétisme animal* (The Hague, 1784), 199–269; see also Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore and London, 1998), 299; François Azouvi, ‘Magnétisme animal: la Sensation infinie,’ *Dix-huitième siècle*, 23 (1991): 107–18: 113–14; and Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 117–23.

a psychological disposition that actually gets worse after Despina's cure. If lovesickness is a disease, mesmeric treatment cannot cure it.

First, at the end of the first-act finale, when the men declare their love to the sisters after recovering from their convulsive crisis, Don Alfonso and Despina reassure the ladies that 'these are still effects of the poison' and that 'the magnetic cure will stop that effect in a few hours.'⁸⁹ This prognosis does not seem to be accurate: in Act II, after the duet with chorus no. 21 ('Secondate, aurette amiche'), Ferrando and Guglielmo appear even more convincingly affected by the love-poisoning. First, Ferrando admits he is trembling and shaking from his head to the soles of his feet ('Io tremo e palpito / Dalla testa alle piante), recalling the convulsive crises he experienced during the first-act finale.⁹⁰ Then, in the following scene, during the recitative section preceding their duet no. 23, Guglielmo's and Dorabella's conversation exemplifies both the contagious nature of the love poisoning and its power to revert continuously from metaphor to materialization. Guglielmo's lovesickness is first ironically interpreted by Dorabella as an effect of the poisoning, hence the poisoning is transformed by Guglielmo into a new metaphor, namely the poisonous light emanating from Dorabella's eyes:

GUIL.: Io mi sento sì male (*Gli altri due fanno scena muta in lontananza*)

Sì male, anima mia

Che mi par di morire.

[DOR.]: (Non otterrà nientissimo).⁹¹

(DOR.): Saranno rimasugli

Del velen che beveste.

GUIL.: Ah che un veleno assai più forte io bevo

In que' crudi e focosi

Mongibelli amorosi! (*con fuoco*)⁹²

DOR.: Sarà veleno caldo:

Fatevi un po' fresco (*li altri due entrano in atto di passeggiare*)

GUIL.: Ingrata, voi burlate

Ed intanto io mi moro! (Son spariti:

Dove diamine son iti?)⁹³

[GUGL.: I feel so ill, so ill, my love, that I feel as if I were dying. / DOR.: (He won't achieve anything at all.) These must be after-effects of the poison you drank. / GUGL.: Ah, but I drink a far stranger poison from those cruel and fiery volcanoes of love. / DOR.: It's probably a hot poison; fan yourself a little. / GUGL.: Ingrate! You mock, and meanwhile I am dying! [*exeunt Fiordiligi and Ferrando*] (They've vanished: where the devil have they gone?)]

⁸⁹ Da Ponte, *CFT*, I: xvi, 41–2: 'In poch'ore, lo vedrete, / per virtù del magnetismo / finirà quel parossismo, / torneranno al primo umor.'

⁹⁰ Da Ponte, *CFT*, II: iv, 50.

⁹¹ Probably as a result of the publisher's mistake, this line is delivered by Guglielmo in the original libretto, but, more logically, by Dorabella in Mozart's score as well as in later editions of the libretto.

⁹² Mongibello is another name of Mount Etna, which in the Middle Ages was called *Gibel Utlamat* by the Arabs.

⁹³ Da Ponte, *CFT*, II: v, 53.

After Fiordiligi and Ferrando leave, Dorabella encourages Guglielmo to push his test to the edge in order to see whether she is teasing or not. Right before the duet, Guglielmo needs to command her to surrender only once ('cedete, o cara!'). She yields immediately, confessing that she feels a volcano in her breast ('Nel petto un Vesuvio / d'avere mi par'), an image that recalls the heat of Guglielmo's poison, which is now burning in the veins of both. In the following scene Fiordiligi calls Ferrando 'aspide,' 'idra' and 'basilisco,' all of them poisonous snakes.⁹⁴ Although Fiordiligi is more loyal, as we have already seen, she also yields after Ferrando's 'hypnotic' repetition of 'cedi cara.' Thus the poison metaphor is made literal during the first finale and only later transformed into a literary figure. However, as soon as 'poison' starts to signify 'lovesickness' the metaphor materializes back into true love sickness, which, as Mozart seems to suggest by using the minor-infected G major key signature, was already active as a real 'contagious disease' during the poisoning scene. Although in that scene the poison is unreal, both what the poison represents (lovesickness) and what it does (transmits lovesickness) have strong dramatic consequences – further reason to consider this scene the opera's most important dramatic turning point. It remains true, as Link states, that the two gentlemen are not healed by the mesmeric cure, but it is also true that the two ladies are infected by a disease which was not supposed to exist but which materialized by representing it. Therefore more than merely debunking the (sexual) magic of animal magnetism, *Così*, warns against the counter-effects of the attempt scientifically to regulate the human body and sexuality, as well as human affections and morality.

