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# Mozart's operas and the myth of musical unity

JAMES WEBSTER

Books discussed in this essay:

Wye Jamison Allanbrook. *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: 'Le nozze di Figaro' and 'Don Giovanni'*. University of Chicago Press, 1983. xii + 396 pp.

Thomas Bauman. *W. A. Mozart: 'Die Entführung aus dem Serail'*. Cambridge University Press, 1987. xiii + 141 pp. (Cambridge Opera Handbooks).

Tim Carter. *W. A. Mozart: 'Le nozze di Figaro'*. Cambridge University Press, 1987. xii + 180 pp. (Cambridge Opera Handbooks).

Daniel Hertz. *Mozart's Operas*. Edited with contributing essays by Thomas Bauman. University of California Press (forthcoming fall 1990).

Stefan Kunze. *Mozarts Opern*. Reclam, 1984. 687 pp.

Julian Rushton. *W. A. Mozart: 'Don Giovanni'*. Cambridge University Press, 1981. ix + 165 pp. (Cambridge Opera Handbooks).

Andrew Steptoe. *The Mozart–Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural and Musical Background to 'Le nozze di Figaro', 'Don Giovanni', and 'Così fan tutte'*. The Clarendon Press (Oxford), 1988. [viii] + 273 pp.

## 1

The privileged status of Mozart's operas is reflected not only in their prominence in the repertory and in the unceasing flood of publications devoted to them, but even more in their composer's iconic role as arguably our greatest culture-hero. Even if we disagree about their dramaturgy and ultimate meanings, or admit the occasional flaw, their talismanic role – their moving us not merely to delight and admiration but reverence and awe – seems unshakable.

And yet, they have received relatively little close or informed musical analysis. In view of the intense cultivation of theory since the Second World War, and the literally thousands of published analyses of Mozart's instrumental music, this neglect would be baffling indeed, if it did not reflect the traditional uncertainty about the status of opera as 'absolute music', and the lack of consensus about how to understand it in technical terms. In addition, recent operatic

analysis has concerned itself more with the nineteenth-century giants Verdi and Wagner than with Mozart. This too can be explained: they composed little or no significant instrumental music; to study them is necessarily to study their operas. In addition (and this is only an apparent paradox), the dominance of analytical models based on the instrumental music of Mozart and Beethoven was a positive stimulus to Verdians and Wagnerites: although a battle had to be waged to overcome them, the cause was just and the enemy soon routed. Indeed, the critical thinking entailed by this effort led to the development of new and fruitful analytical paradigms, notably that of 'multivalence'. This holds that the various 'domains' of an opera (text, action, music, etc.; as well as, within the music, tonality, motives, instrumentation, etc.) are not necessarily congruent and may even be incompatible; and that the resulting complexity or lack of integration is often a primary source of their aesthetic effect. In Mozart studies, by contrast, the presence of his unsurpassable instrumental music has tended on the one hand to make close study of the operas seem unnecessary, while on the other hand those few who have attempted it have transferred 'instrumental' methods to the very different context of dramatic staged vocal music – uncritically, and without benefit of countervailing analytical traditions.

In 1987, I drew attention to these matters and called for concerted multivalent analysis of Mozart's operas: 'all we need to do is get on with it'.<sup>1</sup> This now strikes me as simplistic; my discussions were not always sufficiently attentive to the differences between opera and instrumental music. The enterprise will require a more nearly fundamental re-examination of paradigms and methods. As a first step, I review here a number of recent studies which include substantial analytical material.<sup>2</sup>

The volumes by Thomas Bauman on *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Tim Carter on *Le nozze di Figaro* and Julian Rushton on *Don Giovanni* appear in the useful Cambridge Opera Handbook series, which strikes a balance between 'Kenner' and 'Liebhaber' that Mozart himself would have admired. Each includes a detailed dramatic and musical synopsis which is everything other than a crutch for the uninitiated; in Rushton, it leads to fundamental new dramatic insights. A signal virtue of Carter's volume is the inclusion of a chapter on Italian prosody and its implications for Mozart's music, a vital aspect of any Italian opera which has been almost entirely ignored in the English-language Mozart literature.

The strength of Andrew Steptoe's *The Mozart–Da Ponte Operas* is his focus on the particular social-cultural milieu of each work. The Vienna of 1785–86,

<sup>1</sup> James Webster, 'To Understand Verdi and Wagner We Must Understand Mozart', *19th-Century Music*, 11 (1987–88), 175–93 (here, 179); the preceding paragraph summarises this item. On Verdi and Wagner analysis, see Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, 'Introduction: On Analyzing Opera', in Abbate and Parker, eds., *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley, 1989), 1–24.

<sup>2</sup> In preparing this essay I have profited especially from discussions with Mary Hunter, Roger Parker and John Platoff. I also thank Thomas Bauman for making available the front matter to Daniel Hertz's volume.

he argues, was not the same as that of 1789–90, and Prague was another place altogether. The differences among the three works reflect Da Ponte's and Mozart's conscious attempts to please these various audiences:

*Figaro* was written for the sophisticated audience of a society in flux, one in which the conventions of the *ancien régime* coexisted with a new interest in egalitarianism. [...] A whiff of scandal was attached [...], and the audience expected to enjoy the *frisson* of contact with potentially inflammatory material. [...] Mozart wrote the work during a period of high optimism. [...]

The conditions surrounding *Don Giovanni* were quite different. [...] The project was hazardous because although the story was still guaranteed to win popular applause, more refined audiences were unlikely to be satisfied with the much-abused legend. However, Mozart and Da Ponte gauged that the piece would be suitable for the musically intelligent but provincial and somewhat unsophisticated tastes of Prague. [...]

When *Così fan tutte* reached the stage early in 1790, the situation had changed yet again. [...] Society in Vienna had retreated from its flirtation with egalitarianism, and fear of revolution had led to the ascendancy of conservative elements. [...] Mozart [...] responded by producing an opera specifically designed for his aristocratic audience [ , who] would prefer an amusing exposition of more personal human foibles. (pp. 243–4)

If perhaps overly schematic, this orientation is a refreshing change from the usual art-for-art's sake approach to a genre which was explicitly rooted in social relations, and was covertly (if not indeed overtly) political.

The social element appears in a different light in Wye Jamison Allanbrook's *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*. Developing insights of Leonard Ratner,<sup>3</sup> she works out elaborate correlations between the so-called 'rhythmic topoi' (defined roughly by patterns of metre, tempo and musical phrasing) and 'the gestures of social dance' (see her introduction and Part I). She then employs this system as a framework for superb detailed analyses of *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, with particular attention to the literary and social aspects of the musical drama. Daniel Hertz's *Mozart's Operas* offers a welcome compilation of his many articles published over a period of more than twenty years, some of them in out-of-the-way places, together with four new essays, and two additional contributions by Bauman (who signs as editor) on the German operas *Die Entführung* and *Die Zauberflöte*. If the volume lacks a central thesis or consistent point of view, its variety, learning (not only about Mozart, but Italian opera in general) and sparkle will delight many readers. Stefan Kunze's *Mozart's Opern*, finally, is the first large-scale, comprehensive treatment of Mozart's operas since Hermann Abert and Edward J. Dent, nearly three generations ago. For that reason, and because it has so far excited little attention in the English-speaking world, I will devote considerable space to it in what follows.

