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FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MOZART'S OPERAS:
POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE PORTRAYAL

by

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Music is very closely related to the social norms and views held during the time the music was created. It often reflects these social norms and views and helps to perpetuate them. Mozart's operas were no exception, and they helped to perpetuate norms and views regarding women. Mozart's operas were written during the eighteenth century, and they express the socially accepted views about women that were held at this time.

During the eighteenth century, women were viewed very differently than in the twenty-first century. Women were expected to marry and be subservient to the men in their lives. "The duties of a wife to her husband, in every degree and state of life, can be no less than love, fidelity, and obedience to all his lawful desires..." (Jones, 35). The wants and needs of a woman were not considered, and only the desires of men were of any importance.

Women were considered weak, and therefore could not be exposed to anything inappropriate that might corrupt their fragile minds. They were removed from the real world, as the less intelligent gender. It was a common belief during the eighteenth century that this lack of intelligence was caused by the inability of women to reason (Wiesner-Hanks, 41). Because women supposedly lacked intelligence and were perceived as inferior, it was thought they were only capable of the "...government of [the] house, family, and children..." (Jones, 21). Even the great philosopher Rousseau held these beliefs. According to Rousseau, "Woman is made specially to please man...and to be subjugated" (Wiesner-Hanks, 42). Women were expected to keep their opinions silent and be reserved. In a letter from one father to his daughter, the father states, "The men will complain of your reserve. They will assure you that a franker behavior would make

you more amiable. But trust me, they are not sincere when they tell you so” (Jones, 47). Women were not considered worldly-wise or intelligent enough to hold any views about important topics, such as current affairs or business, and, therefore, were not supposed to voice their opinions.

The women of Mozart’s operas fit this description of eighteenth century women very well. Mozart portrayed his female characters in one of two ways: either as fickle, unintelligent, submissive, and overly emotional women, or as overly aggressive, vengeful, uncaring women. The women in Mozart’s operas were often not in control of their relationships and were forced to comply with the wills of men. Mozart represented his female characters in a biased light that adhered to the eighteenth century’s views regarding women. However, the views he presented about women are not necessarily his own personal views.

First, a brief introduction will be given regarding each of the two categories of women. It will classify each character to be discussed into the two major stereotypes that are found in Mozart’s operas. After these classifications, each individual character will be discussed and analyzed in detail. The role of each character in relation to the other characters, and also to the plot, of the opera will be given in order for the reader to gain a greater understanding of the interactions between male and female characters. Finally, evidence will be given to support the theory that although Mozart portrayed his female characters in a sexist fashion, these views may not have aligned with his own views.

Although Mozart did write a small number of rational, intelligent women into his operas, most of his female characters are stereotypes of the general views of women

during this time period and fall into one of two categories. The first type of woman is the submissive and overly emotional woman. A woman in this category is irrational and fickle. In difficult situations, she follows her emotions and not her brain. She cannot decide what she wants and displays a vast array of emotions in a very short time period. She is considered mentally weak and helpless, because she does not think for herself and only submits to the wills of men. This type of woman was generally liked by the audiences of Mozart's operas, because she adheres to the stereotype of women during the 18th century. This category of women is represented by Donna Elvira and Zerlina from Don Giovanni and Pamina from The Magic Flute. The second type of woman found in Mozart's operas is the aggressive, cruel, and controlling woman. Women in this category do not let men take advantage of them, and they stand up for their rights. They refuse to let others control their lives and are strong, intelligent, rational, and decisive. They are not fickle and do not have radically changing emotions. This category of women is represented by Donna Anna from Don Giovanni and The Queen of the Night from The Magic Flute. Because Donna Anna and The Queen of the Night went against the common stereotypes of the time, they were generally disliked by the operas' audiences.

The characters Donna Elvira, Zerlina, and Donna Anna, from the opera Don Giovanni, each represent a stereotype of women. Donna Elvira, the first character to be discussed, represents a woman from the first category, as she is a fickle, overly emotional woman. Donna Elvira is a former lover of Don Giovanni, and her emotions regarding him change drastically throughout the opera. Liane Curtis describes her as a "... 'tragic' figure obsessed with the man who jilted her..." (Curtis, 127). Before the opera begins, Donna

Elvira was seduced by Don Giovanni. He wooed her with his charm and with many wonderful promises of a happy life at his large estate. Don Giovanni lived with Donna Elvira for three days and told her that he planned to marry her. However, he did not keep his promise, and he left her (Kaiser, 71). This is a very serious situation for Donna Elvira, because during this time period it was considered scandalous for a woman to have lived alone with a man before marriage for any amount of time. If the public were to learn of this incident, Donna Elvira's reputation would be ruined, and she would lose the respect of everyone around her. When the audience is first introduced to Donna Elvira, she has just been deceived and is reeling over the loss of Don Giovanni. Initially, after being betrayed and abandoned, Donna Elvira is enraged and wishes pain upon Don Giovanni. She wants nothing more than to ruin his image and cause him harm. However, as a fickle, overly emotional woman, she is experiencing very intense, contrasting emotions at this point, and she soon comes to the conclusion that she does not hate Don Giovanni. In fact, she still loves him. She loves him so intensely that she threatens to hurt him if he does not come back to her. Although it may not seem too drastic nowadays for a woman to have these varying emotions after being betrayed and lied to by the person she loves, during the 18th century, women were expected to accept the decisions of men, even if meant accepting their own abandonment. These intense and drastically different emotions can be seen when Donna Elvira sings her aria "Ah! Qui mi dice mai quell barbaro dov'è?":

Ah who will ever tell me
Where that barbarous man is,
Who, to my shame, I loved,
Who was faithless to me?
Ah if I ever find the wicked man,
And he still does not come back to me,
I want to slaughter him horribly,

I want to tear out his heart (Brown-Montesano, 35).

