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Mozart's Operas: Function, Genres, Archetypes

Souvenons-nous d'abord qu'un opéra n'est point une tragédie, qu'il n'est point une comédie, qu'il participe de chacune et peut embrasser tous les genres.

—Beaumarchais, Preface to *Tarare*, 1787

WHAT PURPOSE DID MOZART'S OPERAS SERVE? What role did they play in the culture that produced them? The categories into which music historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries divided them do not help much to answer these questions. In the sixth edition of the Köchel catalogue *La finta semplice*, *La finta giardiniera*, the unfinished *Lo sposo deluso*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Così fan tutte* are placed in the category of "opera buffa." *Mitridate*, *Idomeneo*, and *La clemenza di Tito* are called "opera seria"; *Lucio Silla* and *Il re pastore* "dramma per musica"; *Ascanio in Alba* "serenata teatrale"; the unfinished *L'oca del Cairo* and *Don Giovanni* "dramma giocoso." *To Bastien und Bastienne* and the unfinished opera we call *Zaide* is assigned the generic term "Singspiel"; *Die Entführung* is a "komische Singspiel"; *Die Zauberflöte* a "Deutsche Oper."

In the languages used for the generic designations the catalogue makes an implicit distinction between opera in Italian and opera in German – a distinction that suggests some essential difference between them. Within this overall dichotomy, another can be discerned (especially in the category of Italian opera): namely the distinction between serious opera and comic opera.

Italian vs. German, serious vs. comic: these dichotomies have helped to shape much thought about Mozart's operas, including, for example, Alfred Einstein's chapters "Opera Seria," "Opera Buffa," and "German Opera" in his influential Mozart biography.¹ Mozart certainly used these terms. In the manuscript catalogue of his own works that he compiled from 1784, he used "opera buffa" for *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*, "opera seria" for *Tito*, and "teutsche Oper" for *Die Zauberflöte*. But he and his contemporaries also used other terms, some of which may help us look with fresh eyes at and listen with fresh ears to his operas. And they may also help us answer the questions asked at the beginning of this chapter.

1. Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: His Character, His Work*, New York, 1945.

Let us begin with Leopold Mozart's account of opera in London during the Mozarts' visit of 1764-65. Although from force of habit we might refer to the works he mentions – *Ezio*, *Berenice*, *Adriano in Siria*, *Demofonte* – as serious operas, it is interesting to note that Leopold referred to them simply as operas; the only distinction he made was between operas newly composed by a single musician and others – pasticci – made up of existing music by several different composers.

On their first trip to Italy, Mozart and his father arrived during Carnival and began going to the opera as often as they could, in Verona, Mantua, Cremona, and Milan. Again these operas were of the kind that we generally refer to as serious operas – Guglielmi's *Ruggiero*, an anonymous *Demetrio*, Valentini's *La clemenza di Tito*, and (probably) Piccinni's *Cesare in Egitto*. Yet the Mozarts referred to them as "operas." Only once during a tour that lasted more than a year did they acknowledge a distinction between serious and comic opera. By mentioning explicitly that they had attended the opera buffa in Brescia,² Leopold confirmed the impression that for him and Wolfgang "opera" by itself meant what we would call serious opera.

Most Italian serious operas of Mozart's day were settings of librettos that their authors generally called "drammi per musica" – dramas for music. Note the neutrality of this literary term, corresponding to the Mozarts' tendency to refer to the setting of such a libretto as an opera pure and simple. Only toward the end of the eighteenth century did librettists emphasize with any frequency the seriousness of their librettos with such terms as *dramma serio per musica* or *dramma tragico per musica*. The *dramma per musica* tended to avoid the extremes of tragedy (such as murders and suicides on stage) and comedy (such as slapstick). Its royal and noble characters came from tragedy; its pairs of lovers and happy endings from comedy.³

Leopold Mozart used the term "opera seria" only when he felt it necessary to acknowledge the existence of comic opera as something distinct from the dominant genre. Writing of the projected *La finta semplice* in 1768 he referred to it first simply as "an opera for the theater." Only later he felt obliged to admit: "It is not an opera seria, however, for there is no longer any opera seria here and moreover people do not like it; but rather an opera buffa, but not a short opera buffa but about two and a half or three hours long." In emphasizing the length of *La finta semplice* Leopold was obviously trying to establish the importance of Wolfgang's project, despite the genre

2. *MBA* I, 418; Anderson, 181. [THE KEY TO FOOTNOTE ABBREVIATIONS IS FOUND AT THE BOTTOM OF PAGE 16.]

