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An ambiguous partnership of word and tone: media "confrontation" in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

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Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* is generally recognised as the greatest work dealing with the theme of Don Juan. It is also extremely complex and raises in an unusually challenging way the significance of the figure of Don Giovanni. This article examines the relevance of Nicholas Cook's theory regarding the analysis of musical multimedia. Focusing also on the works of Wye Jamison Allanbrook and Leonard Ratner that have a bearing on the topic, it explores Mozart's ingenious deployment of musical expression, style, and syntax in the opera as primary agents in the construction of human character. Cook's "contest" model postulates that the projection of Don Giovanni's character owes its complexity to a remarkably ambiguous partnership of word and tone, resulting in what may be called a "contradiction" of musical and verbal meaning.

'n Meersinnige samespel van woord en toon: media "konfrontasie" in Mozart se *Don Giovanni*

Mozart se opera *Don Giovanni* word algemeen beskou as die grootste werk oor die tema van Don Juan. Die opera is terselfdertyd uiters kompleks van aard en vergestalt op 'n ongewoon uitdagende wyse die betekenis van die figuur Don Giovanni. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die relevansie van Nicholas Cook se teorie vir die analise van musikale multimedia vir hierdie probleem. Terwyl dit terselfdertyd fokus op die werk van Wye Jamison Allanbrook en Leonard Ratner, ondersoek die artikel Mozart se vindingryke aanwending van musikale ekspressie, styl en sintaksis in die opera as primêre werktuig in die konstruksie van die menslike karakter. Cook se "konflik"-model bring na vore dat die projeksie van Don Giovanni se karakter op 'n merkwaardig meersinnige samespel van woord en toon berus wat 'n bepaalde "weerspreking" van musikale en verbale betekenis tot gevolg het.

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> It was produced — and need I say it? *Don Giovanni* did not please. Everyone except Mozart was sure it lacked something or other. So a few additions were made, a few arias changed, and again we exposed it on stage — And *Don Giovanni* did not please. And what did the Emperor have to say about it? 'The opera is divine: it is quite probably even lovelier than *Figaro*, but it is no meat for the teeth of my Viennese'. I relayed this to Mozart, who answered without upsetting himself 'Let us give them time to chew on it'.
>
> Da Ponte 1959: 86.

In his introduction to *Reading Opera*, Arthur Groos (1988: 1) pointed out that the study of librettos had for a long time been neglected by historians, and that it had generally been taken for granted that "as literature the vast majority of them are beneath contempt".[1] The aim of this collection of essays (Groos & Parker 1988), representing a broad survey of critical approaches to what Groos termed "the much-maligned genre of opera", was therefore to examine and to challenge both the long-standing prejudice against libretti and the scholarly tradition that had, until then, held it.

During the years since the volume was published, libretti have enjoyed considerably more attention within the range of contemporary humanistic thought, in terms of questions about intertextuality, genre transposition, and reception history. As was illustrated by *Reading Opera*, they invite a broad spectrum of contemporary interpretative strategies ranging from the formalist to the feminist.

While this broadened interdisciplinary focus has challenged musicologists, literary critics, and historians to re-evaluate their attitude toward libretti as "something sub-literary and intrinsically uninteresting" (Groos 1988: 1), more recent musicological study suggests that the "reading" of opera should approach the genre as a composite example of collaborative art in which all dimensions are being equally important. Ironically, from this perspective, it is the previously unquestioned status of the music itself that should now first and foremost be critically re-examined — albeit without denying the importance of other textual dimensions.

1 While presented as a general point of view, Groos cites this standpoint from the article of Dent & Smith (10: 822) in the 1980 edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*.

An important contribution in this regard is the British musicologist Nicholas Cook's *Analysing musical multimedia* (1998). Cook (1998: vi) rightly points out that there is virtually no general theory of musical multimedia (under which term he includes opera and the art song), and attempts to redress a balance which has swung, as he puts it, too far away from music.

Cook's (1998: viii) theory of multimedia analysis is based on the premise that "multimedia" is predicated on difference. Accordingly, he departs radically from the more traditional approaches that tend to read opera and *Lieder* texts as examples of relatively perfect word/tone relationships. As might be expected, these approaches have tended to focus primarily on the libretti or verbal content of operas and *Lieder*, maintaining that such content constitutes the full "meaning" of the texts in question. From this perspective the music plays a merely supportive, if not entirely decorative role.

Cook (1998: 16-7, 22) alerts us to the fact that within multimedia contexts, music is an extremely powerful agent that may effectively subordinate verbal content to a series of far more comprehensive "attitudinal" messages. He argues convincingly that music generates meaning beyond anything that may be expressed verbally. Yet, *contra* the view that music is autonomous in its meaning, Cook (1998: 23) emphasises the fact that musical meaning is the product of an interaction between sound structures and the circumstances determining its reception, arising from "the mutual mediation of music and society". Therefore, within the multimedia text, the role and meaning of music are negotiated discursively according to specific productive and receptive contexts.

Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is an extremely complex opera and raises in an unusually challenging way the significance of the figure of Don Giovanni. I believe that it is of particular methodological interest to a discussion of this topic that, within Cook's (1998: 15) theoretical framework, style and genre no longer function as abstract musical properties, but rather "transcode", as it were, social dynamics and meanings in a specific way. This approach suggests that music is thoroughly conceptual in nature, and that musical poetics never functions as a discrete and "externalised" dynamic, but, as Adam Krims (2000: 46) will have it, rather as a moment of symbolic production. Furthermore, Cook's (1998: 16) observes that, by means of strategic juxtaposition, style and genre

may function as discourses of "opposition", and as such may play a decisive role in the construction of meaning — or, as is the case in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, uncertainty of meaning. Given the obscurity of Don Giovanni's character, Cook's approach seems to be particularly relevant to an examination of Mozart's ambiguous deployment of musical expression, style, and syntax as projecting specific social meanings — yet, in contextual interaction with the characters' words, complicating a reading of the opera. Understood from Cook's (1998: 24) perspective, this implies that in musical multimedia not only each medium as an independent variable of the text needs to be closely analysed; rather it is through the contextual "corroboration" of the different media that meaning is to be construed.