The libretto of this piece shows how quickly Donna Elvira's emotions change. At the beginning her aria, she calls Don Giovanni a "barbarous" and "wicked" man, and it seems as if she loathes him. However, by the end of it, she has decided that she still wants to be with him and wants him to come back to her. And combined with the dislike and love, she also feels shame for loving a man with such undesirable qualities. As can be seen, Donna Elvira is portrayed as an overly emotional woman who is unable to use rational thought.

While traveling in search of Don Giovanni, Donna Elvira happens upon him and his servant Leporello. Don Giovanni manages to slip away from her and tells Leporello to explain to Donna Elvira his true character. Leporello proceeds to sing his "Catalogue Aria" in which he details all the conquests of Don Giovanni. According to Leporello's records, Don Giovanni has slept with over two thousand women, including six hundred forty women in Italy, two hundred thirty-one women in Germany, one hundred women in France, ninety-one women in Turkey, and to top it all off, one thousand three in Spain! These women are of a wide variety and some are chosen just to add diversity to the list (Schoep and Harris, 247). One would think that upon hearing this disturbing information about the true character of Don Giovanni, Donna Elvira would begin to view the situation rationally. However, consistent with the stereotypical view of women during the 18th century, Donna Elvira does not. She completely disregards the newfound perspective Leporello has offered her. Even after hearing about Don Giovanni's true character, Donna Elvira is still in love with him. She foolishly believes that she will be the woman

to change him and make him be faithful. Instead of thinking about the situation logically and rationally, she blindly follows her emotions.

Not only does Donna Elvira's character comply with this period's sexist views, but the "Catalogue Aria" is also sexist. According to Liane Curtis, "The aria represents blatant objectification of women, women classified as stereotypes and reduced to numbers" (Curtis, 123). In this aria, women are categorized based on physical qualities, such as size, body type, nationality, and age. Leporello sings of Don Giovanni's conquest of women of all classes, ages, and levels of attractiveness. The women in this aria are not treated as human beings, but instead are viewed as objects to be collected (Curtis, 123-124). Later in this paper, the portrayal of Don Giovanni in this aria will be discussed.

Donna Elvira's loving feelings toward Don Giovanni are short lived, however, because soon after the scene with Leporello, she is once again angry with Don Giovanni for leaving her. She tries to expose him as the lying fraud he truly is to other young women that he is trying to seduce. When Don Giovanni turns his eyes toward Zerlina, a peasant girl, Donna Elvira intervenes and tries to disrupt his plan of seduction (Hunter, 146). She tells Zerlina about her unfortunate affair with Don Giovanni in her aria "Ah fuggi il traditor":

Ah, run away from this traitor,
Do not let him say more to you:
His lips are lying,
His eyes deceitful.
Learn from my torments
How that heart is to be believed
And let your fear be born
From my peril. (Brown-Montesano, 36)

This aria clearly shows that Donna Elvira understands Don Giovanni's deceitful nature

and the dangers of being involved with him. She knows very well that it would be wise to avoid him, yet she still acts like a stereotypical 18th century woman by ignoring common sense and being completely influenced by her feelings. Donna Elvira dwells on her emotions and is unable to get past them.

Toward the end of the opera, Donna Elvira comes to the realization that she truly does love Don Giovanni and is not upset with him anymore. In her aria “Mi tradi”, Donna Elvira contemplates the horrible fate that awaits Don Giovanni if he does not repent for his sins:

That ungrateful man betrayed me,
Unhappy, O God, he makes me!
But, betrayed and abandoned,
I still experience pity for him.
When I feel the torment,
My heart speaks of vengeance;
But when I perceive that he is in danger,
My heart palpitates. (Schoep and Harris, 247-248)

Even though he has caused her so much pain, Donna Elvira still loves Don Giovanni and pities him. As a stereotypical woman, Donna Elvira forgives him for his betrayal.

According to Kristi Brown-Montesano, “...Donna Elvira satisfies conventional expectations about operatic women...in a phrase, she ‘goes soft’” (35). Throughout the entire opera, Donna Elvira adheres to the prescribed notions of the 18th century woman by being overly emotional and fickle, and finally, by “going soft” and forgiving Don Giovanni. Zerlina, another character from the opera Don Giovanni, also adheres to these stereotypical notions.

Zerlina, the next female character to be considered, is a transition between the extremes of the first and second categories of women. Although she wants to be

perceived as a submissive and helpless young woman and, therefore, feigns these qualities, Zerlina is actually a very manipulative and driven woman, which is in line with a woman of the second category. She is a young peasant girl who is the soon-to-be bride of another peasant named Masetto. On the day of her wedding, she meets Don Giovanni, who decides that he would like to add her to his “collection” of conquered women. In order to separate her from the wedding party, Don Giovanni instructs Leporello to offer the peasants gifts in order to distract them. Although Masetto suspects foul play in this offering, Don Giovanni is still successful at separating the peasant couple. Once he and Zerlina are alone, Don Giovanni begins to seduce her and woo her with his charm and lies (Hunter 145). Although Zerlina is already betrothed to Masetto, “...she unceremoniously forgets him and never thinks of remaining loyal to him” (Kaiser, 191). Zerlina is a very fickle woman, and in a very brief period of time, she transfers her interest from Masetto to Don Giovanni. Zerlina, just like Donna Elvira, foolishly falls for Don Giovanni’s lies and blindly believes him. She even agrees to a betrothal with him. At this point in the opera, Zerlina is exhibiting the foolish and fickle qualities that align with the sexist views regarding women in the 18th century and also with the first category of women discussed earlier.