3. Piero Weiss, "Opera and Neoclassical Dramatic Criticism in the Seventeenth Century," *Studies in the History of Music* II (1988), 1-30; Robert C. Ketterer, "Why Early Opera Is Roman and not Greek," *Cambridge Opera Journal* XV (2003), 1-14.

that local conditions forced on him. Likewise *La finta giardiniera*, composed for Munich in 1774, was simply an opera until Leopold started to discuss it in conjunction with the serious opera by Antonio Tozzi that he hoped Wolfgang's opera would surpass.

Wolfgang himself was under no such constraints when, in December 1772, he first mentioned comic opera: "I suppose Fischietti will soon be setting to work on an opera buffa, which, when translated, means 'crazy opera.'"⁴ For him comic opera represented a kind of deviation from the norm – from the kind of opera he had composed for the Carnival in Milan.

The terms "opera seria" and "serious opera," however convenient, are misleading because they imply a uniform level of seriousness and lack of comedy that ill fits many such operas. Even when drawing a distinction between serious and comic opera Mozart acknowledged a continuum between them:

I have not the slightest doubt about the success of the opera, as long as the libretto is good. For do you really suppose that I should write an opéra-comique the same way as an opera seria? In an opera seria there should be as little frivolity and as much seriousness and solidity, as in an opera buffa there should be little seriousness and all the more frivolity and gaiety. That people like to have comic music in an opera seria I cannot help. But in Vienna they make the proper distinction on this point.⁵

Mozart made that statement (in a letter to his father dated 16 June 1781) in reference to his projected opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and it is interesting to note the generic terms he used in connection with this German opera: opéra-comique and opera buffa. At the same time as he granted to serious opera a little frivolity and to comic opera a little seriousness, he alluded to his own project with terms that undercut the validity of historians' distinctions between Italian, French, and German opera.

On another occasion Mozart drew a distinction between French and Italian musical styles, but – again crossing generic borders that we take for granted – he found some contemporary tragédies lyriques, despite the language in which they were sung, more Italian than French. Joseph Frank, in memoirs published in 1852, recalled a conversation with Mozart that presumably took place in Vienna in the 1780s. His report constitutes a rare bit of evidence of the kind of music that Mozart examined in his spare time: "As I always found him busy studying the scores of French operas, I was bold enough to ask if he would not do better to devote his attention to Italian

4. *MBA* I, 466; Anderson, 219.

5. *MBA* III, 132; Anderson, 746.

scores. 'In respect to melody yes, but in respect to dramatic effectiveness, no. Moreover, the scores you see here – apart from those of Grétry – are by Gluck, Piccini, and Salieri; they have nothing French about them but the words."⁶ Assuming Mozart's views are represented here with reasonable accuracy, it is interesting to note that in referring to Italian opera he made no distinction between comic and serious.

Leopold Mozart's emphasis on the length of *La finta semplice* is not the only instance of his and Wolfgang's differentiating operas by length. Indeed length seems to have served in the eighteenth century as an important generic marker, cutting across the generic borders that historians have grown used to. Thus Mozart referred to both Holzbauer's *Günther van Schwarzburg* (the German opera that he saw in Mannheim in 1777) and his own *Idomeneo* with the term "grosse Opera"; later a similar term ("grosse Oper") was used on the poster advertizing the first performance of *Die Zauberflöte*. When Leopold wrote of "Die operett Bastien und Bastienne, im Teutschen" – "the little opera *Bastien und Bastienne*, in German" – he first established the length of the opera with the diminutive "operett," and only later, as an afterthought, mentioned the language of its text.⁷

"Viva la libertà": Opera as Carnival entertainment

THE GREATEST LIBRETTIST OF DRAMMA PER MUSICA – a dramatist and poet whose name became practically synonymous with the genre – was Pietro Metastasio. Between 1723 and 1771 he wrote twenty-seven three-act librettos, whose excellence was recognized by composers, singers, and audiences alike, and over the course of the century composers made hundreds of settings of them. Metastasio brought together elements of early eighteenth-century Italian opera, Italian epic poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and French classical tragedy (Corneille and Racine) to create librettos of great beauty and strength. He based most of them very loosely on historical or quasi-historical events in Greek or Roman antiquity, and peopled them almost exclusively with royal and noble characters. In their fine craftsmanship, liveliness, optimism, accessibility, and cosmopolitan appeal to opera-lovers in many parts of Europe, Metastasio's librettos embody many of the Enlightenment's ideals. No wonder they appealed so strongly to Mozart when he was exposed to them in London, Vienna, Salzburg, and Italy.

The derivation of plots from ancient history, the nobility of characters, the inevitable triumph of virtue, the highly conventional alternation of recitative and aria: all these aspects of Metastasian *dramma per musica* – together with the term "opera seria" itself – might lead us to think of the

6. *MDL*, 476; Deutsch, 561.