From this it follows that the meaning of an operatic text (for instance) is no more than an emergent property of meaning negotiated between interacting media in the light of a specific context. Therefore, "traditional" relationships between word and tone may now be interpreted in novel (and possibly more critical) ways. Cook (1998: 100ff) argues convincingly that, rather than being either in conformance with or complementing one another, individual components (such as word and tone) may in fact be contradictory.[2] As stated above, he also believes that it is often in the context of style and genre that such "oppositional conflict" arises.

Analysing musical multimedia constantly implies that metaphor offers a figurative "key" by means of which musical meaning may be "unlocked". Cook relies extensively on the thought of Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and its further elaborations in the work of Turner & Fauconnier (1999), repeatedly emphasising the role of metaphor as a property of the conceptual system. In cross-media interaction it involves "the reciprocal transfer of attributes that gives rise to a meaning constructed, not just reproduced" (Cook 1998: 97). In the context of musical multimedia, this implies that metaphor becomes a powerful hermeneutic tool for the figurative examination of those parameters of the text which in more traditional approaches have been viewed simply as "abstract" musical material.

2 Cook (1998: 106) in fact claims that "contest" is the paradigmatic model of multimedia.

What, then, does this approach imply for the interpretation of *Don Giovanni?* And how may Cook's metaphorical model be applied interpretatively in order to deepen an understanding of the complex projection of Giovanni's character?

Don Giovanni is widely believed to be the greatest of Mozart's operas, and also has the reputation of being particularly difficult to produce. As Jonathan Miller (1990: ixff) points out, it is almost uniquely problematic in performance — due, among other things, to the mythological quality of the work and its deeply rooted emotional experience. Given the perplexing juxtaposition of farce and ferocity, natural comedy and gothic horror, it is extremely difficult to achieve dramatic consistency. This structural ambiguity also permeates the opera's dramatic components of time, space, and character. Besides most of the action seeming to take place in the open, scenes do not appear to be related to one another in any obvious manner. Throughout the opera the characters wander through apparently familiar locations — a fractured landscape in which discrete "events" and "places" are simultaneously mysteriously adjacent to one another.

The disunity of time and space is echoed by a parallel indeterminacy of character. While titles define individuals' roles (for example, Donna Anna, Don Ottavio, the Commendatore, and so forth), the personal circumstances which would lend a social reality to the characters are lacking. Don Giovanni, for instance, keeps no household, but merely a derelict establishment occupied by a party of musicians. Miller (1990: xi) argues that this absence of a social setting and non-conformance with the accepted operatic canons of character and personality may in fact represent the very essence of the opera, which compels both performers and audience inexorably on towards the vortex at its conclusion. Yet productions of this masterpiece have been criticised for a lack of depth concerning the projection of dramatic gestures, and for a clichéd, even simplistic casting of characters.[3]

3 Wye Jamison Allanbrook's (1983) study of rhythmic gesture in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* is a unique attempt to challenge such readings from a musicological point of view. Her argument is based on a careful consideration of the musical evidence that metrical and rhythmic choices in these operas play a crucial role in the construction of human character. Her interpretation of Don Giovanni's music, in particular, revises preconceived notions of his projection of character in a rigorous and scholarly manner.

Although the problems of reception and production referred to above also hamper attempts at an explanation of the opera, they nevertheless make it exceptionally interesting from an analytical point of view. Approached from the vantage point of musical gesture based upon principles of style and genre, it offers a wealth of interpretative possibilities.

The discussion that follows focuses on the arias "Ah, fuggi il traditor" and "Fin ch'han dal vino". Within the broader frame of Cook's multimedia theory, these arias will be interpreted as being the projection of a set of rhetorical gestures and affective postures embodying specific socio-cultural meanings. In this regard, it is useful to refer to the work of Leonard Ratner (1980) and, more specifically, to Wye Allanbrook's (1983) study of rhythmic gesture in Mozart. Both authors concentrate explicitly on expression, syntax and style in classical music, exploring a vocabulary of characteristic gestures or rhetorical "commonplaces".

Ratner's study is a relatively detailed guide to the principles according to which the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven was composed. It presents a set of criteria based on musical analysis and theoretical treatises of the late eighteenth century, examples being Heinrich Christoph Koch's *Musikalisches Lexicon* (1802), Daniel Gottlob Türk's *Klavierschule* (1789), and Johann Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739).

Wye Allanbrook focuses on characteristic gestures and rhetorical "commonplaces" in Mozart's operas. She finds that rhythm is a primary agent in the projection of human character. Her study illustrates that the dance rhythms and meters that pervade the music of Mozart's operas conveyed specific meanings to the audiences of his day — each rhythmic motif projecting a particular affective posture or characteristic "stance":

> It is not at all surprising that rhythm — the number, order, and weight of accents and, consequently, tempo — is a primary agent in the projection of human postures and thereby of human character. The German term *Gemüthsbewegung* itself suggests the primacy of rhythm in the anatomy of feeling: each passion is termed a *movement* of the soul. Indeed the German word for tempo, *Bewegung* (French *mouvement*), emphasizes not rate of speed but quality of motion. The rhythmic *topos* or characteristic rhythmic gesture lies at the base of almost all of Mozart's affective vocabulary, and in opera especially.

Allanbrook (1983: 3) argues strongly that the music of this period is pervasively mimetic, not of Nature but of human nature. She acknowledges that the music of classical opera was no longer directly linked "in an

ancillary relation to the text", but used its own "thesaurus of musical *topoi*" when constructing "meaning" (Allenbrook 1983: 5 & 9). Specific types of music and their expressive qualities reflected the social status and protocol characteristic of eighteenth-century life — "extra-musical" connotations in which audiences were well versed. An example of this is to be found in the so-called "high", "middle", and "low" styles representing degrees of social status (cf Ratner 1980: 7ff). Of particular importance are the dance forms that reflected social standing not only directly, but also by virtue of their rhythm and pace, feeling and affect as well.