## 2

All of these volumes depend on traditional paradigms drawn from the analysis of instrumental music. I will focus on the most problematical of these: the

<sup>3</sup> *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York, 1980).

search for 'unity'. The notion of artistic unity in the modern sense arose in the early nineteenth century as an aspect of Romantic aesthetics, based on organicism and evolutionism; it was thus linked with the rise of 'absolute' instrumental music.<sup>4</sup> Its analytical manifestations in theorists like Schenker, Schoenberg and Réti have been much discussed recently.<sup>5</sup> In operatic studies, this orientation flourished primarily in connection with Wagner, especially in the work of Alfred Lorenz. Although Lorenz's procrustean analyses are now widely ridiculed, his approach decisively influenced Mozart studies in at least four ways: by taking operatic music 'seriously' as a proper subject for analysis; through the belief in unity as the ultimate criterion of aesthetic value, and the concomitant tendency to hierarchical reductionism; by his assumption that, ideally, there exists a congruence or correspondence between music on the one hand, and text and stage action on the other; and by privileging Mozart's ensembles and finales (which is to say, his most nearly through-composed, his most nearly Wagnerian music) at the expense of arias, not to mention recitatives.<sup>6</sup>

Among postwar English-speaking critics, even the intelligent and undogmatic Joseph Kerman and Charles Rosen focused mainly on ensembles and finales, and explicitly invoked sonata form both as a primary constituent of Mozart's operas and as a criterion of value.<sup>7</sup> In his influential account in *Opera as Drama*, Kerman's paradigmatic example was Donna Elvira's trio 'Ah taci, ingiusto core' from Act II of *Don Giovanni* (no. 15), which he lovingly explicated in terms of sonata form's tonal and material rhythms: the exposition, contrasting themes, increasing tension and eventual resolution were seen to accommodate different personalities, to create a form analogous to the stage action, and most of all to reflect the characters' developing psychology. And yet, of the sixteen non-duet ensembles in the three Da Ponte operas,<sup>8</sup> 'Ah taci, ingiusto core'

<sup>4</sup> Bellamy Hosler, *Changing Aesthetic Views of Instrumental Music in 18th-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor, 1981); James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence* (New Haven, 1981), Ch. 5; Carl Dahlhaus, *Esthetics of Music*, trans. William W. Austin (Cambridge, 1982), Chs. 4–6; idem, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago, 1989); John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Vernon L. Kliever, 'The Concept of Organic Unity in Music Criticism and Analysis', Ph.D. diss. (Indiana University, 1961); Dahlhaus, 'Schoenberg and Schenker', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 100 (1973–74), 209–15; Ruth Solie, 'The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis', *19th-Century Music*, 4 (1980), 147–56; Jamie Croy Kassler, 'Heinrich Schenker's Epistemology and Philosophy of Music: An Essay on the Relations between Evolutionary Theory and Music Theory', in David Oldroyd and Ian Langham, eds., *The Wider Domain of Evolutionary Thought* (Dordrecht and Boston, 1983), 221–60; William Pastille, 'Ursatz: The Music Philosophy of Heinrich Schenker', Ph.D. diss. (Cornell University, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> A hint of this appears in Abbate and Parker (see n. 1), 4 n. 9, 13–16; it is developed in their essay 'Dismembering Mozart', published elsewhere in this issue.

<sup>7</sup> Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (1956; rev. edn. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988), Chs. 4–5; Rosen, *The Classical Style* (New York, 1971), 290–312. That the reissue of Kerman's New Critical work is essentially unaltered despite today's changed critical climate only emphasises its dated qualities.

<sup>8</sup> *Figaro*, nos. 7, 13, 18; *Don Giovanni*, nos. 1, 9, 15, 19; *Così*, nos. 1–3, 6, 9, 10, 13, 16, 22. I omit *Don Giovanni*, no. 3 (Elvira's 'Ah chi mi dice mai'), which is not a true trio, but an aria with occasional asides; in form it is a sonata without development.

is the only one which is unambiguously in sonata form! (Admittedly, a number of others are in sonata-without-development ['sonatina'] form, including Rosen's paradigmatic example, the sextet [no. 18] in Act III of *Figaro*.) The paradigm in question is located more in this critical tradition than in Mozart's musical drama.

It will be appropriate to begin with arias. Other things being equal, an aria entails fewer 'domains' than an ensemble or finale (which does not necessarily imply that it is 'simpler' or 'less dramatic'), and to this extent the task is easier. And a focus on arias will at least signal the need to redress the balance vis-à-vis the traditional privileging of Mozart's ensembles.

To a greater extent than his ensembles, Mozart's arias are indebted to the operatic traditions of his time. (Again, this must not be taken as implying a negative value-judgement.) Eighteenth-century opera was based on conventions of all sorts: plots, character-types, verse-patterns, key-associations, 'semantic' instrumental usages and so forth, onto which each city or company grafted its own local traditions. Even a Mozart could not escape them (nor is there evidence that he wanted to do so). In this respect Hertz's approach is exemplary; he vividly 'sets the stage' (see his Ch. 7) for the composition and production of a work, and his vast knowledge of eighteenth-century Italian opera repeatedly leads him to new insights. It would admittedly have been better to place less emphasis on one-to-one 'modelling', as for example Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with respect to *Figaro* (Ch. 8), and more on conventions as such, for example aria-types. From this point of view, Michael Robinson's chapter on opera buffa in Carter's *Figaro* handbook is preferable; Bauman, too, describes the much thinner *Singspiel* tradition within which Mozart composed *Die Entführung*. Rushton's handbook on *Don Giovanni* includes a superb analysis by Edward Forman of the various earlier Don Juan stories and Da Ponte's relation to them. Kunze also treats this subject illuminatingly (pp. 330–40; in 1972 he published a detailed monograph on *Don Giovanni vor Mozart*). Unfortunately, he adopts Abert's nationalistic stance that the 'Germanic' Mozart always transformed and transcended the Italianate *buffa* traditions. At times he goes even further: 'In *Figaro* Mozart was competing only against himself, not this or that model, nor any given tradition' (p. 297). As Hertz's discussion shows, this is absurd; it can be understood only in light of the Germanic ideology of 'Classical style'.<sup>9</sup> The most balanced approach so far to the topic of Mozart's arias in relation to their context has been adumbrated by John Platoff.<sup>10</sup>

Given the critical tradition, it is a signal virtue that Kunze devotes as much attention to the arias as to ensembles and finales, and that his treatment of them is equally sympathetic and rigorous. For example, in the chapter on *Figaro*,

<sup>9</sup> On this subject, see Webster, *Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony and the Idea of Classical Style: Through-Composition and Cyclic Integration in his Instrumental Music* (Cambridge, forthcoming), conclusion.