7. *MBA I*, 289.

operas based on Metastasio's librettos as unremittingly serious, sober, and predictable: as a product of the Enlightenment at its stiffest and dullest. Some historians have dismissed them as just that. Those historians may have forgotten that *dramma per musica* was very much a product of the Carnival season for which it was largely conceived.⁸

"È aperto a tutti quanti / Viva la libertà," says Don Giovanni to the three masked strangers who silently enter his ballroom in the finale of act 1. His last three words, taken up by his guests and Leporello, constitute a perfect motto for a season in which eighteenth-century Europe took a vacation not only from organized religion but from the Enlightenment as well. The winter weeks between Christmas and Lent saw a relaxation of codes of conduct, and the pleasures of food, wine, and sex beckoned temptingly. Masks encouraged social interaction unthinkable under other circumstances, as Mozart noticed, to his great pleasure, during the first few days of his first trip to Italy, during Carnival 1770: "Everyone is masked now and it is really very convenient when you wear your mask, as you have the advantage of not having to take off your hat when you are greeted and of not having to address the person by name. You just say, 'servitore umilissimo, Signora Maschera.' Cospetto di Bacco, what fun!"⁹

Carnival balls and similar festivities at other times of year often took place in theaters, with dancing on stage and as well as in the auditorium. In some theaters machinery below the auditorium's floor allowed it to be lifted to the same level as the stage. If the floor could not be raised, an elaborate staircase was built in the area where the orchestra usually sat, as in the Teatro San Benedetto in Venice during Carnival 1782, where a dinner and ball were given in honor of Grand Duke Paul Petrovich (heir apparent to the Russian throne) and his wife Sophia Dorothea. When Empress Maria Theresa gave birth to Archduke Leopold in 1747, her Milanese subjects expressed their joy with a ball in the Regio Ducal Teatro; there too the difference in height between the auditorium and the stage was bridged with a grand stairway.¹⁰ Forty-four years after Milan celebrated Leopold's birth, Prague celebrated his coronation as king of Bohemia with an opera, Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*; a ball in the same theater marked the coronation of his wife.

8. On eighteenth-century opera as Carnival entertainment and embodiment of the carnivalesque see Martha Feldman, "Magic Mirrors and the *Seria* Stage: Thoughts toward a Ritual View," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XLVIII (1995), 478-83, and Mary Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: A Poetics of Entertainment*, Princeton, NJ, 1999, 71-79.

9. *MBA* I, 302; Anderson, 105.

10. Kathleen Hansell, *Opera and Ballet at the Regio Ducal Teatro of Milan, 1771-1776: A Musical and Social History*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1980, 52.

Another Habsburg festivity brought Mozart into a similarly carnivalesque mixture of theater and dance. The celebrations in Milan of the marriage of Archduke Ferdinand (another son of Maria Theresa) and Maria Beatrice d'Este in October 1771 included the following events, as listed in a printed calendar:

Wednesday 16	Opera [Hasse's <i>Ruggiero</i>] with illumination of the whole theater
Thursday 17	Serenata [Mozart's <i>Ascanio in Alba</i>] in the theater
Saturday 19	Serenata in the theater
Monday 21	Grand ball of His Serene Highness the Duke of Modena
Tuesday 22	Opera in the theater
Wednesday 23	Opera and masked ball in the theater
Thursday 24	Serenata with illuminations in the theater
Saturday 26	Opera and gala ball at court
Sunday 27	Serenata and masked ball in the theater
Monday 28	Serenata with illuminations in the theater
Tuesday 29	Opera and masked ball in the theater
Wednesday 30	Opera and masked ball at court and in the theater ¹¹

The Cuvilliés Theater in Munich was the site not only of Carnival operas like Mozart's *Idomeneo* but of balls like one during Carnival 1765 for which the stage was embellished with magnificent decorations. For those who watched from the boxes, such occasions were spectacles as exciting as the operas with which they shared the stage. And just as Carnival balls became theatrical events, so operatic audiences became crowds of Carnival merrymakers. The boundary between the stage and the auditorium, like other boundaries characteristic of everyday life, fell victim to the freedoms of the season and of the carnivalesque celebrations with which eighteenth-century subjects acknowledged their rulers' power.

Opera seria put Carnival on the operatic stage: elaborate costumes, disguises, cross-dressing, plots with only the flimsiest resemblance to the historical events on which they are supposedly based, and happy endings. Most carnivalesque of all – and most contrary to the spirit of the Enlightenment – was the presence of musici. The passionate declaration of love by men without testicles – at once sad, bizarre, and funny – was an essential element of opera seria throughout the century. Castrated singers, like Mozart's friend and mentor Giovanni Manzoli, helped make opera seria Carnival entertainment at its most extravagant and exotic.