Mozart applied this musical "lexicon" in a masterly way, especially in his operas (Ratner 1980: 389, Allanbrook 1983: 2). Thus it is the objective of this article to demonstrate that his musical construction of Don Giovanni's complex character reveals the exceptionally subtle nature of his expressive vocabulary, which to an extent exists "independently" of the opera's libretto. Interestingly enough, the work of Ratner (1980) and Allenbrook (1983) demonstrates that, simultaneously, this lexicon provides a tool for analysis that may productively and creatively mediate the present-day interpretation, performance, and reception of Mozart's music. The interpretation of their analyses to be presented here does not attempt to contribute to any detailed analytical reading of the music; rather its objective is to evaluate these analyses both within the context of Cook's multimedia theory, and — at the conclusion of the article — within the context of a contemporary performance of the work.

1. The tale

Both the musical and the dramatic components of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, first produced in 1787, were quite familiar to eighteenth-century audiences. The plot was well known through the dramatisations by Tirso de Molina, Molière, and Goldoni, while Gluck and Gazzaniga had previously composed musical settings. The characters and their actions undoubtedly recalled formulae and stereotypes from the *opera seria* and the *commedia dell'arte* (Ratner 1980: 397). Among others, Søren Kierkegaard, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and George Bernard Shaw have produced book-length scholarly studies on the opera (cf Kerns 2004).

Julian Rushton (1981: 27ff) notes that long before Mozart's librettist Lorenzo da Ponte began to consider the subject, it had achieved

independence from purely literary treatment. Where modern critics consider the plot as belonging to the category of myth, in the eighteenth century it was considered "mere fairground entertainment" (Rushton 1981: 27). While there is little evidence about sub-literary presentations to which da Ponte might have been exposed, several features of his libretto recur frequently within a popular tradition that is not reflected in any of the literary sources.[4]

The plot of *Don Giovanni* barely progresses beyond the two dramatic confrontations between the Don and the Commendatore that frame the story.[5] The intervening events represent a character study of the Don as he engages with other figures in the opera, retelling the story of Don Juan, the notorious seducer of women.

The story commences at night outside the Commendatore's palace. Keeping watch, Leporello grumbles about his fatiguing duties as servant to Don Giovanni. Suddenly, cries of rape echo in the darkness and Don Giovanni flees from the bedroom of Donna Anna. Matters have turned sour and an exchange of insults follows. The commotion awakens Donna Anna's father, the Commendatore, who with his sword drawn charges at Don Giovanni. A duel follows and the Commendatore is killed. After this catastrophic beginning, the plot journeys through what can only be called a series of practical jokes, disguises, frustrated seductions, and pranks — typical of comic opera. Each of these, however, anticipates the opera's fateful and tragic conclusion.

All Don Giovanni's relationships are markedly ambiguous (Ratner 1980: 398). While Donna Anna proclaims her hatred for him, she nevertheless directs all her efforts throughout the opera toward the pursuit of her seducer rather than toward her marriage with Don Ottavio. Ottavio's manliness is compromised by his proclaiming his devotion to Anna while taking no meaningful part in the act of retribution. Donna Elvira, who is made to look ridiculous more than once in the opera, is a woman scorned yet ready to take back the Don if he would only

4 The most familiar example is the catalogue of Don Giovanni's mistresses, a standard feature of popular presentations. His servant Leporello would produce a rolled-up list of female names, dangle it about in the audience, and hint that spectators' wives were mentioned in it (Rushton 1981: 28).

5 My brief synopsis of the plot is based on Kerns 2004 and Ratner 1980: 397ff as well as Da Ponte: <http://www.operatampa.org/seasons/dongiovannisynopsis.htm>.

repent. Leporello and Zerlina both desire higher social status, and so, even though the Don's servant is repulsed by many of his actions, he nevertheless envies Giovanni and dreams of taking his place. Likewise, Zerlina is all too ready to abandon her peasant lover Masetto when the Don approaches her — only to accuse Leporello of being the seducer.

Following one of many embarrassing situations, Don Giovanni and Leporello escape by jumping over a wall into a cemetery late at night. They are startled to find the grave of the Commendatore, and Leporello is terrified when the statue speaks. The Don makes light of Leporello's fear by inviting the statue to dinner, and returns home to host a grand party that becomes the glittering setting for yet another seduction. In an ominous *ombra*-fantasia[6] musical setting, the statue arrives at the Don's palace. Don Giovanni is given a final chance to repent. He refuses and is condemned to hell, then literally consumed by fire.

2. The "Don Juan type"

In his analysis of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, the German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus (1985: 263) singles out the aria "Fin ch'han dal vino" (the so-called "champagne aria" — the shortest of the entire opera) as a psychological key to the Don's character. Allanbrook (1983: 220) describes it as Giovanni's "theme song"; as his "sole unguarded moment" in the opera, during which Mozart allows us a brief glimpse into the seducer's soul. Apart from this single insight, however, Giovanni's identity and character are constantly disguised. The stage directions for the opening scene, for instance, already describe him as "cercando sempre di celarsi" — "constantly trying to conceal his identity" (Allanbrook 1983: 208). Accordingly, he responds to Donna Anna's rage with the following words: "Chi son io, tu non saprai" ("My name you shall not know"; Roth, as in Dent 1947: 10-1). As Allanbrook (1983: 208) observes, Giovanni also conceals himself in the accompanying music, adopting for his first utterances Donna Anna's vocal line, and not contributing any original rhythmic or melodic material in the remainder of the first trio.

6 In eighteenth-century opera, the *ombra*-fantasia style is used to evoke the supernatural, representing ghosts, gods, moral values, and punishments (Ratner 1980: 24).

As this subtle manipulation of musical means suggests, Mozart does not project Giovanni's character in any obvious way via his music. Rather, this is accomplished by a refined and understated deployment of the composer's expressive vocabulary — an understanding of which depends on a thorough "empirical" study of musical parameters as presented in the work of Ratner (1980) and, in particular, Allenbrook (1983).