Fortunately for Zerlina, Donna Elvira is present and warns her about the treacherous and deceitful side of Don Giovanni. Because of Donna Elvira’s help and advice, Zerlina returns to Masetto, who is understandably upset with Zerlina for leaving him to go away with another man on their wedding day. Zerlina tries to pacify Masetto’s anger by telling him that nothing happened between her and Don Giovanni. When

Masetto does not immediately forgive her, Zerlina attempts to make Masetto feel guilty for questioning her loyalty, even though he has every right to and should be. She is somewhat dishonest and deceitful, especially when she claims that she has been completely faithful. She also tells Masetto that Don Giovanni has not “touched even the tip of her little finger” (Brown-Montesano, 69). This, however, is a lie, because Zerlina and Don Giovanni slept together and were planning to elope. In this section of the opera, Zerlina is manipulative and controlling. She is beginning to show her true personality, which concurs with the second category of women. Though this dishonesty might be undesirable, Zerlina’s position in life demands it. Because she is a woman and is married to Masetto, she is considered his property. Therefore, she must appease him and submit to him in order to live a peaceful life. Zerlina’s power of seduction and pretense of submission are the only tools she has to ensure this peace and domestic stability in her marriage, so she employs them.

However, Zerlina’s first attempts do not banish all Masetto’s fears, so she sings him an aria called “Batti, batti, o bel Masetto”. In this aria Zerlina attempts to appease Masetto by telling him to beat her. She promises to stay still while being struck, and she tells him that he can tear out her hair and gouge out her eyes. Zerlina states that she will then happily kiss his hands after the beating has been completed (Brown-Montesano, 70). This aria is a great representation of the submission that was expected of women. Furthermore, Zerlina, representing a woman from the second category, uses this aria to seduce and manipulate Masetto and succeeds in gaining control of the situation by feigning submission. Although Zerlina does not believe that Masetto will actually beat

her, the fact that she is singing of it in order to console him tells us that the beating of women was quite the common practice during this time period. It indicates that violence was a typical way to invoke submission in women. By feigning this submission, Zerlina appeases Masetto and appears to conform to both this period's norm and the characteristics of the first category of women.

After his first attempt to conquer Zerlina fails, Don Giovanni decides to try again. He arranges a party at his estate in honor of the newly married couple. At the party, he corners Zerlina and attempts to rape her. Zerlina's screams bring Masetto to her rescue, but Don Giovanni manages to escape. Masetto then assembles a group of peasants to seek out Don Giovanni and punish him. Don Giovanni, however, has dressed up as Leporello and attacks Masetto when he asks "Leporello" for directions to find Don Giovanni (Hunter, 146). When Zerlina finds her poor, beaten husband, she once again employs a seductive aria to appease him. In her aria "Vedrai, carino", Zerlina comforts him with enticing language, trying to calm his anger:

You will see, little dear,
if you are good,
what a lovely remedy
I want to give to you.
It is natural,
not unpleasant
and the druggist
does not know how to make it.
It is a certain balm

that I carry with me:
I can give it to you
if you want to try it.
Would you like to know
where I keep it?
[bringing his hand to her heart]
Feel it beat,
touch me here (Brown-
Montesano, 77).

Zerlina uses this provocative aria to alleviate the tension that emerges after Masetto is attacked due in part to her affair with Don Giovanni. Through this aria, she is once again

deceptively employing her false submissive attitude in hopes of a tranquil domestic life. As one can see, Zerlina represents both the first and second category of women. However, Donna Anna, the third and final character to be discussed from the opera *Don Giovanni*, represents only a stereotypical female from the second category.

Donna Anna is an upper-class woman engaged to Don Ottavio. She is a very strong willed woman, unlike Donna Elvira and Zerlina. At the beginning of the opera, Don Giovanni sneaks into Donna Anna's bedchambers in an attempt to rape her. Because Donna Anna is an aggressive character, she fights him off and then proceeds to chase him into the streets yelling "Don't hope, unless you kill me, that I will ever let you escape" (Brown-Montesano, 1). After hearing her screams, Donna Anna's father comes outside, begins to duel with Don Giovanni and is subsequently killed. This experience is very traumatic for Donna Anna, and she vows revenge upon Don Giovanni. This desire for revenge can be seen in her aria, "Or sai chi l'onore":

Now you know who tried to steal my honor,
who was the traitor, who took my father from me.
Vengeance I ask of you...your heart demands it.
Remember the wound in his poor breast...
Recall the ground covered with blood,
if the just anger in your heart begins to diminish (Schoep and Harris, 250).

Instead of accepting the death of her father and trying to get past her attempted rape as she is expected to do, Donna Anna focuses all of her energy into obtaining justice. She is determined that Don Giovanni pay for the crimes he has committed. Donna Anna's "...demand for retribution...sets her apart from the sentimentally selfless and endlessly lenient feminine ideal so prevalent in the operatic canon" (Brown-Montesano, 2). Revenge is not a quality that 18th century society believed a woman should have, and by

expressing this intense emotion, Donna Anna went against the social norms of the time. Even though she is bent on revenge, she also exhibits a rational mindset. After the death of her father, Donna Anna grieves for him and plans to obtain justice. The stereotypical response of a woman in this era, however, would be to grieve for a brief period of time and then foolishly focus on her upcoming wedding. Donna Anna deviates from this normal pattern, and in doing so incurs the contempt of the audience. According to Brown-Montesano, "...a great deal of critical reception has focused primarily on her failure to embrace [Don Ottavio's] optimism and her unwillingness to think about her nuptial plans" (26) and "In most cases this critical hostility stems from...biases about what is appropriately 'feminine'"(2). Because she did not conform to the 18th century view of women, Donna Anna was disliked by audiences. These unfavorable views have extended into the present, and many critics even today characterize Donna Anna as a "...repressed hypocrite, vengeful harpy, or humorless ice princess" (Brown-Montesano, 2).