11. Hansell, *Opera and Ballet*, 82.

An engraving by Marc'Antonio dal Re depicts the performance of an opera seria, probably Giuseppe Carcani's *Tigrane* at the Regio Ducal Teatro in Milan during Carnival 1750.¹² It suggests something of the festive atmosphere that prevailed in an eighteenth-century theater. Apamia, attended by two pages, stands between cages containing wild animals and expresses the conflicting emotions that so often torment the characters in *dramma per musica*. Her elaborate costume corresponds to no historical period – certainly not ancient Asia Minor, where *Tigrane* takes place – but suggests a fantastic world of the imagination, or a Carnival ball. The scenery, painted on a series of flats jutting out from the side of the stage and on a backdrop at the far end of the stage, likewise makes no attempt to represent anything from the real world.

The stage held up to the audience a kind of mirror: a make-believe Carnival reflecting the actual celebration taking place in the auditorium. In the light of candles that continued to flicker throughout the performance, the audience, the orchestra, and the singers enjoyed together an all-enveloping brilliance. The light allowed the audience to divide its attention between the stage and auditorium. Some people wore masks; some showed their backs to the stage and looked around at their neighbors; some engaged in conversation, pointing in various directions; some studied their librettos; some followed the action on stage.

Dal Re's engraving suggests that the seriousness of Carnival opera was one of its less important characteristics. Whether serious or comic, German, Italian, or French, eighteenth-century opera was above all a celebration embodying and expressing the spirit of Carnival.

It is by no means accidental that almost half of Mozart's operas – early and late, and regardless of genre – were first performed during Carnival: *Mitridate* (26 December 1771), *Lucio Silla* (26 December 1773), *La finta giardiniera* (13 January 1775), *Idomeneo* (29 January 1781), and *Così fan tutte* (26 January 1790). (*Der Schauspieldirektor*, a play with music rather than an opera, was also written for Carnival; it was first performed on 7 February 1786.) *Le nozze di Figaro* may have been conceived as a Carnival opera, though its premiere had to be delayed until after the festive season.¹³ Most of Mozart's other operas can be understood as

12. The engraving (reproduced in full in the article "Milan" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*) contains a sonnet dedicated "to the incomparable merit of Signora Violante Vestri who to applause and universal pleasure represented in the drama entitled *Il Tigrane* the character of Apamia in the theater of Milan" and a portrait of the singer. Violante Vestri created the role of Apamia in Carcani's *Tigrane* at the Regio Ducal Teatro of Milan during Carnival 1750.

13. Daniel Heartz, *Mozart's Operas*, ed. Thomas Bauman, Berkeley, CA, 1990, 138. The opera's final words sound like an invitation to a Carnival ball: "Sposi, amici, al ballo, al gioco. / Alle mine date foco, / Ed al suon di lieta marcia / Corriam tutti a festeggiar."

products of the transfer of carnivalesque traditions to other times of year in order to celebrate special political events – an archducal wedding (*Ascanio in Alba*), visits of members of royal families (*Il re pastore*, *Die Entführung*, *Don Giovanni*), and a coronation (*La clemenza di Tito*).

Both *Die Entführung*, conceived for a visit to Vienna of the same Russian crown prince whose visit to Venice was celebrated with a Carnival ball, and *Don Giovanni*, whose premiere was intended to coincide with a visit to Prague of Archduke Franz (Leopold's son and successor) and his sister Maria Theresa and to celebrate Maria Theresa's wedding to Prince Anton of Saxony, came to the stage late, and well after the visits for which they were originally intended. In Prague, the festive function that *Don Giovanni* was meant to serve was served instead by a performance of *Figaro*. An account of that performance in a Prague newspaper conveys the carnivalesque qualities of the occasion:

At half-past six o'clock [Their Highnesses] betook themselves to Count Nostitz's National Theater, embellished and illuminated for this occasion in a very distinguished manner. The auditorium was so much glorified by the finery of the numerous guests that one had to admit never having beheld such a magnificent scene. At the entry of Their Highnesses they were greeted with the most evident marks of joy by the whole public, which they acknowledged with gracious gratitude. At their request the well-known opera *Die Hochzeit des Figaro*, generally admitted to be so well performed here, was given. The zeal of the musicians and the presence of Mozart, the composer, awakened a general approbation and satisfaction in Their Highnesses. After the first act a sonnet, ordered by several Bohemian patriots for this festivity, was publicly distributed.¹⁴

Dramma per musica and dramma giocoso per musica:
Semiramide and *La finta giardiniera*

METASTASIO'S *SEMIRAMIDE*, written for the Roman Carnival of 1729, is one of his most entertaining librettos, and contains some good examples of his comic talents. Mozart never set it to music, but he did write an opera, *La finta giardiniera*, that shares with *Semiramide* some important elements of plot. Thinking about Metastasio's libretto and Mozart's opera together may help us see the generic boundary between *dramma per musica* and *dramma giocoso per musica* as unnecessarily rigid.