<sup>10</sup> 'The buffa aria in Mozart's Vienna', elsewhere in this issue.

each group receives just under thirty pages of analytical treatment.<sup>11</sup> (Kunze does not mention or discuss the plausible hypothesis that eighteenth-century buffa duets resemble arias more closely than they do larger ensembles, as regards both internal construction and the fact of being based largely on 'types'.) Hence one is inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt, even though his selection of arias for analysis is biased towards those which accompany stage action (Susanna's 'Venite, inginocchiatevi', no. 12; pp. 288–94), represent actual music on stage (Cherubino's 'Voi che sapete', no. 11; pp. 295–7), or are overtly ironic (Susanna's 'Deh, vieni', no. 27; pp. 299–307), while others, equally important, are not discussed at all – the Count's 'Vedrò mentre io sospiro', no. 17; the Countess's 'Dove sono', no. 19; Figaro's 'Aprite un po' quegl'occhi', no. 26. This is the old privileging of 'dramatically flowing' or 'realistic' numbers over supposedly 'static' or 'conventional' ones. Allanbrook, by contrast, gives every aria its due, including those usually ignored, such as Marcellina's and Basilio's in Act IV (nos. 24–5).

Kunze's approach is multifarious, emphasising versification, tonality, phrase-structure, vocal-instrumental relations, relations to traditional aria-types and so on; although the choice of focus often seems arbitrary, the results are always worth study. The accuracy and pertinence of analytical detail, often related to broad historical and critical issues, and sustained across the entirety of Mozart's *oeuvre*, is genuinely imposing. Nothing like it has been seen since Abert; his only rival in this respect among our authors is Allanbrook, who had the luxury of limiting herself to only two operas. Especially for his chosen repertory of 'action' arias, in which the orchestra is largely independent of the vocal line, Kunze develops remarkably subtle and highly differentiated analyses.<sup>12</sup>

One must also admire the sheer weight of Kunze's analyses; indeed his programme is to 'understand the operas as theatre through music' (p. 5). As he puts it elsewhere, 'The character of the dramatic course as a whole is analogous to that principle which governs the music of each individual number' (p. 237);

<sup>11</sup> Ensembles and finales, 253–4, 258–71, 307–18; arias and duets, 279–307. Kunze's book is not easy to use. For 650 dense pages of text divided into very long paragraphs whose initial lines are not indented, the table of contents gives only the (eight) chapter titles (averaging eighty pages), and the text and running-heads offer only one level of subheadings (averaging perhaps twenty pages). Nor is there an index of works or of individual numbers (a necessity in a volume of this type, realised in every other book under review). The reader wishing to grasp the organisation, or merely to locate the discussion of a given number, must laboriously outline the entire volume.

<sup>12</sup> His methods are indebted to the late Thrasybulous Georgiades, whose provocative but eccentric system was founded on the belief that Classical-period music simultaneously projects two complementary rhythmic domains: a 'scaffolding' (*Gerüstbau*) based on the unchanging 'empty' measure; and the infinitely flexible tonal-metric shapes of motives and phrases, which 'fill' those measures with ever-varying content. This is not the same as our distinction between metre and rhythm, although there are points of contact. Its great advantage for opera is that it is inherently 'multivalent'. *Mutatis mutandis*. It also excels in disentangling the differentiated vocal parts of ensembles. Georgiades, 'Aus der Musiksprache des Mozart-Theaters', *Mozart-Jahrbuch*, 1950, 76–98; rpt. in Georgiades, *Kleine Schriften* (Tutzing, 1977), 9–32.

the principle in question is the dialectic between strict construction and dramatic freedom. To be sure, this is again the correspondence theory, and the 'dialectic' is often displaced to the level of philosophical abstraction. Thus Kunze expands the technical opposition between 'skeleton' and 'content' into an abstract one between 'necessity' and 'freedom': 'Already in structuring the libretto, Da Ponte allowed a polarity to become manifest which is equally a subject for resolution in Mozart's music: strict, complex construction vs. complete freedom of movement and action' (p. 236). Occasionally, this tendency leads to passages like the following, regarding the finale in Act II of *Figaro*:

Two principles can be teased out, which have analogies in Mozart's compositional thought: the end- and goal-orientated, processive character of the musical construction; and equally the space-encompassing establishment of a temporal realm in comprehensible and, to this extent, motionless space-relations, the establishment precisely of the temporal and experiential space in which the work constitutes itself as permanent.<sup>13</sup>

When Gurnemanz explains these things to Parsifal just before the *Verwandlung* leading to the Grail scene at the end of Act I, he needs just six short words: 'Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit'.

Another of Kunze's leitmotifs is musical 'autonomy'. He asserts that Mozart was 'interested in operatic "reform" only to the extent that it did not endanger musical autonomy; that is, the possibility of allowing musical theatre to emerge from the technical construction' of the music (p. 192). This is not merely another example of critics projecting their concerns backwards onto artists, but leads to a denial of the dramatic function of Mozart's overtures (except in *Don Giovanni*): 'the overtures always remain independent, indeed autonomous instrumental compositions, even those which do not actually close; there is nothing whose intelligibility depends on a knowledge of the entire opera or the first scene.' This stance is rightly rejected by Hertz (Ch. 18) and Bauman (pp. 93–4).

More generally, Kunze's insistence on the 'autonomy' of musical detail often leads him to miss the forest for the trees. For example, his discussion of Figaro's 'Non più andrai' (no. 10; pp. 282–4) correctly emphasises its 'double' construction, as a rondo and as a process leading to the triumphant march at the end; but he says nothing about *why* this should be so, what it shows us about Cherubino's potential for love and Figaro's ability to turn sticky situations to his advantage.<sup>14</sup> Regarding Susanna's 'Deh, vieni', he goes so far as to claim that 'a precise description of the construction [in mm. 40–44] would lead to the same results even if the text were not taken into account' – with respect to her climactic envoi, no less, 'Ti vo' la fronte incoronar con rose'. In these

<sup>13</sup> 'daß [. . .] sich zwei Prinzipien herauschälen lassen, die ihre Analogie auch in Mozarts kompositorischem Denken finden, namentlich der finale, zielgerichtete und prozeßhafte Charakter des musikalischen Baus sowie gleichermaßen die raumumspannende Herstellung eines Zeitbezirks in überschaubaren und insofern stillgelegten Raumverhältnissen, die Herstellung eben des Zeit- und Ereignisraums, in dem sich das Werk als Bleibendes konstituiert' (311).

<sup>14</sup> See Allanbrook, 93–9, and Webster, 'To Understand . . . Mozart' (n. 1), 181.



respects Allanbrook's analyses are a welcome corrective. Her insights into Mozart's characters and their social relations (which constitute the dramatic expression of the 'rhythmic topoi'), and her interpretations of *Figaro* as a sub-lime-comic version of pastoral, and of *Don Giovanni* as a society which 'No-Man' shocks into extremes of inauthentic passion, are the best we have.

