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*THE DON GIOVANNI MOMENT: ESSAYS ON THE LEGACY OF AN OPERA*

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Writings on the reception history of *Don Giovanni* are not in short supply, but this new collection is unusual and thought-provoking. Its fourteen essays focus on responses to Mozart's opera chiefly (but not exclusively) in relation to literary and philosophical works. Other topics examined here include interpretations of the character type of the Don, and the implications of that character type for the interplay between morality and aesthetics, eroticism and music, and individualism and convention in the nineteenth century and beyond.

The words 'moment' and 'legacy' in the title strongly imply that we should think of Mozart's opera as the initiating cause of the story that is unfolded here. That initiating 'moment' is characterized first as a particular musical event in the opera – the 'D-minor chord strikes terror as it moves hauntingly toward an irrevocable cadence' (xv) – and then as the opera taken as a whole, which foreshadows 'a dawning future of transgressive passions, antiheroes at odds with the social order, fulsome orchestrations, D-minor *agitato*, chromatic harmonies, indulgence, blasphemy and, not least, a penchant for melodramatic "red-fire" finales' (75). Given that the Don had a long history before Mozart's opera was written, the opera cannot have been the single cause of the events described here, even if the distinctiveness of Mozart's musical and dramatic treatment produced particular kinds of reactions. The major defence of Mozart's special role (Da Ponte is given rather less credit) appears in the various discussions of Søren Kierkegaard's claim that only a Mozart could have melded together drama and sound in such an absolutely musical and compelling way (123, 137). But interestingly enough, even that view of Mozart's uniqueness is challenged here in a rather brilliant essay by Lydia Goehr ('The Curse and Promise of the Absolutely Musical: *Tristan und Isolde* and *Don Giovanni*'), which posits Wagner's *Tristan* as a work of similar import.

There is also another orientation to the word 'moment' in the book. The opera, we are told, provides through its narrative a 'moral . . . moment of recognition' (xix), which forces us to consider 'the confrontation that the aesthetic poses to the moral, and the moral to the aesthetic' (xviii) – a construal of the 'problem' of *Don Giovanni* that owes a great deal to Kierkegaard's reading of the opera in *Either/Or*. It is just this concern with the ethical assessment of the Don's character that explains why the centrepiece of the book (Chapter 7) is an essay by the moral philosopher Bernard Williams ('Don Juan as an Idea', reprinted from Julian Rushton, *W. A. Mozart: 'Don Giovanni'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 81–91).

These philosophical issues provide an extra dimension to the book, but they also create an organizational tension. The chronological coverage of works and writers dissolves any systematic analysis of moral questions into a friendlier but more diffuse 'history of ideas'; the 'tour' of Kierkegaard, as it were, must be completed before those of Nietzsche and Adorno can begin. This means that even Bernard Williams's strong central 'keystone' chapter has a hard time holding the arch of the philosophical debate together. Worse still, the lack of an index means that any attempt to assemble the discussions on moral issues (or any others) that are central to the book is a laborious business – the salient points are scattered not only among chapters by Williams and Goehr (which I have already mentioned), but also across those by Philip Kitcher and Richard Schacht (on authority and Wagner's *Ring*), Nikolaus Bacht (on Adorno) and Daniel Herwitz (on Kierkegaard). Thus, in spite of its ambition, the organization of the book inevitably privileges history over philosophy.

The history of the character Don Giovanni begins with Counter-Reformation Spain, a land – as Ingrid Rowland reminds us in the first chapter – that was already familiar with talking statues and blameless madonnas. There the Don served (in a play by Tirso de Molina) as a Catholic admonition against the loss of restraint and immorality. Next, Ernst Osterkamp tellingly contrasts those Catholic concerns with the ones



embodied in the figure of Faust, a protagonist who represents a Protestant warning against godless science, and who strives for absolute knowledge rather than absolute pleasure. The following four essays explore the influence of the notion of Don Giovanni on E. T. A. Hoffman (Richard Eldridge), Pushkin (Boris Gasparov), Mörike (Hans Vaget) and a host of gothic vampires, libertines and Mephistophelian virtuosos (Thomas Grey). These are tales well told, but it is in these chapters that the question of historical causation comes to a head. It is never made clear why so many of the more extreme responses to Don Giovanni should have occurred at the heart of the Biedermeier period, an epoch described rather sketchily in the book as one of 'sentimentality and resignation' (101). Moreover, appeals to epochism simply beg the question as to whether Mozart's opera is to be taken as the real 'cause' of these manifestations, or whether these demonic and rebellious perspectives arose from different forces entirely, merely attaching themselves to the opera because it provided a historically convenient 'host body'.

Later in the book two further essays track the influence of Mozart's opera on Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Brian Soucek) and Shaw's play *Man and Superman* (Agnes Heller). Those chapters complete the book's chronological exploration of works that specifically reacted to either *Don Giovanni* (the opera) or Don Giovanni (the character). Of course, a book of this kind is not designed to provide a comprehensive reception history, but the narrower its concerns, the less truly it can speak of the adaptable power of Mozart's work and the legacy of its 'moment'. After all, it could be argued that the work became powerful in the nineteenth century because of its relation to all three modes of human existence as described by Kierkegaard – the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious – and that this book really discusses only the first two. There is, for example, no mention of the singer Pauline Viardot, who did much to nurture an attitude of overt religiosity towards the work by creating a shrine for the autograph score (which she owned) at her home, to which a constant stream of the great and the good – Rossini, Tchaikovsky, Fauré, Turgenev and others – came to pay homage. (See Mark Everist, 'Enshrining Mozart: "Don Giovanni" and the Viardot Circle', *19th-Century Music* 25/2–3 (2001–2002), 165–189.)