14. *MDL*, 264-65; Deutsch, 300.

The plot of *Semiramide* – while worked out with the clockwork precision and ingenuity characteristic of Metastasio – is itself so wonderfully and patently preposterous as to be funny. At some time before the action begins the Indian prince Scitalce, having been told that his beloved Semiramide was unfaithful to him and intended to kill him, stabbed her and left her for dead. (The wicked, deceitful Sibari, who also loved Semiramide, had given Scitalce this information, which was entirely false.) Semiramide survived the attack, and married the king of Babylonia. After his death, she ruled Babylonia disguised as her son Nino, since he, although heir to the throne, was too weak to rule. (As originally sung in Rome, where female sopranos were not allowed on stage, Semiramide was created by a musico, adding an extra layer of sexual ambiguity to the role.)

As the drama begins, Semiramide, acting as King Nino, supervises the choosing of a husband for Princess Tamiri. Three princely suitors arrive to compete for Tamiri's hand: the Egyptian Mirteo, the Scythian Ircano and, to Semiramide's shock, Scitalce, who is unaware that Semiramide is alive. The rivalry for Tamiri's hand and the amatory conflict between Semiramide and Scitalce (who, until near the end of the drama, believes he was justified in trying to kill Semiramide) are the two primary strands out of which Metastasio wove his drama, which ends with the revelation of Semiramide's identity and of Sibari's deceit, the reconciliation of Semiramide and Scitalce and the engagement of Tamiri and Mirteo. (The names of the characters – three of which share the syllable "mir" and two of which are partially anagrammatic – add to the libretto's playfulness and quality of carnivalesque make-believe; one thinks of Tamino/Pamina, Papageno/Papagena, Bastien/Bastienne, Vitellia/Servilia, Sandrina/Arminda and Arminda/Ramiro in *La finta giardiniera*, Fracasso/Cassandro in *La finta semplice*, and Cecilio/Celia in *Lucio Silla*.¹⁵)

15. Mozart, who sometimes signed his name "Trazom," probably enjoyed this quasi-anagrammatic play as much as librettists did.

The violent, uncouth barbarian prince Ircano, whose role one might almost call a *parte buffa*, makes a comic impression on his first appearance. Tamiri's three suitors arrive together; Mirteo tries to address Semiramide, but Ircano keeps interrupting him:

Mirteo	Al tuo cenno, gran re, deposte l'armi, Si presenta Mirteo. L'Egitto...	Having laid down his arms at your command, great king, Mirteo introduces himself. Egypt...
Ircano	(<i>a Mirteo, interrompendolo</i>) Odi, La bella Che fra noi si contende, È quella?	(<i>to Mirteo, interrupting him</i>) Listen, the beautiful woman for whom we compete: is it she?
Mirteo	(<i>ad Ircano</i>) È' quella. (<i>a Semiramide</i>) L'Egitto e il regno mio...	(<i>to Ircano</i>) It is she. (<i>to Semiramide</i>) Egypt is my kingdom...
Ircano	(<i>a Semiramide, interrompendo</i>) Del Caucaso natio Vien dal giogo selvoso L'arbitro degli Sciti am ante e sposo.	(<i>to Semiramide, interrupting</i>) From the forested mountains of his native Caucasus, comes the master of the Scythians, lover and bridegroom.
Mirteo	Ircano, a quel ch'io veggio, Tu d'Assiria i costumi ancor non sai.	Ircano, from what I see, you do not yet know customs of Assyria.
Ircano	Perchè?	Why?
Semiramide	Tacer tu dei: Parli il prence d'Egitto.	You must be quiet: let the prince of Egypt continue.
Ircano	In Assiria il parlar dunque è delitto? (<i>si ritira indietro</i>)	In Assyria then speaking is a crime? (<i>he retires to the rear</i>)

(Metastasio, *Semiramide*, Act 1, Sc. 3)

Later in the opera Ircano learns of Sibari's plan to murder Scitalce by poisoning the drink that Tamiri is to give Scitalce as a sign that she offers him her hand in marriage. Scitalce is about to drink the poison (that is, he is about to promise to marry Tamiri) when his love for Semiramide keeps him from doing so. Having been refused by Scitalce, Tamiri now offers her hand to Ircano by passing the drink to him. Ircano's surprise and confusion at this turn of events is amusing.