But the ways Mozart's arias really function – the relations among text-form, 'type', instrumentation and key, formal design of the music, tessitura, voice vs. orchestra, characterisation, dramatic context and so on – remain mysterious. Even revisionists – I include myself in the indictment – have not fully overcome the methods and presuppositions derived from two hundred years of instrumental analysis. As Platoff argues, 'sonata form' itself is in many respects irrelevant: even if one modulates to and then prolongs the dominant, the concluding sections in the tonic often do not constitute a 'recapitulation', either motivically (the music may be varied beyond aural recognition, or totally new) or gesturally (the return to the tonic is often 'underarticulated' compared to what is always heard in instrumental movements). Hence, something like my concept 'free recapitulation' or Mary Hunter's more neutral 'tonal return section' is needed.<sup>15</sup> But even if one accepted the traditional categories, a catalogue of formal types in Mozart's Da Ponte operas would include precisely one aria in sonata form ('Venite, inginocchiatevi') – compare what was said above regarding ensembles. And even in this aria, the 'recapitulation' (mm. 82 ff.) has very little to do with the 'first group' (1–14); in dramatic terms it represents a new state (Susanna has finished dressing Cherubino, and she and the Countess marvel at the result), and this is heard in the music.

More fundamentally, to invoke instrumental formal types as the primary basis for understanding arias may be irrelevant, if not positively misleading. Even the hypothesis that most late-eighteenth-century operatic numbers begin with an 'exposition', defined neutrally as a paragraph in the tonic followed by one in the dominant – which all revisionists so far still accept – needs critical review. Does this tonic-dominant relation really function analogously to the structural, form-defining polarity of the first large section of a sonata or binary form? If this section leads, not to a 'development' and 'recapitulation' but to a return of 'A' in the tonic and then a faster concluding section, as in many rondòs (for example, 'Dove sono'), is it properly understood as 'expository'? The sectional division is often A | B | A or A | B | A || C, so that the putative exposition (A + B) does not even exist as a formal unit. Or it may be ambiguous, as in *Così*, no. 17, Ferrando's 'Un'aura amorosa'.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps 'the' form of many arias permanently oscillates among various potential groupings of its sections.

<sup>15</sup> Platoff, 'The buffa aria', §§2 and 4; Hunter, 'Haydn's Aria Forms: A Study of the Arias in the Italian Operas Written at Eszterháza, 1766–1783', Ph.D. diss. (Cornell University, 1982), Ch. 9.

<sup>16</sup> See the differing accounts of this aria in Sieghard Döhring, *Formgeschichte der Opernarien* (Marburg/Lahn, 1975), 97–8, and Hunter, 44–5.

## 3

We turn now to the 'unity' of larger spans. With its allies – 'tonal planning', the privileged position of ensembles and finales, and the dominance of instrumental formal models – its existence is assumed in all the volumes under review.

The paradigmatic example of a large, complex number interpreted as a 'unity' on the basis of instrumental formal models is of course the Act II finale in *Figaro*. Both the notion and the choice of example go back to Lorenz.<sup>17</sup> To this day it remains an obligatory ritual to praise it as Mozart's finest achievement. For Allanbrook it is

perhaps Mozart's greatest single piece of dramatic composition. [...] In form the finale consists of eight smaller pieces laid out in a large key-area [sonata-form-like] plan.<sup>18</sup> [...] This key scheme shapes a closed form with its own harmonic drive and dynamic curve. (p. 119)

Kunze writes that

the finale of Act II of *Figaro* [is] by far [*mit Abstand*] the longest of Mozart's great finale-compositions. [...] In the finale, the key-succession [of Act II] is united into a cycle. [...] Tonally, the finale itself is [...] constructed in virtual symmetry around C major in the middle, and gravitationally with respect to the tonal foundation E flat of the two pillar-sections, Allegro and Allegro assai. (pp. 307, 308, 310)

Kunze's account harbours a serious error. Several other Mozart finales are effectively as long as this one (which comprises 939 notated measures), including those in *Don Giovanni*/II (871) and *Die Zauberflöte*/II (920); if length in performance and dramatic complexity were taken into account, *Figaro*/IV, both finales of *Così* and *Don Giovanni*/I would count as well. Nor is Mozart's length unusual for Viennese operas of the 1780s; indeed, Paisiello's *Il re Teodoro in Venezia*/II and Dittersdorf's *Der Apotheker und der Doktor*/I, *Betrug durch Aberglauben*/II and *Die Liebe im Narrenhause*/I actually exceed it.<sup>19</sup> Kunze's failure to check this 'fact' indicates how deep-seated is the notion of *Figaro*/II's special character. His positing of a 'symmetrical' axis around the C-major section ('Conoscete, signor Figaro', when the Count interrogates Figaro about the letter of assignation, and he and the ladies ask permission for the wedding to proceed) is based both on the patterns of tempo changes and on supposed tonal relations

<sup>17</sup> 'Das Finale in Mozarts Meisteroperen', *Die Musik*, 19 (1926–27), 621–32. His idea had been anticipated in Oskar Wappenschmidt, 'Die Tonart als Kunstmittel im ersten Finale von Mozarts "Die Hochzeit des Figaro"', *Die Musik*, 10 (1910–11), 2nd quarter, 272–84, 323–40, whose account however was purely descriptive, without invoking 'unity' or 'tonal forms'. In English, Rosen's assumption (301–5) of large sonata-form-like unities has been very influential.

<sup>18</sup> The term 'key-area plan' was coined by Ratner to denote the common ground of binary and sonata forms; see his *Classic Music* (n. 5), Ch. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Platoff, 'Music and Drama in the *Opera Buffa* Finale: Mozart and his Contemporaries in Vienna, 1781–1790', Ph.D. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 21, 82–3; Paul Joseph Horsley, 'Dittersdorf and the Finale in Late-Eighteenth-Century German Comic Opera', Ph.D. diss. (Cornell University, 1986), 154–9.

to the remainder of Act II (see p. 212). But this is of little weight, compared to the lack of entries or exits within it, and its placement in the middle of other spans: the overall build-up towards the climax of complexity at the end; and the famous descending-fifth sequence of keys, which has begun in the preceding section in G. And despite his invocation of its 'axial' importance, Kunze oddly says almost nothing about this section. Only Allanbrook's interpretation of it as a pastoral hymn (pp. 127–31), a stage in the increasing intimacy between Susanna and the Countess – for her, one of the central aspects of the plot – begins to do it justice.

Steptoe explicitly invokes sonata form in describing both the finale as a whole, and the individual sections:

[In] the mighty Act II Finale [...] the sections all contribute to an organised key structure based on the tonic E<sup>b</sup> major. [...] Figaro's entry in G] is in an axial position harmonically, since it is here that structural tension is greatest. [...] It is midway between the tonic (E<sup>b</sup>) and the dominant of the whole Finale. The keys [to this point] pick out the E<sup>b</sup> major tonic triad, reinforcing the home key while generating tension from it. [...]