Another character that portrays the second type of woman in Mozart's operas is The Queen of the Night from *The Magic Flute*. The Queen is similar to Donna Anna in that she is seeking revenge on other characters throughout the entire opera. However, the Queen is a much more volatile and aggressive character than Donna Anna. She is willing to deceive everyone, including her daughter, to obtain her goals and is "vengeful, scheming, defiant toward male authority, proud, violent, and stubborn" (Brown-Montesano, 81). After her daughter Pamina is taken from her by her enemy Sarastro, the Queen vows revenge against him. She manipulates a prince named Tamino into rescuing

her daughter from the “evil” Sarastro, because, as a woman, she is not allowed to enter into his fraternal temple. She promises Tamino her daughter’s hand in marriage if he can rescue her. Tamino, who has been shown a picture of Pamina and has fallen in love with her, accepts the offer. Tamino goes to the temple and upon entering it, is surprised to find that the temple is bright, welcoming, sophisticated, and artful. This is in complete contrast with what the Queen has led him to believe about the temple and its “evil” leader Sarastro (Keele). He realizes that he has been lied to by the Queen, and after talking to the priests residing in the temple, Tamino decides that he would like to follow Sarastro rather than the Queen.

Upon hearing that Tamino has failed in his quest to rescue Pamina and destroy Sarastro, the Queen takes matters into her own hands. She sneaks into the temple and tries to convince Pamina to kill Sarastro with a dagger. Not only does the Queen manipulate strangers, she is also willing to manipulate her only daughter. In her aria “Der Hölle Rache”, the Queen gives Pamina an ultimatum: kill Sarastro or you will no longer be my daughter:

Hell’s vengeance boils in my heart,
death and despair blaze around me!
If by your hand Sarastro feels not death’s pain
then you are no longer my daughter;
Let all natural bonds be forever cast off,
forever abandoned, forever destroyed
if through you Sarastro does not die!
Hear, gods of vengeance, a mother’s oath! (Brown-Montesano, 96).

The Queen is so adamant about obtaining revenge and power that she is inclined to forsake and abandon her only child in the process; “...she is a jealous matriarch who breaks off relations with [her] cherished child, screaming threats of revenge” (Brown-

Montesano, 83). This goes against the stereotype of the 18th century when a woman's main job, before anything else, was to be a mother. The Queen's main goal, however, is to obtain power, and she does not feel the normal motherly attachment that she should.

Because she is in love with Tamino and does not see Sarastro in the negative light her mother does, Pamina does not kill Sarastro. This pushes the Queen into a rage, and she vows revenge on all of the characters in Sarastro's temple. She believes she has been betrayed by Tamino and Pamina and wants nothing more than to have them suffer alongside Sarastro. Along with her subjects, the Queen attempts to raid Sarastro's temple. (Branscombe, 66). Ultimately, however, the Queen is overpowered; "The Queen, who would seize power and wisdom rightly belonging to males, is defeated" (Stuckey, 34). She is punished for trying to obtain the power that is the possession of the men of the opera.

Essentially, the Queen is evil because she wants power. She wishes to rule over others, which as a woman, is not considered her proper role in life. According to Kaiser, "The Queen of the Night's 'pride', her avidity for power and her fanaticism, must...be wicked; that goes without saying if you think that a woman's place is in the home" (152). Her desire for control is considered unnatural for her gender, as females during this era were expected to be subservient to males and follow all their decisions. In this opera, the Queen is "demonized in terms that reflect deep cultural anxieties about female rule" (Brown- Montesano, 85). She refuses to allow men to rule over her, even her former husband, who was the leader of the fraternity prior to Sarastro. Upon his death, her husband told her, "Do not try to understand things beyond the grasp of woman's mind. It

is your duty to place yourself and your daughter under the leadership of wise men”” (Stuckey, 18). She, however, ignores the will of her deceased husband and tries to regain the power that he once possessed as the leader of the fraternal organization. This blatant disregard for male authority is considered reprehensible, and, therefore, the Queen is represented as a dark, evil figure.

Pamina, the Queen’s daughter and the final female character to be considered, represents a woman from the first category, as she submits to male authority and is often times irrational. According to Stuckey:

The Queen of the Night, as Mother, is the source of femininity that threatens Male authority and control. Pamina, the Daughter, has been purged of her mother’s ‘arrogance’ and has accepted male institutional authority; she represents the ‘good feminine’ purified of the Mother’s tainting influence (36).

Pamina follows the orders of men and accepts her position in life, so she is considered an example of a “good” female.

After Pamina is captured by Sarastro, the Queen promises Pamina to Tamino if he can rescue her. Pamina is treated as an object, a prize which Tamino can win, instead of a human being with her own thoughts on the issue of her marriage. Sarastro, too, has planned this union with Tamino for her, and when Pamina discovers this, she accepts it without protest; “Sarastro will direct love, just as he does power, and Pamina must wait for his will” (Brown-Montesano, 124). Like the stereotypical 18th century woman, she understands that she cannot always make her own choices and acknowledges that others, specifically men, will plan her life.

One night, while sleeping, Pamina is attacked by a slave named Monostatos, who

attempts to rape her. He tells her that if she refuses him, he will kill her. In this scene, Pamina once again adheres to the “good female” stereotype, and she “...refuses sex, because she has already given her heart to Tamino” (Stuckey, 24). She exhibits the self-sacrificing qualities of a “good female” by fighting the attempted rape not for her own personal reasons, such as her own safety or emotional stability, but instead to remain pure for her intended husband Tamino. She is not concerned for herself, only for Tamino and his reputation.