Mozart's *La finta giardiniera* is a setting of a libretto of unknown authorship, first set to music by Pasquale Anfossi in Rome in 1774. This *dramma giocoso per musica* grows out of a dramatic situation all but identical to the one that launches *Semiramide*: Contino Belfiore, groundlessly jealous of his lover Violante, has stabbed her and left her for dead. But Violante has survived and, pretending to be the gardener Sandrina, has entered the service of Don Anchise, mayor of Lagonero, who falls in love with her.

Belfiore arrives in Lagonero intending to marry Anchise's niece Arminda. In the finale of act 1 Belfiore recognizes Violante, who accuses him of betrayal:

Barbaro senza fede,	Cruel man without faith,
È questa la mercede	is this the reward
Del mio costante amor?	for my constant love?

Violante's question echoes Semiramide's, addressed to Scitalce, in act 3 of Metastasio's drama:

È questa la mercede	Is this the reward
Che rendi a tanto amore,	that you give me for so much love,
Anima senza legge e senza fede?	soul without law and without faith?

After much confusion and excess of sentiment that lead Belfiore and Violante to temporary spells of madness, she reveals her identity and forgives him, he breaks off his engagement to Arminda, and the opera ends with a celebration of the marriage of Belfiore and Violante (as well as the marriages of two subsidiary couples).¹⁶

There is more comedy in *La finta giardiniera* than in *Semiramide*, of course; and that is enough to justify our calling the one a comic opera and the other a serious opera. But those terms, by themselves, obscure the fundamental similarities between Mozart's opera and Metastasio's libretto – two dramas located on different parts of a continuum between tragedy and comedy. Mozart made a musical allusion to the connections between *dramma per musica* and *dramma giocoso per musica* in the *introduzione* – the opening ensemble – of *La finta giardiniera*, the principal melody of which he took from the concluding *finale col coro* of his previous opera, *Lucio Silla*. Daniel Hertz, in pointing this out, remarked: "the composer literally picks up where he left off in the operatic domain."¹⁷

16. For a perceptive and persuasive analysis of the opera see Jessica Waldoff, *Recognition in Mozart's Operas*, New York, 2006, 104-64.
 17. Hertz, *Haydn, Mozart, and the Viennese School*, 597.

An Archetypal Plot: Two Lovers and a Second Man

THE BROADLY SIMILAR FUNCTION that most of Mozart's operas served helps to explain why most them, regardless of operatic subgenre, language, or place of performance, can be understood as elaborations of A SINGLE BASIC DRAMATIC ARCHETYPE: A YOUNG MAN AND A YOUNG WOMAN LOVE ONE ANOTHER, BUT THEIR PATH TO MARRIED HAPPINESS IS BLOCKED BY A SECOND MAN, OLDER AND/OR MORE POWERFUL (the "obstructing character" in Northrop Frye's classification of dramatic archetypes¹⁸), who often gives the opera his name. The young lovers eventually overcome the obstacles in their way, while the second man remains alone. Jessica Waldoff has pointed out that this resolution typically arrives by way of what she calls a recognition scene: "The conclusions of these operas, whether buffa or seria, whether Italian or German, culminate in a truth that recognition brings, not for the individual alone, but for the whole stage and the world it represents."¹⁹ Below is a list of all such Mozart operas save one (*La finta semplice*, which does not use the archetype in question); in column 2 are the pairs of young lovers at the center of each opera; in column 3 the second men.

<u>Opera</u>	<u>Pair(s) of Lovers</u>	<u>Second Man</u>
<i>Ascanio in Alba</i>	Ascanio, Silvia	Aceste
<i>Bastien und Bastienne</i>	Bastien, Bastienne	Colas
<i>La clemenza di Tito</i>	Sesto, Vitellia	Tito
<i>Così fan tutte</i>	Ferrando, Dorabella Guilelmo, Fiordiligi	Alfonso
<i>Don Giovanni</i>	Ottavio, Anna Masetto, Zerlina	Giovanni
<i>Die Entführung aus dem Serail</i>	Belmonte, Constanze	Selim
<i>La finta giardiniera</i>	Belfiore, Violante	Anchise
<i>Idomeneo</i>	Idamante, Ilia	Idomeneo
<i>Lucio Silla</i>	Cecilio, Giunia	Silla
<i>Mitridate re di Ponto</i>	Sifare, Aspasia	Mitridate
<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Figaro, Susanna	Almaviva
<i>Il re pastore</i>	Aminta, Elisa	Alessandro
<i>Zaide</i>	Gomatz, Zaide	Soliman
<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	Tamino, Pamina	Sarastro

18. Northrop Frye, "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy," in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton, NJ, 1957, 163-86.