The general organisation of the Finale into a harmonically balanced sequence is duplicated in the internal structure of sections. [...] The dramatic stimulus is presented in the exposition, worked through the central development, and resolved for [sic] the recapitulation. (pp. 175–6, 178–9)

Carter's comments are shorter but no less sweet:

The Act II finale (no. 15) is so constructed that the keys of its eight sections move through a clearly conceived arch. [...] The whole finale is a masterpiece of tonal planning that creates a firm structure through no less than 940 [*recte* 939] bars of music and despite all the twists and turns of the action. (pp. 118–19)

That the finale as a whole is orientated around E flat, nobody will dispute. But to assert that it is 'in' this key, as if it were no different from a symphony movement, is already premature. And to call it a sonata form is to take a single domain (tonal shape) as standing for the whole, ignoring every other aspect of both music and drama: its systematic increase in complexity, which points towards the end as a climax; its sheer sectionality, emphasised by the abrupt contrasts at the entry of each new character; the lack of cogent musical relationship between the putative 'exposition' (Sections 1–3) and the putative 'recapitulation' (Marcellina); and so forth. (No responsible analyst of instrumental music would dream of invoking 'sonata form' on the basis of tonal shape alone.) One might accept the notion as a kind of synechdoche – the tonal form standing for the musical-dramatic whole – if its votaries did not ignore its incompatibility with so many other aspects of the finale (and if the interpretation itself had not long since become reified). Again, a multivalent approach is essential. And one consequence of this approach is likely to be the realisation that, as we have already suggested for some arias, this finale does not exhibit any single 'form'. Allanbrook's original and detailed 'demystification' of what she calls the *ombra* music in the Act II finale of *Don Giovanni* is a step in the right

direction; it describes both Mozart's invocations of ecclesiastical terror in the small and a 'key-area form' organising the whole.

Abbate and Parker ('Dismembering', p. 194) note one multivalent feature in the finale of Act II of *Figaro*. The very long concluding section in E flat, which as a whole provides tonal closure and whose two final subsections (Più allegro – Prestissimo) continually cadence, seems to stand in a non-congruent relation to the dramatic situation, which 'is wide open, at a moment of maximum instability'. They add that at the end of Act IV, when the action has reached a stable conclusion, the closing D major section is relatively brief, apparently creating the 'opposite' disjunction. But neither case is straightforward. Despite the repeated strong cadences, the end of Act II remains in important ways musically unstable: incessant contrasts in text, material, rhythm and dynamics between the four victorious characters *en bloc* and the three (internally differentiated) defeated ones;<sup>20</sup> Susanna's chromaticism, syncopations and unstable coloratura (mm. 825, 842, 880); harshly dissonant dominant sevenths over tonic pedals (892 ff.); and most of all, at 'Prestissimo', the losers' desperate new motive, sf–p–crescendo, entering on an unharmonised, syncopated G and rising chromatically a ninth to A<sup>b</sup>.

What is more, in all these respects the final D major section of the Act IV finale is fundamentally different. Everyone sings the same text; there are no meaningful distinctions between groups of characters (they all generally sing in rhythmic unison). In the last sixty bars (from m. 460) there are no dissonances, save the cadential six-four in 495 and 505; no chromatic notes, save G<sup>#</sup> in the lightning orchestral flashes in 465–7 and 508–10 (neither is in the slightest degree destabilising). To be sure, it is shorter than the Più allegro/Prestissimo sequence at the end of Act II, and has fewer V–I cadences. But this is appropriate: the drama is already resolved; we are in a state of harmony. Nor is this a question of dramatic closure allowing the music 'to be free' (Abbate and Parker, p. 195), as if Mozart's harping on E flat at the end of Act II somehow represented a state of comparative 'unfreedom'. Such a notion still perpetuates, by inversion, the old prejudice according to which sonata forms are 'tighter' than others. In fact, one might well feel that there are *too many* strong cadences at the end of Act II, too hectically cascading over each other, for effective closure; do not the victors 'protest too much'? No Mozart or Haydn instrumental movement would ever dream of such excess. Nor would the last section of any concluding finale; 'Corriam tutti' in Act IV of *Figaro* is by comparison a model of control. Thus tonality itself is multivalent at the end of Act II: the long 'grounding' of E flat functions differently from the dissonances, chromaticism, syncopations and rhythmic diversity. (For the possibility that E flat itself is dissonant with respect to the D of the overture and the end of the opera, and further discussion of the function of D at the end, see pp. 215–16.)

*Don Giovanni* and *Così* exhibit the same distinction as *Figaro*. Despite

<sup>20</sup> Hermann Abert, *W. A. Mozart*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1956), II, 277–8.

repeated tonal closure, their central finales end in a state of musical as well as dramatic confusion and dissonance, with opposed groups of characters, disjunct texts, rhythmic contrast, coloratura and/or patter for leading characters, dissonance and chromaticism; while their end-finales are harmonious on all levels, with at most an echo of past troubles overcome (most prominently in *Don Giovanni*). Even in the very different world of *Die Zauberflöte*, where Act I itself ends with a moralising hymn, the latter is lightly chromatic on the harmonic level and includes a striking tenfold augmented triad under  $d^{\#\prime\prime}$  in the orchestral postlude; these have no counterpart in the final section of Act II. In fact, no other Mozart finale has a sonata-like tonal form like that in Act II of *Figaro*; it is no more typical of his finales in general than 'Ah taci, ingiusto core' of his ensembles, or 'Venite, inginocchiatevi' of his arias.

## 4

Even if one is unwilling to embrace the post-postmodernist image of 'dismemberment' as a way of understanding Mozart's operas, one dare not ignore their ineluctably multivalent character. This applies not merely to individual numbers, but to the relations among them as well. An aria or trio is a single unbroken span of music, with a clear beginning and end, sung by the same character(s), in a single key and with uniform instrumental forces; despite all difficulties, it may in principle be analysed as a coherent movement. Even a finale has a clearly defined beginning and end in the same key, and once under way proceeds without interruption. It too might in principle be analysed as a coherent musical-dramatic action – not as a 'sonata form', of course, but perhaps analogously to a through-composed symphony, or to non-operatic compound movements with voices like the finale of Beethoven's Ninth. (For the distinction between 'coherence' and 'unity' as analytical ideals, see §6.)

But what of discrete numbers? In an eighteenth-century opera, each number is not only independent, with its own character and form, but is separated from all the others: by recitative, action, entries and exits, dramatic reversals, changes of scene, even perhaps the fall and rise of the curtain. In the absence of strong 'corroborating' evidence (as Tovey would have insisted), the hypothesis that these independent pieces are related like the movements of a symphony, let alone that they articulate a 'progression' like the wholly interdependent sections of a single instrumental movement, is implausible, to say the least. And yet every one of these volumes takes it for granted.