Of all the major characters in the opera, only Don Giovanni has no self-reflective aria. It would seem, however, as if Mozart "reflects" on the Don's character by musical means via his engagement with other characters, and in particular with the women he seduces — as if telling us who Don Giovanni is by revealing musically who he is not (cf Kerns 2004). In this regard, Donna Elvira's aria "Ah, fuggi il traditor" seems to provide us with a particularly poignant example. Allanbrook (1983: 235) describes the aria as "an Handelian tour de force", and points out that Mozart takes great care to make the music seem "odd and old-fashioned" in terms of eighteenth-century stylistic conventions. It contains two short rhythmic motives. This creates the almost motoric rhythms of a Baroque aria yet simultaneously forces Elvira to move with an awkward, staggering gait — the first of three measures having an accented note on the second beat lasting just short of a measure's length. Allenbrook (1983: 235) contends that this curious rhythm is extremely clumsy in that it leaves one searching vainly for the down-beat, but also, conclusion-orientated in that it has no down-beat and therefore no proper beginning. The second Baroque-like motive is a simple two-measure consequent that returns the phrase to the normal rhythm:

> These two motives in various permutations and combinations constitute all the material of the vocal line of 'Ah, fuggi' until its final cadence, where Elvira lets loose with what has by now become her habitual coloratura (Allanbrook 1983: 235).

Allanbrook (1983: 237) specifically cites what she calls the "ridiculous syncopations" and the occasional five-measure phrase as crucial elements in the creation of "a quasi-mechanical" eccentric effect. She finds that the reduced orchestration — strings only — further contributes to the aria's sense of obsolescence. For Allenbrook (1982: 237), its eccentricity makes "Ah, fuggi" a tremendously striking aria. Its brevity and its constant rhythmic elisions provide the ideal choreography for Elvira's dash to snatch Zerlina from Giovanni's clutches.

In the original Molière play, Don Giovanni abducts Elvira from a nunnery. Although Da Ponte omits this detail in Mozart's opera, Elvira is depicted as a Christian *dévote* who declares at the end of the opera her intention to immure herself in a convent for the rest of her life (Allanbrook 1983: 238). Highly-strung and high-minded, for Elvira "the crux of Giovanni's crime is not the assault on her body but the seduction of her heart" (Allanbrook 1983: 238). From this Allanbrook concludes that the near-comic idiosyncrasies of Mozart's "stiff-gaited" antique musical style, while projecting Elvira's urgency and her pain, simultaneously ridicule this aristocrat with high religious principles who nevertheless cannot control her wilful and capricious emotions (Allanbrook 1983: 238). Thus, as an ambiguous example of media "contest", Elvira's words of wrath are accompanied by the orchestra in an eccentric and near-comical idiom — as if Mozart were mocking her emotional torment in the music.

At the beginning of this analysis I referred to Giovanni's opening line in the opera: "You shall not find out who I am", as well as mentioning that productions of this opera generally (and sometimes rather stereotypically) portray the Don as an irresponsible, promiscuous scoundrel. He lies; he injures — and even kills; he evades any responsibility for these actions, and he is without remorse (Kerns 2004). Even so, Mozart seems to make it clear to us through his music that the women Giovanni seduces have genuine feelings for him, and that he succeeds time and again in capturing their love and passionate devotion — even if their words speak of anger, humiliation and eventually hatred. Would this mean that Mozart is suggesting to us that Don Giovanni's deplorable actions mask a more endearing side than is generally projected in performances of the work? — a side that is deserving, for instance, of Elvira's eternal love?

3. A noble idealist?

While the composer's expressive apparatus of style and genre suggests that those who come closest to Don Giovanni find it difficult to dismiss him as a dangerous, contemptible villain, John Kerns (2004) and other writers observe that the character of Don Giovanni cannot really be interpreted as an embodiment of the Enlightenment hero — a symbol of independent thinking and action standing in triumphant

opposition to both the Church and rigid social convention. That might have been possible if Giovanni's behaviour were not flawed by narcissism, irresponsibility and dishonesty.

Bernard Williams (1981: 81ff) maintains that more recent speculation on Giovanni has in many cases not returned to viewing Don Juan as an archetypal figure, but has been quite specifically influenced by Mozart's opera. The reason for this is not restricted to the fact that the opera is by far the greatest work dealing with the theme — the latter's dominance in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature is based both on the opera's problematic nature and on the fact that it raises the significance of the figure of Don Giovanni in an unusually challenging way.

Written in 1843, Kierkegaard's essay "The immediate erotic stages, or the musical erotic" (in his book *Either/Or*) is a seminal contribution cited in the majority of subsequent publications on the topic.[7] While the subject matter is Mozart's opera rather than the character of Don Juan, Giovanni as a symbol of the spirit of sensuous desire forms the main topic. Kierkegaard postulates the idea that the Don was incessantly in pursuit of the "feminine ideal", and describes him therefore as a principle of vitality — indeed the "life force" of the opera. As Bernard Williams (1981: 85) notes, Kierkegaard notoriously plays down Giovanni's repulsiveness and even denies that he is a schemer or a deceiver because he is essentially "energy in action" and "unselfconsciousness".[8] Although Kierkegaard does point out that Don Giovanni is opposed to

7 Kierkegaard published the essay under the pseudonym Victor Emerita, later explicitly categorising his pseudonymous works as "aesthetic" in contrast to his religious writing. Several translations of the volume exist. In the 1944 version cited here the first volume was translated by David F Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson.

8 Peter Conrad's (1990: 81-92) essay "The libertine's progress" is a particularly fascinating historical account of the various "permutations" of the archetypal Don Juan character. Commencing with the seventeenth-century blasphemer Tirso de Molina, Conrad traces Don Juan's "career" through subsequent centuries, for instance as an eighteenth-century epicure who claims his right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; as a nineteenth-century idealist, and as a twentieth-century case for psychiatric diagnosis. In addition to discussion of the contributions of Kierkegaard, E T A Hoffmann, Byron, Shaw and other leading authors, Conrad's account also includes references to Richard Strauss's symphonic poem *Don Juan* (1889) and to film productions such as those of Zefirelli and Losey.

Christianity and consequently to the idea of the reflective spirit, he refers only vaguely to an ethical dimension.

John Kerns (2004) observes that during Mozart's lifetime enlightened thinking, with its rejection of rigid strictures and of a mind-body dichotomy, coupled with its celebration of the natural, was the moral trend of libertines throughout Europe. Mozart reflected in his art the important questions of the day, supporting the new Enlightenment ideals of reason and individualism in rebellion against the authority of the church and against rank, convention, and superstition (Kerns 2004).[9]

Yet Kerns (2004) finds that the opera is not principally about either the political and social issues of the time or about Don Giovanni, its chief protagonist. Rather, it is about human relationships, with the Don presented as a morally ambiguous figure. This ambivalence lends enormous vigour to the opera. If the Don is a pure villain, the opera becomes a story of his capture and punishment. If he is a pure hero, it becomes — as Kerns (2004) amusingly speculates — a John Wayne remake "where we bond with the hero who then dies for a cause". However, the essence of the opera seems to be the conflict between, on the one hand, Giovanni's narcissistic irresponsibility, sexual appetite and cruelty, and on the other, his emblematic representation of the robust archetypal life force who is a genius at satisfying his particular needs (Kerns 2004).