19. Jessica Waldoff, "Don Giovanni: Recognition Denied," *Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna*, ed. Mary Hunter and James Webster, Cambridge, 1997, 292; Waldoff has explored her thesis in greater depth in *Recognition in Mozart's Operas*.

Mary Hunter, focussing on Italian comic operas performed in Vienna during the 1770s and 1780s, sees this repertory as representing several plot archetypes, one of which, exemplified by *Le nozze di Figaro*, she describes as the "theme of a virtuous lower-class woman importuned by a nobleman and eventually allowed to return to her proper lover."²⁰ A second archetype, involving the "triumph of young love over rigidity, lust, or greed in the form of a father, uncle, or guardian who tries to prevent his daughter, niece, or ward from marrying the young man of her choice," is exemplified by Giovanni Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.²¹ A third archetype

involves elopement or abduction. Here an already married or betrothed couple find themselves in a foreign environment, with the heroine about to be wed to the local ruler or patriarch; sometimes (as in Mozart's *Die Entführung* and Haydn's *L'incontro improvviso*) the heroine spends some time alone in the exotic location before the hero finds her. The happy outcome in this case always depends on the generosity of the ruler or head of household.²²

I would argue that all three of these plot archetypes constitute subcategories of the more basic archetype presented here, which covers serious as well as comic opera, German as well as Italian.

In several of Mozart's operas the second man is sexually or amorously attracted to the young woman. The Roman dictator Lucio Silla wants to marry Giunia; only when he gives her up to Cecilio can the young lovers find happiness. Mitridate, similarly, is engaged to Aspasia, who loves Mitridate's son Sifare. In *Zaide* and *Die Entführung* Soliman and Pasha Selim are attracted to Zaide and Constanze; Constanze's refusal inflames Selim's passion, just as Lucio Silla admits that he finds Giunia attractive despite her resistance.²³ Don Anchise, the mayor of Lagonero in *La finta giardiniera*, wants to marry his gardener Sandrina (he is unaware that she is really the Marchesa Violante in disguise). And in *Figaro* Count Almaviva, already married, wants to seduce Susanna.

20. Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa*, 3.

21. Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa*, 40.

22. Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa*, 41.

23. Hertz, *Haydn, Mozart, and the Viennese School*, 552, points to similarities between Lucio Silla and Pasha Selim: "Like the Pasha in *Die Entführung*, Silla's amorous fire is stoked by resistance. "

In the other operas the second man has other reasons to frustrate the desires of the young lovers, or does so unintentionally. Colas, in *Bastien und Bastienne*, keeps the young lovers apart – by advising Bastienne to pretend that she no longer loves Bastien – only to strengthen their love for one another. Idomeneo, in sending his son Idamante into exile (and separating him from Ilia), hopes to avoid having to fulfill the vow he made, during a storm at sea, to sacrifice to Neptune the first person he saw on reaching land. In *Il re pastore*, Alessandro, unaware that young Aminta loves Elisa, arranges for him to marry someone else. Sarastro keeps Tamino and Pamina apart until Tamino proves himself wise and virtuous. Aceste, in *Ascanio in Alba*, resembles Sarastro in being a high priest who acts as a guardian for a young woman, Silvia. She loves a man whose face she has seen in a dream. Aceste, in telling Silvia that she is to marry Ascanio, causes her distress because she believes that she will not be able to marry her true love. But – symptomatic of this opera's lack of dramatic tension – Silvia's distress is shortlived; Aceste tells her almost immediately that the man of her dreams is in fact Ascanio.

Two of Mozart's late operas, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*, represent a variation on the archetype in which the second man interferes with the marriage of not one but two young couples. (There are subsidiary couples in several of Mozart's operas – for example, Annio and Servilia in *La clemenza di Tito*, Agenore and Tamiri in *Il re pastore*, Pedrillo and Blonde in *Die Entführung* – but only in *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* are the two couples of equal importance.) Don Giovanni tries to seduce both Donna Anna and Zerlina; and in killing Anna's father he sets in motion events that will delay her marriage to Don Ottavio by at least a year. Don Alfonso first separates two pairs of lovers by proving to Guilelmo and Ferrando that their fiancées are capable of infidelity, and then reunites them. In doing so, he plays a role analogous to, and probably inspired by, that of the magician Trofonio in Salieri's *La grotta di Trofonio*, another opera in which the archetypal pair of young lovers has been doubled.²⁴

La clemenza di Tito offers another variation on the archetype. Vitellia and Sesto make an odd pair of operatic lovers in that Vitellia's feelings for Sesto are, until near the end of the opera, entirely overwhelmed by her desire to avenge the death of her father at the emperor's hand and by her ambition to be empress herself. Tito fulfills the conventional role of second man by asking for Vitellia's hand in marriage, unaware that Sesto loves her. But Tito decides to marry Vitellia only after she has seduced Sesto into taking part in a plot to assassinate the emperor. The opera's ending leaves in doubt the future relations of Sesto and Vitellia.