Act I of *Figaro* ends with 'Non più andrai' in C (no. 9), following a chorus in G; Hertz (Chapter 8; quoted on p. 210), Carter (p. 119) and Kunze (p. 255) assume that this constitutes a 'progression' from a 'dominant' to a 'tonic'.<sup>21</sup> But these numbers are separated by a considerable recitative, which brings an

<sup>21</sup> In this, as in many other points to be taken up here regarding 'tonal planning' in *Figaro*, the authors under review explicitly or implicitly follow suggestions first made by Abert, in his introduction to the Eulenburg miniature-score edition (ed. Rudolf Gerber); and by Siegmund Levarie, in *Mozart's 'Le nozze di Figaro'* (Chicago, 1952).

important dramatic turn (the Count's pardon and banishment of Cherubino). Even to think of them as analogous to two successive movements of a symphony probably goes too far. Besides, in a classical-period symphony we do not think of the keys of the several movements as creating a *progression*; the 'Jupiter' is never described as a 'plagal' form, I–IV–I, nor the 'Eroica' as a 'weak' one, I–vi–I. (An exception occurs only if movements are run-on, as in Haydn's 'Farewell' and Beethoven's Fifth.) And how does one know that C rather than G is the 'tonic', unless on the assumption that the key in which an internal unit ends always exercises this function? This too is only a hypothesis, which (so far) is no more than an uncritical borrowing from instrumental analysis. Bauman, owing to the use of dialogue rather than recitative in *Die Entführung*, emphasises the discontinuity between musical numbers and non-music; see pp. 1, 26, 72–3, 93. But he does not explain why *Die Entführung* should be 'problematical' in this respect, while *Die Zauberflöte* remains beyond criticism. Nor do the discontinuities prevent him from asserting the presence of tonal unities spanning the entire opera.

To return to the opening of *Figaro*: the overture is in D, the first duettino between Figaro and Susanna in G. Not only the three authors just cited, but Allanbrook (p. 75) and Steptoe (p. 187) as well, interpret this as a move from 'tonic' to 'subdominant'. Allanbrook goes so far as to mistake this supposed tonal relation for a 'sign' of dramatic content: in the same sentence, she calls no. 1 a 'relaxed and leisurely scene', whereas it is nothing of the sort.<sup>22</sup> To be sure, nothing intervenes. But in important ways overture and duet are incommensurable: instrumental *versus* vocal music; curtain down (or empty stage) *versus* characters, costumes, scenery, action, dialogue, disagreement, drama; in the eighteenth century, audience entering or talking or woolgathering *versus* (perhaps) attending to what is happening; and so forth. What is the justification for calling this a 'progression'? And suppose we were to grant this point: how do we know that D is the 'tonic' and G the 'subdominant', rather than D the 'dominant' and G (the beginning of the action, after all) the 'tonic' – except by retrodicting from the end of the opera, three hours and four acts in the future, or by appealing to Mozart's general practice of ending an opera in the key of the overture? Nothing else in *Figaro* supports the hypothesis that D is 'the tonic'; it appears elsewhere only in Bartolo's and the Count's arias, nos. 4 and 17. (See §5 below.)

And if the overture and no. 1 do constitute a progression from I to IV, what then? How does B flat in no. 2 prolong or extend it? (One answer has been: 'further' into the 'subdominant realm', as Figaro's and Susanna's situation becomes increasingly difficult; this can only be called risible.) And where is the 'dominant'? Only in the duet no. 5 between Susanna and Marcellina,

<sup>22</sup> Levarie, 17–19; Frits Noske, *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* (The Hague, 1977), Ch. 2; idem, 'Verbal to Musical Drama: Adaptation or Creation?', in James Redmond, ed., *Drama, Dance and Music* (Cambridge, 1981), 143–52; Webster, 'To Understand . . . Mozart' (see n. 1), 183–4.

arguably the least important number in the act (save possibly the chorus); what follows is not the tonic, but Cherubino's aria 'Non so più' in the (*a fortiori*) 'remote' key of E flat; indeed, neither D nor A is heard again until Act III. Admittedly (as Kunze, Carter and Hertz point out), the first two acts exhibit correlations between the use of closely related keys in contiguous numbers for a given group of characters, but remote relations between one group and the next: Bartolo and Marcellina (nos. 4 and 5) in D and A; Cherubino (nos. 6 and 7) in E flat and B flat; Figaro (nos. 8 and 9) in G and C; the Countess and Cherubino (nos. 10 and 11) in E flat and B flat; Susanna (and the others) in G and C (nos. 12–14). Even this scheme does not always apply: the opening scene for Figaro and Susanna begins in G, but continues in B flat and F; nobody enters or leaves between 'Voi che sapete' in B flat and 'Venite, inginocchiatevi' in G. Furthermore, these are primarily 'associative' uses of tonality: D for high-born sentiments (or parodies of same); the 'simple' keys C, F and G for 'buffa' numbers, E flat for deeply-felt utterances, A for love-duets (or parodies), and so forth. This does not add up to the presence of 'progressions'.

Still less can one defend the extension of such 'progressions' over larger spans such as an entire act, as do Hertz, Carter and Kunze regarding Act I of *Figaro*. I quote Hertz:

'Non più andrai' [in C] arrives with a sense of inevitability not only because Mozart planted its rhythm in the opening number, but more importantly because it has been set up as a tonal goal, both in short-range terms, being preceded by the twice-sung Peasants' Chorus in G (which serves as dominant preparation), and in long-range terms that reach back to the initial duettino in G.<sup>23</sup>

And Carter baldly states that 'the act elaborates a large-scale V–I progression'. But we are not told how G can be 'prolonged' through six intervening numbers in five different keys; only one of these (D) is closely related to it, and it appears only in no. 4, at a far temporal remove from both nos. 1 and 8. What is worse, their treatment of G harbours an unacknowledged inconsistency: how can the same key simultaneously be the 'subdominant' of D (following the overture), and the 'dominant' of C (at the end)? In the former case, the act ends in IV of IV (and no. 8 cannot be the 'dominant'); in the latter, it begins in V of V, which is not only senseless in its own right, but will not mesh with the ultimate goal of 'tonal planning', which is to establish D as the tonic of the entire opera. (This differs only in degree from the games analysts play with Wagner's *Ring*, in which the E flat at the beginning of *Das Rheingold* is said to function as V of V of the concluding D flat of Brünnhilde's immolation and the end of Valhalla; in a real-life production, the latter events are witnessed approximately one week later.) Hence if one takes G seriously in both its putative

<sup>23</sup> Hertz, Ch. 8; quoted from 'Constructing *Le nozze di Figaro*', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 112 (1987), 90–1.

tonal functions, one must admit that the 'tonic' itself has changed during the course of the act, from D to C. But if this is so, the act cannot be 'in' any single key, and it would be a pretty puzzle to determine the *location* of this change.<sup>24</sup> It would seem that overall tonal progressions governing entire acts (as opposed to more or less consistent key-associations) do not exist in Mozart – not even in Act II of *Figaro* (see §5).