How then is the character of Don Giovanni to be understood? And what is Mozart's response to this vexing question?

In his famous aria "Finch' han dal vino", Giovanni embraces his hedonistic philosophy, expressed in music that is exuberant and celebratory. Yet, towards the end of the analytical discussion, it will be argued that its formal construction simultaneously conveys a profound sense of futility, raising questions about the Don's psychological profile, given his inability to form any genuine human relationship (cf also Kerns 2004). This apparent dichotomy in musical objectives suggestively enhances Giovanni's "theme" of disguise and concealment.

9 The libretto of *Don Giovanni* is quite clear on some of these points, and even contains an explicitly political musical passage containing the refrain "Viva la Liberta". When the opera was performed in Italy, the refrain was so galling to the authorities that it had to be changed to "Viva la Societa" (Kerns 2004).

Rather surprisingly, Joseph Kerman's (1990) essay "Reading Don Giovanni" detects a lack of lyrical development in the Don's music that betokens a void both in the opera and in its main character. He observes that in the well-known love duet "La ci darem la mano" Giovanni, however tender and charming, expresses himself in the simplest of melodic units, and that it is Zerlina who invents the melody's adornments, extensions and diversions (Kerman 1990: 123). He maintains that in subsequent amorous scenes Giovanni employs more or less the same melodic materials for both his serenade to Elvira's maid and his impromptu wooing of Elvira on behalf of the disguised Leporello. As Kerman (1990: 123) states, "[f]or all the difference of treatment, the similarity of melodic gesture is unmistakable".

Thus while in "Ah, fuggi" — and other amorous encounters — Mozart seems to suggest the possibility of a more sympathetic view of the Don, he simultaneously employs his expressive vocabulary to unmask the crudeness and simplicity of Giovanni's "technique": falling back on a single successful formula irrespective of whether the seduction occurred "spontaneously" or was deliberately planned (Kerman 1990: 123). These observations point once more to the profound ambiguity in the figure of the Don, and to the fact that throughout the opera, music often seems to "belie" his words.

Let us return to the explication of the premises underlying Nicholas Cook's (1998) *Analysing musical multimedia*. The core aspect of Cook's (1998: 98ff) framework, which is based on the work of Lakoff & Johnson (1980) on metaphor theory, explores three basic models in which different types of media may relate to one another, namely via conformance, complementation and contest. While his "conformant model" talks of contexts where media pairs correspond to each other, in the case of "complementation" there is neither consistency nor contradiction. In Cook's (1998: 103) words, the "contest" model

> is intended to emphasize the sense in which different media are, so to speak, vying for the same terrain, each attempting to impose its own characteristics upon the other. One might develop the analogy by saying that each medium strives to deconstruct the other, and so create space for itself.

As suggested in the introduction, Cook's theory implies that in operas and *Lieder*, word and tone relationships may be redefined ac-

cording to this "contest model" — where the various media represent contradictory meanings. This approach requires detailed attention to all dimensions of such texts. Throughout the book Cook emphasises the fact that any substantive analysis of musical multimedia must closely examine not only each medium as an independent variable of the text, but also the contextual interaction between all components.

While in *Don Giovanni* a close analysis of Mozart's music is crucial to any attempt to "decipher" the opera's meaning, the discussion of "Fin ch'han dal vino" which follows will attempt to demonstrate how the significance of the composer's expressive vocabulary may be more fully understood only if it is predicated on what Cook calls "media difference" — a difference negotiated discursively according to specific productive and receptive contexts. The explication of Giovanni's famous aria — understood here as Mozart's musically most ambivalent "character sketch" of the Don — serves as a particularly pertinent example of inter-media "opposition" involving a close reading of both the libretto and the musical parameters. What emerges is the vexing problem of intermedia "conflict" and the attendant question of whether the words or the music may be regarded as speaking the dramatic "truth" (cf Cook 1998: 129).

4. Moral ambiguity: a mixture of modes

In Allenbrook's (1983: 220ff) analysis, Dahlhaus's (1985: 263) thesis that "Finch' han dal vino" holds the key to Giovanni's character is worked out in admirable detail. Focusing closely on the composer's preference in terms of style and genre, Allanbrook observes that here Mozart's choice of gesture is a rapid and feverish contredanse. This dance had no place in the hierarchical vocabulary of eighteenth-century social custom; Allanbrook (1983: 220) describes it as "a new danceless dance". Yet her interpretation of the aria considers not only its musical dimensions, but also the interaction of word and tone, in considerably complex detail. Thus, her reading — as a typical example of Cook's "contest" model — challenges perceptions of the music (and of the aria as a whole) as an uncomplicated celebration of life and love.

Allanbrook (1983: 220) argues convincingly that both the verbal text and the musical macro-rhythm of "Fin ch'han dal vino" expand the social connotations of the contredanse into "a thoroughgoing metaphor for Giovanni's nature", as he deliberately induces in Leporello

the very anarchy introduced by the contredanse into what she calls "the orderly cosmos" of social dance:

> Senza alcun ordine
> La danza sia:
> Chi'l minuetto,
> Chi la follia,
> Chi l'alemanna
> Farai ballar [10]

As Allanbrook (1983: 220) points out, this is exactly what transpires in the famous ballroom scene of the first-act finale, where three stage orchestras simultaneously play different dances. Under cover, as it were, of this rhythmic and social "anarchy", Giovanni proceeds with his second, more relentless attempt to seduce Zerlina. Allanbrook's most significant finding is the observation that Mozart not only perceives the contredanse as generally appropriate to the nature of the Don, but also lets the formal organisation of the aria reflect on Giovanni's character. In addition, the aria containing the famous list kept by Leporello for his master also flies in the face of the established hierarchy:

> A! la mia lista
> Doman mattina
> D'un decina
> Devi aumentar.[11]

Allanbrook (1983: 220) notes that in formal terms the contredanse is like a catalogue — an accumulative dance in which phrase piles on phrase as the dancers improvise yet another figure. Mozart makes this manifest in the aria by "superimposing on the essentially dramatic plan of the Classic key-area movement with its clearly delineated beginning,

10 "Let the dancing be without any order: you'll make some dance the minuet, some the follia, some the allemande." Giovanni's metaphor may also point to his disregard for social rank or status in his choice of female partners and/or his appetite for different styles and contexts of lovemaking. In the classic era the minuet was associated with the elegant world of the court and salon (the "high" style). It was described as noble, charming, and lively, expressing only moderate cheerfulness (Ratner 1980: 9-10). Allanbrook (1983: 16) describes the folia (follia) as a dance with noble and considered gestures; the allemande was a popular dance in triple time masquerading as a minuet. It had a quicker tempo, more buoyant manner, and a simpler quality, reflecting the "middle" and "low" styles (Ratner 1980: 12).

11 "Ah! By tomorrow morning you should increase my list by ten."

middle, and end an impression of additive or chain construction" (Allenbrook 1983: 220-1). Even the elisions in the coda are by way of avoiding cadences in order to add another repetition by means of "a relentless *moto perpetuo*" (Allanbrook 1983: 221).

Particularly poignant is Allanbrook's (1983: 218) observation that the moral world of *Don Giovanni* is delineated by the familiar *galant* and *buffa* gestures, denoting the courtly and peasant social spheres, respectively. She maintains that as the opera's chief protagonist, Giovanni constantly cuts across this class hierarchy — a pattern of behaviour evident from the outset in the opening scene. He owes allegiance to nobody, and in both his music and his words he is merely a class imitator. Allanbrook (1983: 219) argues that Mozart signals this "non-participation" ingeniously — almost every one of Giovanni's solos being either a dissembling performance or a disguise. However, as outlined in the analysis above, she finds that it is "Finch'han dal vino" — as the Don's "theme song" — that most effectively subverts the established order of dance gestures employed in the opera (Allanbrook 1983: 219).

Allanbrook's interpretation of "Ah, fuggi il traditor" and of "Fin ch'han dal vino" demonstrates that the music of Mozart's operas is not merely a decorative "ancillary" to the text. Rather, as she argues throughout her book, his ingenious deployment of musical expression, style, and syntax is primarily responsible for the motivation — literal and figurative — of its characters. Her detailed analysis of the music uncovers, via a rigorous and scholarly approach, the tensions and contradictions between the media pairs that characterise the arias discussed above — and is an outstanding example of multimedia analysis based on the premise of difference (cf Cook 1998: viii). Her keen focus on Mozart's expressive vocabulary simultaneously suggests the kind of correction needed in an interpretative balance that has swung, as Cook (1998: vi) states, too far away from music. Her approach might therefore appear to be both relevant and extremely sensitive to the spontaneous perceptual experience of the music "itself".

In order to appreciate more fully the relevance of Allanbrook's (1983: 235-8) approach to any particular realisation of the aria, let us first investigate what is given in Mozart's score. First, contrary to Allanbrook's finding, it is obvious that a distinctively strong downbeat, provided by the bass-line of the orchestral accompaniment, is

present throughout the entire aria. While Mozart does make use of melodic syncopation, the music is nevertheless harmonically "anchored" by way of short I-IV-V sub-phrases linked to one another throughout the duration of the aria. In its bias towards rhythmic gesture Allanbrook's (1983: 235-8) approach completely disregards tonal progress (or a lack thereof) in the aria. It is probably for this reason that she overlooks the tonal "density" of the music and the fact that tonal "closure" is constantly eluded until the last two measures. The only obvious instance of rhythmic "instability", as it were, is found in the coloratura passage of bars 35-36, a figure which is then repeated in bars 39-40.

It takes only a preliminary observation of Mozart's score to reveal that Allenbrook's reading of "Ah, fuggi il traditor" is, to a considerable extent, an artificial analytical construct that has little bearing on what is presented in the music — or on what may be projected in a performance of the aria. Many recordings exist of *Don Giovanni*, most of them respectable (and respectful) readings of Mozart's score. As an exemplary "case study" I have chosen John Eliot Gardiner's 1995 recording with the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists, in which Elvira's role is sung by the soprano Charlotte Margiono. Eliot Gardiner is a leading exponent of the historically informed performance practice movement, whose interpretations are widely acclaimed for emulating what may be called both historical and interpretative authenticity.

What light does Eliot Gardiner's rendition of the music throw on Allanbrook's understanding of the aria — and in particular on her conclusion that Mozart ridicules Elvira by way of an artful deployment of rhythmic devices?

In order to respond adequately to this question, consideration should be given to Cook's (1998: 124) idea that a media "contest" could also be viewed "as a contest between different levels of signification". He goes on to explain that the term "levels" applies in different ways to different media. While in the case of language it encompasses all meaning from the lexical to the semantic, in the case of music the point of departure is the structural level.

Cook's (1998: 124) statement is of considerable importance for a consideration of media "contest" in *Don Giovanni* in that it values the

formal aspects of musical meaning as an "empirical" starting point for an exploration of its semantic possibilities. Here it seems appropriate, while unravelling something of the opera's complex character, to reflect on the musical "clues" which Mozart left for us. Leonard Ratner's (1980) chapter on *Don Giovanni* offers valuable insights in this regard.

Ratner's (1980: 398-9) examination of the broader relationships that organise the opera reveals that Mozart appears to have assigned specific socio-cultural meanings to the keys by which the opera is structured. This reflects a general eighteenth-century view that they could represent affective qualities, adding colour to elements of plot and character. In *Don Giovanni*, Mozart consistently uses D minor to remind us of the tragic and fateful aspect of the story. The overture opens in D minor with sinister *ombra* music. It is also the key of the duel and of Donna Anna's revenge duet. It appears momentarily in Leporello's famous "catalogue aria" (the above-mentioned listing of the Don's 2,065 conquests). It is used in the middle section of Anna's great aria "Or sai" as she recalls the duel and the death of her father, and it furnishes an episode in the finale of Act I when the revenge motive returns. Then again, it is the key of the final *ombra* scene in Act II when Don Giovanni is summoned to hell by the Commendatore's statue.