24. On the operatic "conversation" between *La grotta di Trofonio* and *Così fan tutte* see Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa*, 257-72.

Although the archetypal second man is left alone at the end of most of Mozart's operas, in three exceptional cases he has a different fate. Count Almaviva, having failed to seduce Susanna, returns to married life with Countess Rosina. And in two operas the second man dies. The last words of Mitridate, mortally wounded, are "Moro felice appieno" (I die supremely happy), while Don Giovanni can only cry out "Ah!" as he descends into the flames. Neither Mitridate nor Giovanni takes part in the last ensemble of the opera named after him.

Mozart normally differentiated the young male lover from the second man by writing the role of the younger man for a singer with a higher voice. In his settings of *drammi per musica*, the highest male voices are those of musici, who created the roles of Sifare, Ascanio, Cecilio, Aminta, Idamante, and Sesto. The second man in these operas – Mitridate, Aceste, Lucio Silla, Alessandro, Idomeneo, and Tito – is a tenor. In the German operas and the comic operas in Italian, the second man is a bass or baritone, except in three cases (in the harem operas, Sultan Soliman is a tenor and Pasha Selim does not sing at all; in *La finta giardiniera* Anchise is a tenor), while the young male lovers are tenors, with three exceptions: Figaro, Masetto, and Guilelmo. In writing these parts for basses, Mozart called attention to the important ways in which these characters differed from the archetypal young lover. Figaro is not necessarily younger than the count, nor is Masetto necessarily younger than Don Giovanni. Figaro and Masetto are both of humble birth (young lovers are often noblemen). Masetto and Guilelmo are both "extra" young lovers, their bass voices differentiating them musically from Don Ottavio and Ferrando. In Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Count Almaviva, a young lover, is a tenor; in Mozart's *Figaro* the count, now second man, is a baritone.

These characters interact in settings far from the real world of the audience and performers – but in some ways close to the make-believe world of Carnival. Operas take place in a fairy-tale realm with ancient Egyptian elements (*Die Zauberflöte*), Homeric Crete (*Idomeneo*), the Middle East recently conquered by Alexander the Great (*Il re pastore*), Asia Minor (*Mitridate*), ancient Rome (*Tito, Lucio Silla*), Muslim North Africa (*Die Entführung* and probably *Zaide*), or bizarre versions of modern Italy and Spain in which Christianity does not exist. (The wall that protected Carnival from religious interference also kept opera from incorporating explicitly Christian elements. References to Christ, the Trinity, and the saints were strictly banned.)

The remarkable letter that Mozart wrote to his sister from Verona during Carnival in January 1770²⁵ expresses the excitement he felt on seeing his first opera in Italy. A few words of his description of the opera – "Oronte, the father of Bradamante, is a prince played by ... a baritone ... Ruggiero, a rich prince, in love with Bradamante, a musico" – are enough to let us know that Guglielmi's *Ruggiero* was yet another elaboration of the archetype that would serve Mozart well throughout his career. By 1770 he had seen so many operas and read so many librettos that the archetype from which many of them were derived was probably second nature to him: something to be noticed only when it was absent. From the relations between Bradamante, Ruggiero, and Oronte – a pair of lovers and a second man – Mozart drew his wonderfully diverse operatic oeuvre.

25. *MBA* I, 301; Anderson, 104-5. [This letter is quoted and discussed in chapter 1 of John Rice's book, *Mozart on the Stage*, which will be available for you to read later in 2008; see note, bottom of page 1.]

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Key to footnote abbreviations:

- Anderson Emily Anderson (ed. und trans.), *The Letters of Mozart and His Family* (3rd edn, London, 1985).
- Deutsch Otto Erich Deutsch, *Mozart: A Documentary Biography*, trans. Eric Blom, Peter Branscombe and Jeremy Noble (Stanford and London, 1965).
- MBA* Wilhelm A. Bauer, Otto Erich Deutsch and Joseph Heinz Eible (eds.), *Mozart: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, Gesamtausgabe* (7 vols., Kassel, 1962-75).
- MDL* Otto Erich Deutsch, *Mozart: Die Dokumente seines Lebens* (Kassel, 1961).