Pamina, like her mother, is very passionate. The difference, however, is that while the Queen directs her passion toward obtaining power and gaining equality, Pamina directs hers in a way that still submits to the patriarchal social order of the time (Stuckey, 37). Pamina’s main goal in life is to be loved by Tamino. She is subservient to his wishes and the wishes of Sarastro, because she wants nothing more than to be united with Tamino through marriage. She is willing to subjugate herself to the will of men in order to receive the love that she craves. When, as a test, Tamino refuses to speak to her, Pamina believes that he no longer loves her. She then sinks into a deep depression and contemplates suicide. This despair can be seen in her aria “Ach ich fühl’s”:

Ah, I feel it, it has disappeared,
eternally gone love’s happiness!
Your hours of bliss will never come,
nevermore return to my heart.
Look, Tamino, these tears
flow, beloved, for you alone.
If you do not feel love’s longing
Then rest will come only in death (Coffin, Singer, and Delattre, 269).

In adherence to the beliefs of 18th century society, Pamina’s worth comes from being loved by a man, not from her own character. Without this love, Pamina feels she is

worthless and useless and, therefore, wants to die. She has nothing of importance in her life besides Tamino, for whom she has sacrificed everything, including her bond with her mother. Pamina is so distraught, in fact, that she plans to commit suicide. This decision is both irrational and overly emotional, which adheres to the first category of women discussed.

After being captured by Sarastro, Pamina initially wants to return to her mother. Upon seeing her mother shortly after her kidnapping, Pamina exclaims, ““Oh let us flee, dear mother! Under your protection I will brave every danger”” (Brown-Montesano, 114). At this point in the opera, Pamina is still very much attached to her mother. However, the longer Pamina stays in the temple, the more she realizes that her views of Sarastro differ from her mother’s. She does not view Sarastro as an evil person but as a kind leader. She refuses to kill Sarastro when asked by her mother, and in doing this, is “...leaving her original loyalty (to her mother) and moving toward the masculine temple” (Stuckey, 27). Like a “good female”, Pamina adheres to her father’s last request of her to listen and submit to wise men. Also, because Pamina has fallen in love with Tamino, she must tend to his wants before hers; “Pamina’s primary duty as a woman is devotion to Tamino; she must place their union and his wishes above all else, and she must not have other loyalties that interfere or lead her outside this sphere” (Brown-Montesano, 120). Therefore, since her loyalty to her mother is interfering with her union with Tamino, Pamina chooses to sever ties with her mother. By severing these ties, “Pamina has learned to reject her mother’s ‘arrogance’, she has instead ‘placed herself under the leadership of wise men’....In joining herself to manly wisdom, she has learned not to

‘overstep her bounds’ – the cardinal sin of her mother” (Stuckey, 34). Pamina, as a “good female”, has chosen to leave the dark world of her mother and join the bright world of Sarastro, thereby following the request of her father and being submissive to men.

Although Mozart portrayed his female characters in this sexist fashion, it does not necessarily mean that these were his own views. This theory is supported by Mozart writing a number of characters into his operas that do not completely adhere to the norms of 18th century society. For example, he portrays the characters Donna Anna, Susanna, and Don Giovanni in ways that goes against this time period’s stereotypical views of genders.

Even though Donna Anna is a representation of the second category of women, is considered cold and controlling, and was typically disliked by audiences, she is not represented by Mozart as an evil, villainous character in the same way the Queen of the Night is. In fact, Mozart made no indication in the opera that Donna Anna was an unsavory character or should be disliked. So although she was represented rather stereotypically, the inclusion of this strong, rational female character, who is not inherently evil, is quite progressive. It indicates that Mozart’s views on women may not have concurred with the popular, stereotypical views held during his lifetime. An argument can be made that Mozart stealthily inserted characters into his operas who, although seemed to fit the stereotypes, actually differed slightly and were used to advance his own beliefs about women.

Susanna, from *The Marriage of Figaro*, is portrayed as a rational female who uses her mind to get out a bad situation. She is described as having a “healthy common sense

and quick-wittedness” (Kaiser, 173). In this opera, Susanna is engaged to a man named Figaro. She is also the maid of Countess Almaviva, whose husband desires to sleep with Susanna. During this time period, it was common for the ruler of the household to sleep with the servants, because they were considered to be the ruler’s property. Susanna, however, does not want to abide by this common convention. In order to escape the Count’s advances, she cleverly devises a complicated plan where the Countess and Susanna herself dress up as one another to confuse the Count. Eventually, the Count meets with “Susanna” (who is actually the Countess dressed up as Susanna) and tries to woo her. The Countess reveals herself and then receives a humble apology from her husband (Hunter, 132-135). Susanna’s unique wit and rationality have saved her from becoming another victim of this period’s view of women as property. Another unique quality of Susanna is her faithfulness. When being pursued by the Count, Susanna never wavers from her fiancé Figaro. She even retains her rational demeanor and stays true to Figaro when being wooed and seduced by the Count’s riches. This is an unusual quality for a female character in Mozart’s operas, as most of the women are fooled by the men’s pretenses of love and then abandon their true loves for these new men. The fact that Susanna is the lead female character instead of a character with a small role, that the opera centers completely around her, and that she is represented in a positive light, instead of a negative one like *The Queen of the Night*, is all further evidence that Mozart’s own views may have differed from the norms of this time. Although it might not seem all that amazing for Mozart to write a strong, rational female character into his opera, his doing so goes against the norms of 18th century society, which might not have

been received well by his audiences, just as Donna Anna was ill received. Mozart's portrayal of Susanna seems to indicate that his personal views about women may not have fully aligned with popular opinion.