Conclusion

As Andrew Steptoe points out, there is a contradiction between the historical evidence that Mozart himself was friendly with the Mesmers and the lampooning of Mesmer both explicit in the Act I finale and implicit in the use of satirical sources.⁹⁵ Steptoe explains this 'apparent inconsistency in Mozart's behavior' with Mesmer's much criticized treatment of the blind pianist Maria Theresia Paradis, whom Mozart admired; he also speculates that the composer might have lost respect for Mesmer after he abandoned his wife in Vienna and moved to Paris, and concludes that, although Mesmer's fame in Vienna was past by the time of the première of *Così*, Mozart followed public satire against mesmerism in Paris during the mid 1780s, giving vent to a personal resentment that he had previously kept secret.⁹⁶ However, if the target of *Così fan tutte's* anti-mesmeric satire were not Mesmer as such but his former friends and present enemies (Guillaume Kornman's circle), and if the lampooning derived from the Beaumarchais–Salieri–Da Ponte network as much as from Mozart himself, as I suggest above, not only there would be no inconsistency in Mozart's behavior, but the references to mesmerism in the opera would acquire a new ideological significance.

⁹⁴ Da Ponte, *CFT*, II: vi, 56: 'I've seen an asp, an hydra, a basilisk!'

⁹⁵ Steptoe, 'Mozart, Mesmer and "Così fan tutte"' (see n. 1), 248–52: 248.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 248, 250–5.

Sarah Maza convincingly interprets the hostility of French radical thinkers (including Bergasse and Kornman) to Beaumarchais' *Le mariage de Figaro* as concerned more with the lack of morality than its apparent (i.e. hypocritical) progressive political aspects. The perceived immorality of the play had to do with 'the fact that it revolved around the possibility of two adulteries,'⁹⁷ and moreover by its various 'ambiguities.' The ideological message is ambiguous insofar as Beaumarchais 'has turned away from the clear dichotomies of good and evil.' Finally *Le mariage de Figaro* betrays ambiguity of style: the 'unseemly mixture of high sentiment and low farce,' and the continuous use of 'witticism and indecent allusions'; this ambiguity, Maza says, also emerges in Beaumarchais' *mémoires* for the Kornman affair, which caused him to be viewed as the mouthpiece of political conservatism against the revolutionary language and progressive political positions of his opponents, whose language was straightforward and unambiguous, and who took adultery seriously because they cared for the value of 'bonds' within the family as well as within society as a whole.⁹⁸

One can see how the ideology of the Kornman group (as it emerged from Bergasse's defense) might have been perceived as despicable by a librettist and a composer who committed themselves to disseminate Beaumarchais' opposite ideology in Vienna. Indeed, *Così fan tutte*, as I have already shown, reiterates and enhances the aesthetics of ambiguity already present in *Le nozze di Figaro*, an ambiguity that, as Mary Hunter has pointed out, allows the negotiability of 'aesthetic and moral conventions.'⁹⁹ However, even if the opera is understood to echo Beaumarchais' views, its politics are equally ambiguous. Indeed, Beaumarchais' role as 'mouthpiece of political conservatism' was already unsustainable before the outbreak of the French Revolution, when Beaumarchais was acting as a secret agent at the service of revolutionary America, and after the duality of the progressive Bergasse vs. the conservative Beaumarchais became even less convincing than it already was.¹⁰⁰ In April 1789 (less than a year before the *Così* première) the hail of pamphlets on the Kornman case abated; parliament imposed the cease-fire as soon as Beaumarchais won his trial for libel against Bergasse and Kornman.¹⁰¹ As a consequence, at first the two appeared to a sector of the public as martyrs to the tyrannical feudal system denounced by Bergasse.¹⁰² After the trial, Bergasse (acting as Kornman's lawyer) addressed an open letter to the King denouncing the whole legal system as expression of the corruption epitomized by Beaumarchais' successful

⁹⁷ Maza, *Private Lives* (see n. 13), 290–1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 292–5.

⁹⁹ Mary Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: A Poetics of Entertainment* (Princeton, 1999), 297: 'on every level and in every dimension of this opera the heart of the matter lies in the negotiable spaces between unthinking acceptance and wanton undermining of both aesthetic and moral conventions. One reason for the enduring significance of this work is precisely that those spaces are negotiable . . .'

¹⁰⁰ Ariane Ruskin Batterberry, *Spy for Liberty: The Adventurous Life of Beaumarchais, Playwright and Secret Agent for the American Revolution* (New York, 1965).

¹⁰¹ Maza, *Private Lives* (see n. 13), 310.