The tendency to posit links between separate, often distant numbers does not affect tonality alone. The hunter of motivic correspondences and derivations is a familiar figure on the analytical scene, who, after a period of ostracisation, is making something of a comeback. As regards Mozart, the most prominent exponent has been Noske, now seconded by Heartz and Carter.<sup>25</sup> Motivic development *within* a number is unquestionably one of Mozart's most important techniques for generating coherence, precisely in the supple, unremarkable ways that dramatic music requires (and in full compatibility with the lessened importance of tonal 'polarities' and 'resolutions' compared to instrumental music). Another potentially effective linking technique involves vocal tessitura, especially the consistent exploitation of prominent high pitches. Carter (110–13; following Levarie) links the Countess's two arias through their common feature of 'searching' for *g''*. He may however go too far in arguing that, owing to differences in the treatment of that *g''*, 'Porgi amor' 'closes on a question-mark that emphasises the uncertainty of the Countess's present position', whereas in 'Dove sono' her 'emotional maturity is established'.<sup>26</sup> He certainly does so in linking all this with the *g''* following her forgiveness of the Count in the Act IV finale (mm. 436–7); among other things, in this scene she never sings *g''* by herself, and its harmonisation gravitates towards the subdominant of m. 437. Still another vital linking technique is instrumentation. All this leads on the one hand to conventional 'types' of aria (etc.), and on the other to the idea of 'subplots' involving particular groups of characters or strands of the action. But in all these contexts, it remains essential to proceed multivalently, rather than to depend on tonality, or instrumentation, or motivic connections alone.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Admittedly, Edward T. Cone speculates about such matters in Verdi without assuming that they are nonsensical; see 'On the Road to *Otello*: Tonality and Structure in *Simon Boccanegra*', *Studi verdiani*, 1 (1982), 72–98.

<sup>25</sup> Noske, *Signifier* (see n. 22); Heartz, Ch. 14, 18; see also his 'Tonality and Motif in *Idomeneo*', *The Musical Times*, 115 (1974), 382–6; Carter, 115–18.

<sup>26</sup> My doubts depend on analytical considerations for which there is no space here; I discuss the topic in the context of a methodological study of the analysis of Mozart's arias, to appear in Cliff Eisen, ed., *Mozart Studies* (Oxford, forthcoming in 1991). For the 'high-note' organisation of Tamino's scene with the Priest in the Act I finale of *Die Zauberflöte*, see my 'To Understand . . . Mozart' (n. 1), 188–90.

<sup>27</sup> I have briefly sketched a subplot in *Die Zauberflöte*, involving Pamina, the Queen of the Night and the magic flute itself, in connection with Pamina's aria 'Ach, ich fühl's', in 'Cone's "Personae" and the Analysis of Opera', *College Music Symposium*, 29 (1989), 44–65. See also Allanbrook on Acts III–IV of *Figaro*, described later.



## 5

If it is dubious to interpret a finale as a single form based on tonality, it is downright dangerous to unite discrete numbers, separated not only by recitatives and action but often by intervening concerted numbers as well, in extreme cases even by the curtain and an interval, into large-scale 'forms'. Yet Allanbrook, Kunze, Carter and Steptoe all exhibit this tendency (which again derives from Lorenz *via* Rosen and others). For Carter, E flat in the Act II Finale of *Figaro* is 'the same as the key of the Countess's "Porgi amor qualche ristoro" (no. 10); thus the whole of Act II might be said to elaborate [this key]' (p. 119); and for Kunze,

the E flat finale (no. 15) is already prefigured in the E flat cavatina of the Countess; the tonal succession of the five numbers preceding the finale (E flat, B flat, G, C, G) is unified in the finale into a cycle. [...] The action which culminates in the finale begins with the trio no. 13 'Susanna or via sortite' in C, in the key of the Andante movement which forms the mid-point of the finale. (pp. 309–10)

Allanbrook goes even further, proposing for the end of *Figaro*

a separate and transcendent line of action, which begins to take shape in act III with the pastoral letter duet [no. 20], and which merits a climax [of its own]. The line to this climax plots out its own key-area plan in B-flat, arching from the B-flat letter duet through to the pastoral fourth act, where Barbarina's F-minor cavatina and Susanna's F-major aria 'Deh, vieni' stand both in key and in tone as a kind of dominant to the final B-flat resolution – the pastoral reconciliation of the happy couple. (pp. 173–4)

About the cogency of this 'line of action' (or subplot) there will be little dispute (save to puzzle over the omission of Figaro's 'Aprite un po' quegl'occhi', which involves one of the main characters of the subplot and is in E flat – the putative 'subdominant', immediately preceding the 'dominant' of 'Deh vieni'). But one cannot possibly sustain a 'key-area plan' – that is, a sonata-like form – across parts of two different acts, or imagine its dominant resolving to its tonic across the intervening 'public' music in D and G (the first two sections of the finale, with their excruciating confusion). For that matter, the reconciliation is immediately preceded by Figaro's Larghetto 'Vulcan' speech and the long, complex box-on-the-ear section, both in E flat; this is hardly compatible with a 'dominant' function of 'Deh, vieni' in relation to 'Pace, pace, mio dolce tesoro' in B flat. Kunze, as we have seen, says the same kind of thing about Act II; elsewhere (pp. 347–8), he argues that in Act I of *Don Giovanni*, the 'Champagne' aria in B flat and Zerlina's 'Batti, batti' in F (nos. 11–12) 'prepare' the C major of the finale, and hence already constitute part of it, because of the sequence of rising fifths. (He also mentions, with Allanbrook [220–3], a more cogent relation: in his aria, Don Giovanni invokes the musical-social breakdown which, in the finale, will be realised through the three simultaneous dances: 'Senza alcun ordine / La danza sia'.)

In *Don Giovanni*, Steptoe interprets the opening scene as a macro-sonata

form: overture in D minor and major = exposition; *introduzione* in various keys = development; duet no. 2, 'Fuggi, crudele, fuggi' in D minor = recapitulation (pp. 186–7), his application of the sonata principle to successions of discrete numbers deriving from Rosen. Even granting everything possible – the single scene, the unbroken dramatic sweep, the beginning and ending in D minor, the close relation of the *introduzione* keys – this strains credulity to the breaking point. After all, we have to do with three separate and distinct movements, of which the second and third are separated by recitatives both *semplice* and *accompagnato*, by exits and entrances, and by a proper young lady's discovery of her father's bloody and still very warm corpse. The Molto allegro of the overture is not an 'exposition', but a complete sonata form in its own right; the *introduzione* does not at all resemble a development section in internal construction (it is sectional, Leporello's 'Notte e giorno' is if anything expository, and it breaks off following the Commendatore's death with no hint of preparing D or a 'return'), and bears no tangible relationship to the overture; Anna and Ottavio 'recapitulate' nothing, rather their oath of vengeance crystallises a new stage in the drama. The invocation of 'sonata form' is not merely superfluous; it betrays an unwillingness to attend to what is happening on stage and in the pit, masquerading under a veneer of analytical sophistication.