As for the twentieth century, we have discussions of Adorno's reactions to the opera (in penetrating chapters by Berthold Hoeckner and Nikolaus Bacht), but there is nothing on political or feminist interpretations of the work. We must wait for others to assess, for example, the 1969 collaborative opera *Reconstructie* by the Dutch composer Peter Schat and others, where the United States is portrayed as a symbolic Don Giovanni who rapes Bolivia and Cuba. And we must turn elsewhere for a feminist critique of the (typical?) mid-century male views of William Mann, who opined that it would have been 'beneficial' to Donna Anna 'if she had been pleasantly raped by Don Juan' (*The Operas of Mozart* (London: Cassell, 1972), 468; for one response, see Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007), 12–13).

Moral questions are never very far away from *Don Giovanni*, and many of them coalesce in the book in the excellent discussions of either the *lieto fine* ending (163, 164, 195, 196, 204, 205, 217, 228 and 236 – I give page numbers to compensate for the absence of an index) or the views of Kierkegaard (33, 34, 40, 42, 95, 108, 110–112, 119ff, 129, 141, 143, 146, 184, 185 and 228–229). It is Bernard Williams who most clearly challenges Kierkegaard's view that Don Giovanni was a passionate individual in pursuit of an ideal, by claiming that the Don is a 'characterless' being, an abstract 'principle of vitality', who does not have a clear relation to the social order or divine judgment (111) and who lacks any humanity (116) – a view that is difficult to square with the fact that he blushes and/or grows pale at various points in the opera (for example, at the end of the quartet in Act 1 Scene 12). As Nikolaus Bacht points out, Adorno has another reason for removing the Don's guilt, since all of his actions are 'negations of unfreedom' and they can only be explained by his 'sociohistorical experience' (234).

What lies behind these two apologies is the notion that it is chance – or divine fortune, if you will – that leads one person to behave as if he or she is ethical and another as if he or she is not. Therefore, should unpleasant things happen as a consequence of the Don's actions, he might possibly feel some kind of regret (as he seems to over Elvira) for vicarious reasons, but he is not responsible for feeling remorse; and although he may offer recompense (as he perhaps attempts to do in relation to Masetto), that recompense should not



be taken as a reparation. These issues dig deeply into philosophical ethics, and might have been better covered by a different essay from Bernard Williams (for example, his article on moral luck in his book of the same name, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973–80* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 20–39). Even so, the fact that such complex questions are raised at all serves as a vivid indication of the many rich seams of enquiry that this book uncovers. *Don Giovanni* will never be quite the same again.

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JOHN T. HAMILTON

*MUSIC, MADNESS, AND THE UNWORKING OF LANGUAGE*

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In this study of music and madness as literary topoi in writers from Denis Diderot to E. T. A. Hoffmann, John Hamilton has offered us one of the finest accounts of the late eighteenth-century idea of music as an ineffable and immediate art of tones, opposed to the referential and reflective language of words and thoughts. The account stands shoulder to shoulder with classic studies by Carl Dahlhaus (*Die Idee der absoluten Musik* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1978)) and John Neubauer (*The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986)).

Among Hamilton's original contributions to this history is, first, his subtle account of the complex fraternity of music and madness and their common opposition to language. Where language allows protagonists in literary works to constitute themselves as stable subjects, using memory, reflection and concepts to achieve identity with themselves over time, music and madness 'unwork' language, thought and identity, causing these individuals to confront their own instability as individuals and making boundaries between the fictional worlds (or works) that they inhabit and the historical worlds of their authors more porous. Yet, as Hamilton emphasizes, music and madness are not identical twins. They operate on language from above and below. Music allows individuals to touch the absolute or to identify with a sympathetic community, while madness corrodes processes of individuation with more ambiguous payoffs. By blurring the lines between music and madness and by allowing the two to permeate their texts in varied ways, the writers studied by Hamilton not only investigated the hazy differences and hidden commonalities between the metaphysical and the nonsensical, but often also managed to make their very opposition to language less clear.

Second, Hamilton places the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century obsession with music and language in a well-defined disciplinary context. As he notes, the 'project is *about* music and madness in the strictest terms: not as tonal art and mental states as such but rather as specialized metaphorical strategies deployed in or constituting works of literature' (9). In other words, as they invoked music and madness in their poetic, fictional, autobiographical, epistolary, journalistic and philosophical texts (to list the broad range of text types that appear in the book), writers were at least as much (if not more) concerned with their own discipline and art – language and writing – as they were interested in music or psychology per se. Although the concerns varied from writer to writer, Hamilton makes the striking general claim 'that, above all, the nonsemantic, fascinating voice of romanticism's mad music is the voice of the author or rather the voice of the living person who is to become an author, who is about to ascribe his or her voice to a system that will work it into sense and thereby work it off' (12). In many of the texts under consideration the writers created protagonists with unmistakable autobiographical traits (such as Diderot's *Moi* in *Le neveu de*