Don Giovanni, on the other hand, is represented in a negative light for all of his philandering and lying. This portrayal is in contrast with this period's common belief that women were inferior and could be taken advantage of. During Leporello's "Catalogue Aria", Don Giovanni is portrayed as a very flat character whose only goal is to sleep with as many women as possible. According to Liane Curtis, "...he is a ridiculous, shallow character obsessed with one thing" (124). In his aria "Finch'han dal vino", Don Giovanni instructs Leporello to find girls from the city square, bring them to his party, and give them copious amounts of wine. He then sings about how he plans to "...meanwhile, in the other corner/ with this one and that one...make love" (Schoep and Harris, 242). Don Giovanni cannot be bothered to think about anything other than his own desires. In comparison to the emotional depth of Donna Anna and Donna Elvira, Don Giovanni appears to be a static, superficial character. Although Mozart gave Don Giovanni a large amount of charm, he also made his shortcomings very obvious, portraying Don Giovanni as "...a simple caricature, a hollow shell representing male vice..." (Curtis, 124). In every attempted exploitation, Don Giovanni is unsuccessful; Donna Anna fights him off, Donna Elvira follows him and ruins his reputation, and Zerlina ultimately rejects him. Another indication that Mozart did not completely agree with 18th century society's views on men and women can be found in the Don Giovanni's ultimate end. At the end of the opera, the statue of Donna Anna's father, whom Don Giovanni has previously killed,

comes to life and demands that Don Giovanni ask forgiveness for his sins and repent. Don Giovanni refuses these terms and is subsequently taken down to Hell (Hunter 147). After all is said and done, Don Giovanni is punished for his misdeeds. Mozart, himself, was a very faithful man and respected his wife greatly. According to Jane Glover, “although...Wolfgang received a great deal of female attention...he continued to ache for his ‘beloved little wife’” (164). Therefore, the unfortunate demise of Don Giovanni suggests that Mozart viewed the character’s philandering to be distasteful. In writing this ending, Mozart is departing from the popular belief of women as objects and men as being allowed to be dishonest with and sleep with many different women.

The fate of Pamina also indicates that Mozart’s own views were not sexist. During Tamino’s final task, Pamina is allowed to go along with him and help him reach the state of initiation. During this scene, Pamina takes control of the situation and tells Tamino, “I myself shall lead you, for love leads me!” (Stuckey, 33). She is given the important assignment of ensuring Tamino’s success, which directly contrasts the submissive role she was previously given. Jane Glover states that, “This seems to have struck a real chord in Mozart. He was...entirely at home in Sarastro’s world...But for him the presence too of a woman as companion and guide was absolutely essential” (308). After successfully completing her tasks and aiding Tamino in his final task, Pamina is initiated into the fraternity with Tamino. Together, they become the new God and Goddess, reigning concurrently over the temple. In this role, Pamina has obtained a form of the power that her mother so desperately desired. She has ascended into a role of leadership along with Tamino, which indicates Mozart’s views on women’s subservience

differed from the 18th century norm. One could make the argument that this role of leadership is Pamina's reward for her good behavior. However, in rewarding Pamina, Mozart did not have to go to such a great length. As stated earlier, Pamina wanted nothing more than to be loved by Tamino, and receiving this love would have been quite the reward for her. However, Mozart chose to include Pamina into the temple with Tamino. This inclusion is "...an indication of Mozart's liberal views on the inclusion of women in fraternal societies such as the Freemasons" (Brown-Montesano, 127). Although Mozart has previously represented Pamina in a sexist light, his final representation of her is one of power and equality.

Many of Mozart's female characters are represented in a stereotypical fashion, including Donna Elvira, Donna Anna, Zerlina, and the Queen of the Night. These representations, however, may not have been based on Mozart's own personal views. Mozart was very close to the women in his own life, who were very strong figures and may have served as inspiration for some of Mozart's female characters. Mozart's mother has been described as a "practical, level-headed and experienced" woman, and during Mozart's childhood, she traveled alone with him to Europe on tour (Glover, 12). She was a very competent woman and was able to handle the business aspects of her child's musical career. During their marriage, Mozart's wife Constanze "directed her acute practicality towards solving the problems" and often resolved Mozart's financial difficulties, resulting in Mozart's "new and grateful respect for her, almost as business partner" (Glover, 170). Furthermore, Mozart was very close to his younger sister Nannerl, and she is widely considered to have been "her brother's best friend" (Glover,

46). As can be seen from the characters Donna Anna, Susanna, Don Giovanni, and Pamina, Mozart did write characters that do not adhere to and seem to criticize the norms of 18th century society. The representations of these characters, coupled with knowledge of the women in Mozart's own life, indicate that although Mozart wrote in adherence with the sexist norms to appeal to his audiences, his own personal views may not have aligned with the norms of this time period.

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Program

Smanie implacabili
from *Così fan tutte*
W.A. Mozart
(1756-1791)

Vedrai, carino
from *Don Giovanni*
W.A. Mozart

Sull'Aria
from *Le nozze di Figaro*
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To Greet You My Lady
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**Female Characters in
Mozart's Operas:
Positive vs. Negative Portrayal**