¹⁰² Pattie, *Mesmer* (see n. 1), 141.

defense of Kornman's immoral wife.¹⁰³ Although Bergasse had his ephemeral political victory one month before the outbreak of the Revolution (in May 1789 he was elected deputy of the Lower House), the political tables were very quickly turned and soon thereafter he had to leave France owing to his support for the crown.¹⁰⁴ About this time Beaumarchais inserted the unambiguously evil character of Bégearss in his last drama of the Figaro cycle, *La mère coupable*,¹⁰⁵ and in 1790 his *Tarare* was finally received by Parisians as a true revolutionary work, now entitled *Le Couronnement de Tarare*, displaying a new triumphal finale, and a new preface by Beaumarchais (dated 'the first Bastille Day') praising the role of his opera in stirring the revolution.¹⁰⁶

Mozart's and Da Ponte's implicit reaction to Bergasse's social politics can be seen in Act II, scene 13, where Guglielmo swears at Fiordiligi's betrayal, calling her not only a 'bitch' ('cagna'), but also a 'swindler' and a 'thief' ('. . . furfante. . . ladra').¹⁰⁷ This could be a lampooning reference to Bergasse's view that adultery was both a crime against property and a (magnetic) pathology affecting moral health. Maza relates the former of these to Fournel's *Traité d'adultère*, which presented adultery not as a religious or moral crime, but as 'a theft committed against the husband,' since the wife was 'the husband's possession, of which adultery deprived him.'¹⁰⁸ The aforementioned recitative is one of those whose *vis comica* proves to be irresistible at each performance, presenting Guglielmo (and his rage against Fiordiligi) as unmistakably comic, i.e. impossible to be taken seriously – unlike nineteenth-century opera seria jealous characters.¹⁰⁹ This is also the recitative during which Don Alfonso effortlessly convinces his younger fellows that the best resolution they can make after realizing the unfaithfulness of their mistresses is not only to forgive them, but also to accept them for what they are and marry them. Effortlessly, Don Alfonso succeeds in converting Guglielmo and Ferrando to his own philosophy (which they disparaged and firmly disapproved of at the beginning of the opera), making them repeat with him, at the end of his short piece (no. 30), his creed's motto: 'così fan tutte.' From our contemporary perspective, Don Alfonso's conception of sexual behaviors may well appear more advanced than the strict pseudoscientific regulation promoted by the Kornman group in relation to the family, seen as the ideal center of a harmonic society. Michel Foucault argues that

¹⁰³ Bergasse, *Observations du sieur Bergasse, sur l'écrit du sieur de Beaumarchais, ayant pour titre: Court mémoire, en attendant l'autre, dans la cause du sieur Kornman* ([Paris], August 1788). See also Darnton, *Mesmerism* (see n. 6), 123.

¹⁰⁴ Jean François Eugène Robinet, *Dictionnaire historique de la révolution et de l'empire, 1789–1815*, 2 vols. (Paris, [1899]), II, 156.

¹⁰⁵ Lemaitre, *Beaumarchais* (see n. 11), 293.

¹⁰⁶ Rice, *Antonio Salieri*, 402.

¹⁰⁷ Da Ponte, *CFT*, II: xiii, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Maza, *Private Lives* (see n. 13), 284–5, paraphrasing Jean-François Fournel, *Traité de l'adultère considéré dans l'ordre judiciaire* (Paris, 1778), 275–7.

¹⁰⁹ Think for example of Rodolfo in Verdi's *Luisa Miller*, II: vii, who, after discovering the fabricated proof of the unfaithfulness of his beloved Luisa, sings one of the most moving arias of the entire opera, 'Quando le sere al placido,' conceived to let him gain the sympathy of the audience for his sufferings, which culminate in his final and extreme resolution to poison both himself and Luisa.

it is precisely at the end of the eighteenth century that a secular politics of sexuality emerged, centered in the nucleus of family relationships.¹¹⁰ The bourgeois concern for the health of the family has direct sociopolitical implications,¹¹¹ and generated a medical and juridical discourse about (healthy) sexual relationships that Foucault interprets as a new but equally repressive ‘technology of power.’¹¹² Although Foucault does not mention the Kornman group, there is no doubt that their ideas, propagated among large audiences chiefly through the *mémoires* and pamphlets concerning Kornman’s adultery scandal, played an influential role in the theorization and regulation of family-centered sexual relationships. As Maza notes: ‘The Kornman group’s ideology derived from an odd conflation of Mesmer with Rousseau. They preached the simple values of nature and the family, arguing that true morality (*les mœurs*) was the expression of “natural” family bonds, themselves a form of magnetic “harmony”.’¹¹³ Mozart and Da Ponte’s opera is a satire on this ideological standpoint insofar as it represents disruptive attractions that relieve the compulsory bonds between the members of the two couples in their original (and final) configurations, without, however, dissolving the permanence of their relationship. Moreover, the opera rejects the tendency of the new family morality to ‘essentialize perversity,’ as Foucault would say; a tendency which, by turning behaviors into essential characteristics, excluded from ‘mainstream society’ those individuals whose pathological misconduct could put in jeopardy the natural bonds between the members of a healthy family. Indeed, the satire on mesmeric practices, and thus indirectly on the idea of infidelity as a pathological condition (Bergasse’s classification), reveals Mozart’s and Da Ponte’s ideological position: without tagged moral implications, the opera – immediately and publicly in its title – changes Bergasse’s diagnosis of individual deviancy (‘*così è Mme. Kornman*’) into a description of common behavior (‘*Così fan tutte*’).

¹¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York, 1978), 108, 116.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 11–12, 20–1, 29, 53, 83, 87.

¹¹³ Maza, *Private Lives* (see n. 13), 300.