In contrast, the dazzling key of D major is linked to Giovanni's worldly status, his wealth, his arrogance, and the seductive brilliance that surrounds him. As Ratner (1980: 398) points out, this key is used "as a thread throughout the entire opera", appearing in the Allegro of the overture, in the serenade, and at the beginning of the resplendent supper scene. While both D major and D minor thus have a strong presence within the opera, the Don rarely sings in these keys. Rather, they are used by other characters in referring to him — for instance by Leporello in the famous catalogue aria, and by Elvira in "Ah, fuggi il traditor".

In its ambiguous use of Giovanni's D major key, one could argue that the aria, in addition to projecting Elvira's urgent need to warn Zerlina against Giovanni's charms, also powerfully communicates her pain. Mozart's ingenious use of the Don's "brilliant" D major key, highlighted towards its conclusion by rapturous ascending coloratura passages, suggests that Elvira's music belies her agitated description of the traitor. Rather than being a portrayal of Giovanni's darker side,

the breathless, at times ecstatic, music seems to reveal Elvira's passionate love for the Don. The rhythmic "instability" of the hemiola on which the coloratura passages are based would seem to reflect the insecurity of an existence torn between agony and ecstasy.

Allanbrook's (1983: 238) notion that Mozart ridicules Elvira in this aria is mistaken. Rather, in a most subtle and "humane" way, he reveals her vulnerability and lays bare her feelings for the Don. For the "conflict" in "Ah, fuggi" is not only created by the "media pair" of words and music; even "within" the musical parameters, rhythmic and melodic elements seem to oppose each other. While the harmonic materials constantly create a sense of temporary closure, the melodic subject matter suggests an endless continuum.

If "Fin ch'han dal vino" may be interpreted as a metaphor of Giovanni's ambivalent nature, then "Ah, fuggi il traditor" might be understood as a figurative projection of Elvira's desire to capture the Don, as it were. Yet the tonally "closed" nature of the continuously moving sub-phrases suggests the total impossibility of this quest — and, together with the aria's inherent urgency, portrays Elvira's continual emotional torment. In Eliot Gardiner's interpretation the aria's *stile antico* does not project a comic effect; rather it lends this almost frantic music a feeling of angst and a gravity of expression.

Let us now consider Mozart's deployment of expressive means in Don Giovanni's aria "Fin ch'han dal vino". While the words celebrate the hedonistic pleasures of wine, women and love, Mozart's thematic treatment of the music suggests a certain futility through the sparse I-V-I harmonic progression on which the entire aria is based. Miniature figures built on the main arpeggio motif are continuously yet meaninglessly repeated — as if to mock its fanfare-like celebratory spirit. While the aria starts on a jubilant "high-point", the descending chromatic melodic passages occurring further on rhetorically to recall the idea of sorrow, or of a lament (see, for instance, bars 21-24; 44-47; 48-51; 52-55). As in "Ah, fuggi", not only do the words and music convey conflicting messages, but Mozart intensifies the ambiguity of the aria through the deployment of profoundly ambivalent musical means.

What are the implications of Eliot Gardiner's interpretation for an understanding of "Fin ch'han dal vino"?

Despite the music's sprightly nature, the conductor's carefully paced rendition of Giovanni's champagne aria emphasises its extreme structural simplicity, simultaneously revealing a rustic quality that is in stark contrast with its "noble" key of B-flat major (cf Ratner 1980: 398). This interpretative ambiguity underscores Allanbrook's (1983: 220) understanding of the contredanse as socially irrelevant and for that reason "subversive" in this context; the "conflict" between the significations of the "noble" and the "rustic" may be understood as affirming her reading of Giovanni as socially and morally "neutral" (Allanbrook 1983: 223) and therefore fundamentally destructive.

Mozart's mixing of conflicting styles in *Don Giovanni* is seen by Allenbrook (1983: 320) to be of considerable significance as for an understanding of the opera in general and of the figure of the Don in particular. Although much of the music in the overture, as well as in both the first and the final scene, is set in the so-called "high tragic" style, the opera still cannot be labelled a "tragedy" — and nor may Giovanni be considered a tragic hero. As Allanbrook (1983: 320ff) concludes: "Not the tragic mode itself, but the mixture of genres, of exalted style and low farce … in increasingly dark and turbulent colours" presents us with a vision "both less noble and more encompassing than that of tragedy: *Don Giovanni* gives us a panoramic view of all the orders of society, showing them stretched to the breaking point". Simultaneously, Mozart's miscellany of modes and his deployment of the comic viewpoint lend the opera a greater range and power of comment than does the purely elevated style. Without this approach there is no opportunity "to juxtapose disparate conventions, to re-examine stereotypes, [or] to produce startling identification" (Allanbrook 1983: 328). One may therefore postulate that Mozart achieves this outcome by metaphorically constructing a profound ambiguity (or, in Cook's terms, a "conflict") which effectively subverts and destabilises relationships of word and tone in the opera.

In this article the discussion focuses only on the parameters of word and tone and on the projected contextual interaction between the various individual media in the arias and the duet selected for the purpose. Cook's analytical framework, however, presupposes interpretative possibilities encompassing a far wider spectrum of artistic considerations including the dramatic, the visual, and the choreographic dimensions of the opera — or of specific productions or receptions of it.

As has been continuously emphasised, *Don Giovanni*'s projection of character owes its complexity to the unusually ambiguous partnership of word and tone — a linkage that seems to suggest the necessity for a further or even ongoing interdisciplinary inquiry into the opera. One such example is Jane Miller's (1990) approach, which focuses on *Don Giovanni* from the vantage point of feminism, and another is the work of Michel Foucault. Rachel Cowgill's (1998) more recent "Regendering the Libertine", or "The Taming of the Rake" suggests that questions of both gender and ideology are relevant to the opera's reception history.