Presented by

Kendra Gieseey,
Mezzo-Soprano

with Amanda Rich, Soprano
and Parker Knox, Piano

Monday, March 12, 2012
5:30 pm
Farber Hall, Old Main



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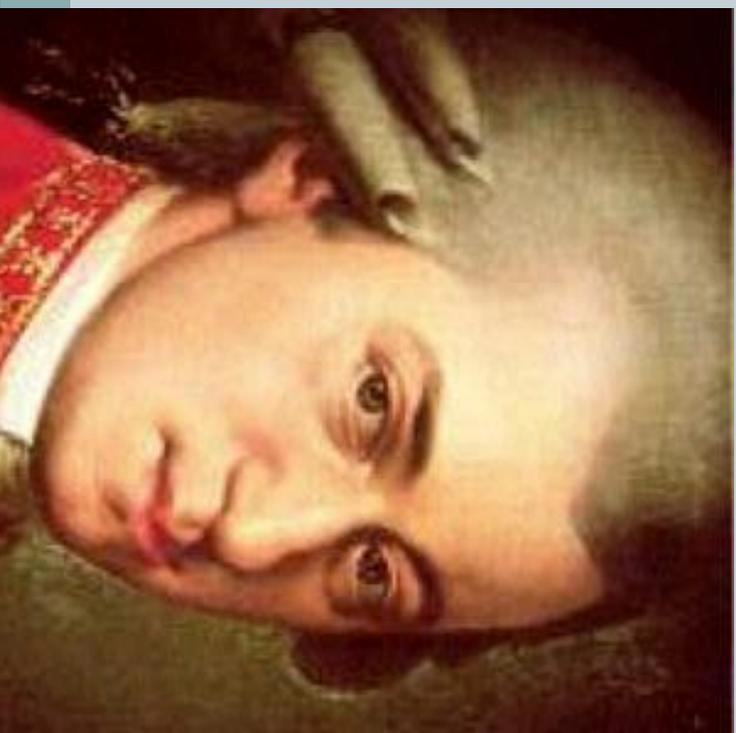
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**Female Characters in Mozart's
Operas: Positive vs. Negative
Portrayal**

KENDRA GIESEY



The Stereotypical 18th Century Woman



- Subservient
- Self-sacrificing
- Overly emotional
- Irrational
- Lacked intelligence
- Fickle and constantly changing their minds

Was Mozart's portrayal positive or negative?

Three Types of Portrayals



Negative Portrayal - Irrational

Negative Portrayal – Deceptive

Positive Portrayal

- Overly weak
- Silly
- Fickle
- Overly emotional
- Irrational
- Submissive/
Subservient
- Aggressive
- Controlling
- Cold
- Deceptive
- Coniving
- Vengeful
- Rational/
Intelligent
- Independent/
Self-sufficient
- Lead Character
- Stable personality
traits

Negative Portrayals – Irrational



DORABELLA

PAMINA

DONNA ELVIRA

Dorabella



- Così fan tutte (Woman Are Like That)
- Fickle
- Overly dramatic
- Her personality is exemplified in her aria “Smanie implacabili”.
- Is overdramatic and is stating that she will kill herself.
- Wants attention from everybody

Smannie implacabili



Italian

Ah scostati!
Paventa il tristo effetto
d'un disperato affeto!
Chiudi quelle finestre
Odio la luce, odio l'aria, che spiro
Odio me stessa!
Chi schermissce il mio duol,
Che mi consola?
Deh fuggi, per pieta, fuggi,
Lasciami sola.

Smannie implacabili, che m'agitare
Dentro quest'anima più non cessate,
Finchè l'angoscia mi fa morir.
Esempio misero d'amor funesto,
Darò all'Eumenidi se viva resto
Col suno orribile de' miei sospir.

English

Ah, move away!
Fear the sad effect
of a desperate affection!
Shut those windows,
I hate the light, I hate the air that I breathe
I hate myself!
Who mocks my pain,
Who will console me?
Oh, leave, for pity's sake, leave,
Leave me alone.

Implacable restlessness, that disturbs me
Inside this soul, doesn't cease,
Until it makes me die.
A miserable example of fateful love
I will give to the Furies, if I live,
With the horrible sound of my sighs.

Pamina



- Treated as a prize for Tamino
 - Kristi Brown-Montesano states, “Sarastro will direct love, just as he does power, and Pamina must wait for his will.”
- Her main goal in life is to be loved by Tamino, and she has no sense of self outside of this love.
- She sacrifices everything for Tamino.
- When Tamino is being tested and refuses to speak to her, Pamina sinks into a deep depression and plans to commit suicide.
- This despair can be seen in “Ach, ich fühl’s”.

Ach, ich fühl's



German

Ach, ich fühl's, es ist verschwunden,
Ewig hin der Liebe Glück!
Nimmer kommt ihr Wonnestunde
Meinem Herzen mehr zurück!
Sieh', Tamino, diese Tränen,
Fließen, Trauter, dir allein!
Fühlst du nicht der Liebe Sehnen,
So wird Ruh' im Tode sein!

English

Ah, I feel it, it has disappeared
Forever gone love's happiness!
Nevermore will come the hour of bliss
Back to my heart!
See, Tamino, these tears,
Flowing, beloved, for you alone!
If you don't feel the longing of love
Then there will be peace in death!

Donna Elvira



- A very fickle woman.
 - She falls in love with Don Giovanni, then hates him when he deserts her, then wants him back, etc.
- Overly emotional and irrational.
 - Described by Liane Curtis as a “...tragic figure obsessed with the man who jilted her...”
- She ignores the facts presented by Leporello and instead chooses to believe only what she wants to believe.
- These characteristics can be seen in the aria “Ah! Qui mi dice mai quell barbaro dov’è?”.

Ah! Chi mi dice mai quell barbaro dov'è?



Italian

Ah, chi mi dice mai
Quel barbaro d'ovè
Che per mio scorno
amai
Che mi manco' di fe?
Ah, se ritrovo l'empio
E a me non torna ancor
Vo' farne orrendo scempio
Gli vo' cavare il cor.

English

Who will ever tell me
Where that barbarian/scoundrel is
For whom I loved and disgraced
myself
And to me was unfaithful
Ah, if I find again that evil man
And he still will not come back to me,
I will destroy him,
I will rip his heart out.

Negative Portrayals- Deceptive



MARCELLINA

ZERLINA

QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

Zerlina



- Deceptive and manipulative – She pretends to be a submissive, helpless girl but is actually a manipulator.
- She is unfaithful to her fiancé and lies about it to get her way.
- In “Batti, batti”, she tells him to beat her in order to appease him.
- Her deceptive nature can be seen in the aria “Vedrai, carino”.