Such interpretations suggest that Cook's contest model may be productively employed in conjunction with "complementary" critical modes of inquiry. Elsewhere, I have demonstrated that the critical impetus of Cook's framework may be intensified by employing it in conjunction with Johann Visagie's (1996) notion of the "hypernorm" — an analytical tool for the critical analysis of ideological culture by means of which musical analysis may be further extended and refined.[12] Visagie defines the hypernorm as some autonomised, selectively privileged norm, value, or goal that takes on a conceptual status with which it dominates other values, norms, or goals. As part of a specialised discourse analysis, the principle of the hypernorm acts as an effectual analytical tool for the trenchant exposure of ideological tensions which a text may "highlight" or "hide" (cf Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

In the context of the present article, an application of Visagie's critical apparatus would seem relevant, not only *vis-à-vis* the critical analysis of more obvious instances of domination such as those of gender and class, but also, and in particular, for uncovering complex ideological tensions between "good" and "evil". However, the analysis above may possibly complicate such an application of the hypernorm in that Mozart constructs not only a conflict between words and music in this opera, but also a profound ambiguity of meaning within the music "itself". By what seems to be a kind of "deconstructive turn", the composer com-

12 For applications of Visagie's theory in the field of mass culture multimedia forms, see Viljoen 2004a & Viljoen 2004b. Note that Visagie's (1990) theory of "root metaphors" and of archetypal figures, indicative of various ethical stances towards life and death, is also of relevance for an interpretation of *Don Giovanni*.

pellingly illustrates how music itself may subvert, invert or even erase any clearly defined manifestation of media "dominance" (cf Cook 1998: 124), leaving one with a profoundly ambivalent metaphorical expression. This suggests that any interpretation of the opera should allow for an unfolding of what Cook (1998: 124) calls the music's "own discontinuities or aporias".

In a reflection on Mozart's operas, Christopher Ballentine (1984: 50) expresses the idea that "the stripping away of masks" is an important theme in the work. Ballentine (1984: 50) defines these masks as "external forms, hardened by social approval and custom but concealing a more vital, more essential level of reality". In the case of *Don Giovanni*, he believes that what is suggestively unmasked in the opera is "the limitation of an ethical norm held by the society Mozart puts on his stage" (Ballentine 1984: 52-3):

> Giovanni, evil and destructive though he is, is revealed to us as having a vigour and dynamism beyond that of any of the other characters … [H]e has — in spite of his conventionally destructive role — a power to quicken those around him, and to quicken them in direct proportion to the extent to which they genuinely enter into experience with him. In a complex way, then, the moralistic view of Giovanni is shown to be lacking, limited: it is unmasked as such by Mozart's opera. What is revealed is a more profound truth, the terms of which are that the hero and what he symbolizes have a strange and paradoxical creative force.

In contrast with Ballentine's view, Allenbrook's (1983: 190) interpretation seems to suggest that by invoking the superhuman and the supernatural, Mozart invites the listener to view not only the familiar *buffa* world in a new light, but also — in a broader sense — particular "views of the world". She believes that the *ombra* element suggests both the spiritual dimension of human existence and its capacity for profound cruelty and moral transgression. Her interpretation expands our perspective on the world by suggesting that "what is to be encountered is a kind of human action which is either too noble or too base to be encompassed within the narrower limits of merely human judgement" (Allanbrook 1983: 198). Accordingly, one may conclude that, ultimately, both the complex figure of Don Giovanni and the message of the opera as a whole serve us not as emblems of the "mask", but rather as "mirrors" reflecting fundamental truths about the profound ambivalence present within all human beings.

5. Postscript

Musicology's current striving towards ever-expanding interdisciplinary collaboration has been significantly stimulated by the controversy concerning traditional analysis and its supposed "complicity" with ideologically suspect modes of thought and value systems. While the objectives of the "New Musicology" have contributed much to more pluralist, more experimental approaches regarding the musical text, some radical examples tend towards a textual bias, running the risk of losing touch altogether with the perceptual experience of music "itself". Here, interpretation runs the risk of becoming overwhelmingly self-referential.

The work of Allenbrook and Ratner, published in the early 1980s, has since acquired almost "classical" status within the broadening sphere of music semiotics and semantics.[13] But, although these authors' research may have respectably and credibly contributed towards the modes of socio-cultural and socio-political interpretation and reception that have become so fashionable during the past two or more decades, their almost "empirical" exploration of musical *topoi* (with their associations, both natural and historical, and their ties with the now largely discredited doctrine of art as imitation) is rather awkwardly situated between the terrain of the so-called "new" or cultural musicology and traditional analysis.

Their most valuable contribution — as relevant today as it was two decades ago — probably results from this very situation. As Ratner (1980: xiv) posits, to refer to eighteenth-century music as a "language" is not simply to use a figure of speech. Both the language and the music of that era had already been thoroughly codified for a specific vocabulary, syntax, and arrangement of formal structures, and were branches of the art of rhetoric. Ratner's rigorous study of these figures allows us to approach the music of the eighteenth century in much the same way as a contemporary listener of that time would have done. Moreover, as is demonstrated so clearly in Allanbrook's work, it opens up further, more speculative possibilities for the interpretation of musical expression, an interpretation that "bridges", as it were, the pictorial and the affective via the metaphorical. While such speculations may, admittedly, be influenced by a range of interpretative contexts, they are nevertheless

13 Despite this fact, South African musicological publications have as yet not engaged with this literature.

informed by a conscientious consideration of the musical text — the latter seen as a specifically constructed "documentation" of social discourse.

As this article has attempted to illustrate, this is a *modus operandi* that may be usefully combined with an analytical framework such as Nicholas Cook's multimedia theory. Of particular interest for musicological investigation is his conviction that instances of musical multimedia pose a special challenge in terms of their theorisation. Cook understands analysis as setting up "an oppositional relationship to sedimented but unquestioned habits of thought" (Cook 1998: v):

> Theory, in music at least, is an intriguing blend of intellectual rigour and reckless risk-taking; its role is not so much to tell it how it is, but rather to provide grit, to set up unyielding points of reference against which over-familiar observations may be measured, and so guard against … easy, 'with-the-grain' interpretations.

For Cook, such investigation consistently and systematically involves a return to the music "itself". Throughout his *Analysing musical multimedia* (1998), he clearly implies that the unravelling of the role of music within the larger discursive structure of multimedia involves, first and foremost, the responsible analysis and interpretation of musical parameters, constantly keeping in mind that no musical style or genre is ever "unmediated".

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