Vedrai, carino



Italian

Vedrai, carino,
se sei buonino,
Che bel rimedio
ti voglio dar!

E naturale,
non da disgusto,
E lo speciale
non lo sa far,
no, non lo sa far.

È un certo balsamo,
Ch'io porto addosso.
Dare te'l posso,
Se'l vuoi provar.

Saper vorresti,
dove mi sta?
Sentilo battere,
toccami qua!

English

You will see, dearest,
if you are good,
what fine medicine
I want to give you.

It's natural.
It's not unpleasant;
And the pharmacist
doesn't know how to make it –
no, he doesn't know how to make it.

It's a certain balm
that I carry on me.
I can give it to you,
if you want to try it.

Would you like to know
where I have it?
Feel it beat;
touch me here.

The Queen of the Night



- Represented as a villain due to her want for power.
- Deceptive and manipulative
- Aggressive
- Seeks revenge on other characters throughout the entire opera.
 - Described by Brown-Montesano as, “vengeful, scheming, defiant toward male authority, proud, violent, and stubborn” and as “...a jealous matriarch who breaks off relations with [her] cherished child, screaming threats of revenge.”

Der Hölle Rache



German

Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen,
Tot und Verzweiflung flammet um mich her!
Fühlt nicht durch dich Sarastro
Todesschmerzen,
So bist du meine Tochter nimmermehr.
Verstossen sei auf ewig,
Verlassen sei auf ewig,
Zertrümmert sei'n auf ewig
Alle Bande der Natur
Wenn nicht durch dich
Sarastro wird erlassen!
Hört, Rachegötter,
Hört der Mutter Schwur!

English

Hell's Revenge cooks in my heart,
Death and despair flame about me!
If by your hand Sarastro does not feel
The pain of death,
Then you will be my daughter nevermore.
Disowned may you be forever,
Abandoned may you be forever,
Destroyed be forever
All the bonds of nature,
If not through you
Sarastro becomes pale! (as death)
Hear, Gods of Revenge,
Hear a mother's oath!

Positive Portrayals



DONNA ANNA

SUSANNA

THE COUNTESS

Donna Anna



- Strong character
- Not willing to let men take advantage of her
 - “Don’t hope, unless you kill me, that I will ever let you escape!” (Brown-Montesano, 1).
- Is rational, sets her mind on goals, and sees them through
- Focuses not on pleasing others, but on her emotional health

Or sai chi l'onore



Italian

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

English

Now you know who sought
to steal my honor,
who was the betrayer
who killed my father:
I ask your vengeance,
your heart asks it too.
Remember the wound
gaping in his poor breast,
recall the earth
covered with his blood,
if ever the wrath of a just fury
should weaken in you.

Susanna



- **Clever and rational**
 - Described by Joachim Kaiser as having a “...healthy common sense and quick-wittedness.”
- **Strong and independent**
- **She does not want to abide by this time period’s view of women, so she takes matters into her own hands.**
- **Faithful to her fiancé**

The Countess Almaviva



- **Intelligent and strong**
- **Rational**
 - Knows that her husband is having affairs, and doesn't pretend that he's not to spare her own feelings
- **Does not want to follow societal norms by letting her husband disrespect her**
- **Is upset that her husband is cheating on her and decides to teach him a lesson**
 - Dresses up as Susanna to trick The Count and then demands an apology for his actions

Sull'Aria



Italian

Sull'aria...

Che soave zefiretto,
Questa sera spirerà,
Sotto i pini del boschetto...
Ei già il resto capirà.
Certo, certo il capirà.

Canzonetta sull'aria.
Che soave zefiretto,
Questa sera spirerà,
Sotto i pini del boschetto.
Ei già il resto capirà,
Il capirà.

English

"To Romeo..."

When the breeze is gently blowing,
And the evening shadows fall,
In the grove where pines are growing..."
And the rest he will recall.
Yes, the rest he will recall.

Let us read it together.
"When the breeze is gently blowing,
And the evening shadows fall,
In the grove where pines are growing..."
And the rest he will recall,
He will recall.

Marcellina



- A member of the Negative Portrayals – Deceptive group
- She is the foil to Susanna
 - While Susanna is strong and intelligent, Marcellina is conniving and jealous.
- She pretends to be a nice, cultured woman, but is really a spiteful, jealous woman.

Via resti servita



Marcellina

To greet you, my lady, I'm honored supremely.
Please enter before me!
I beg you, ignore me!
I know my position, bow to tradition, fine and patrician,
with all due respect.
I know my position, bow to tradition with all due respect.
The bride of the hour!
The Count's little flow'r!
Her attitude!
Her poses!
I swear I shall fly at her in one, in one minute more!
I praise your deportment, without reservation!
So young and so pretty!
What distance between us!
So innocent!
So simple!
How dare she make fun of me, it is, it is a disgrace!
How dare she make fun of me!
How dare she make fun of me, it is a disgrace!

Susanna

By your recognition I'm flattered extremely
No, no, you go first!
No, no, you go first!
Your noble position, fine and patrician, inspires respect.
I know my position, bow to tradition, and my ambition is
being correct.
A lady of station!
The pride of the nation!
Dignified!
Mature!
Decrepid old battleax, I'll settle your score.
And I, your experience and broad reputation!
The belle of the city!
The true Spanish Venus!
Durable!
So old!
So old, so old, so old!
Decrepid old battleax, I'll laugh right in her face!
Decrepid old battleax, I'll laugh in her face!

My Conclusions



- Mozart presented many different types of women in his operas and covered the full spectrum of personality characteristics.
- He portrayed women in ways in which he saw them behave in the real world.
- The different types of characters can be seen in all genres of his operas.
- Mozart impacted future composers, including Rossini, Weber, and Wagner.

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