By contrast, Rushton's approach to large-scale organisation, while not comprehensive (an impossibility in the 'handbook' format), is the best of those here under review. He is the only writer on *Don Giovanni* who pays sufficiently close attention to the staging, particularly the alternation of half- and full-stage sets and the timing of scene-changes. For example, Allanbrook (pp. 245, 258), Steptoe (pp. 119, 193) and Kunze (p. 346) still perpetuate the notion that, following Leporello's 'Catalogue' aria (no. 4), the scene changes to a country locale for the peasant wedding-party with Zerlina and Masetto. But Rushton had already shown (as both libretto and autograph make clear) that a single (full-stage) set, showing both Elvira's lodgings and Don Giovanni's town house, is used without change from before Elvira's initial entry (no. 3) until after the Don's 'Champagne' aria (no. 11).<sup>28</sup> This is not pedantry; it leads to a convincing argument that the drama preserves 'temporal unity', in that the entire action takes place within roughly twenty-four hours – from Don Giovanni's attack on Anna near midnight one night, to his downfall shortly after midnight the next. This insight has wide-ranging dramaturgical implications.

Rushton's acuity and common sense are equally evident in his technical discussions. He does not shy away from proposing elaborate structural relations between the opening scene (agreeing with Steptoe that the overture must be included) and the catastrophe in the Act II finale (104–9, 111–21). But his methods are the opposite of reductive; he assumes no single principle, appeals to no formal types. Instead he points, according to the context, to dramatic parallels, tonal sequences, 'sensitive' sonorities and whatever else seems appropriate. His tracing of the effects of the destabilising pitch B (in the D-minor context),

<sup>28</sup> Ch. 2 and 49–53; Rushton implies (143 n.8) that the error originated in Otto Jahn's Mozart biography.

for example, is exemplary. Although *ad hoc* procedures applied to such unique music cannot be imitated, let alone suggest approaches to methodology or theory, Rushton's tact and insight should inspire emulation.

From Act II of *Figaro* being 'in' E flat and the overture and nos. 1–2 of *Don Giovanni* 'in' sonata form, it is but a step to the belief that an entire opera is in a key or exhibits a form. Bauman, many of whose musical discussions of *Die Entführung* are excellent, nevertheless titles his last section (pp. 89–98) 'Unity and Coherence', stating that the opera is a 'living organism' (89) and that it is 'in' C, prolonged throughout by 'tonal planning' (73–5). He even goes so far as to claim (p. 97) that the final Janissary chorus 'recalls and completes [...] falling fourths left unresolved by the opening phrases of the overture'! This would be difficult to credit even if the D in question, m. 13 of the overture, were not resolved in the immediate context, mm. 29 and 33.

Carter, who begins his discussion of unity in *Figaro* with some scepticism (pp. 115–6), becomes less and less sure of his stance as he adduces more and more links of various kinds, and eventually concludes that

the whole of Act II might be said to elaborate the Neapolitan (flat supertonic) area of the opera's main key, D major. [...] The opera [is] an extended i–bII(=IV)–V–I progression. [...] The 'folle journée' opens and closes in D and thus exists within a single tonal space.<sup>29</sup>

Stephoe goes so far as to locate, among the three Da Ponte operas, 'a progressive movement towards greater unity [...] reflected in the growing emphasis on tonal cohesion, linkage of disparate sections by thematic allusion, and the structural use of key'. Thus whereas *Figaro* exhibits merely 'a genial sequence of memorable but distinct musical experiences', *Don Giovanni*

is characterised by a powerful unity of purpose. [...] Several procedures [...] sustain the dramatic unity [...] the elimination of musical numbers which impeded the flow [...] and] the grouping of successive musical numbers into broader harmonic units. Numbers [...] are embedded within a larger arch. (pp. 185–6)

And in *Così*,

two unifying devices [...] – the linking of separate numbers by tonal progression and the technique of thematic reminiscence – were brought to a further level of refinement. [...]

The key structure penetrates beneath the text and surface plot to delineate the meaning behind actions, and the motivations of the protagonists. [...] The central key, and the axis around which the work revolves, is C major. [...] 'Flat' keys are used to depict false or shallow feelings, while authentic emotion is presented in dominant 'sharp' keys. Such a scheme is a logical extension of the application of classical sonata forms to the dramatic medium. (pp. 213, 232)

Quite apart from the fact that such a scheme, pretending to relate almost all the numbers in a very long opera, has nothing to do with sonata form (a principle of organisation governing single closed movements), the dichotomy of 'true'

<sup>29</sup> 119–20; the 'progression' in question was asserted by Levarie (see below).

and 'false' emotions will not hold up. For example, Fiordiligi's 'Come scoglio' (no. 14) in B flat is notoriously difficult to interpret (Stephoe himself elsewhere describes its ambiguity). Although the Guglielmo–Dorabella seduction duet (no. 23 in F) may be 'shallower' than 'Fra gli amplessi' (no. 29 in A) between Ferrando and Fiordiligi, it is hardly 'false' on that account. And no. 2 in E major is a problem; in Steptoe's scheme it would have to be notably 'sincere', whereas it is merely the middle member in the set of three short introductory trios, of which the other two are in the supposedly 'neutral' keys G and C.

Heartz treats the tonality of *Figaro* in equally schematic ways:

Choosing the key of the second finale meant choosing the keynote of the opera. [...] Every subsequent choice of key had to be calculated on [...] its] relationship to the three act-ending keys.

The pairings [of B flat and G] occur in every act. [...] They] occur after E-flat not only in [the finale to Act II] but also in the sequences of Nos. 6–8, Nos. 10–12, and one last time in the finale of Act 4, another indication of how schematic Mozart was in laying out the whole opera with regard to tonalities. [...] It probably pleased his sense of long-term symmetry that the 'folle journée' ended with the scampering motions of the overture ('Corriam tutti') and mirroring the relationship of the overture to Nos. 1 and 2.<sup>30</sup>

He means that the overture and nos. 1–2 proceed D–G–B flat, and the last three keys of the Act IV finale proceed B flat–G–D. But no evidence suggests that Mozart paid very much attention to such abstract 'long-term symmetries', least of all those separated by the three hours and four acts of a musical drama, intended for live performance before a primarily lay audience whom he wanted above all to delight and impress.

Besides, the apparently unanimous opinion that the end of Act IV moves 'from G to D' is erroneous. Following the Andante forgiveness music in G, the wonderful orchestral transition modulates to the *dominant* (the 'home' dominant, of course); and the Allegro assai not only begins on this sonority, but prolongs it at least through the end of the minor-mode shadow (m. 456), if not indeed all the way to the structural half-cadence in 471–5. The progression is thus not IV–I, but IV–V–I; and it is *through-composed*, bound together by the transition and the new beginning on V. This 'tight' construction gains additional significance by contrasting with this finale's tendency (from Section 3 in E flat onwards) to juxtapose keys and sections. (This tendency has often been noted, but most often in the context of its supposed inferiority to the Act II finale; here, the dominant does not appear as a key, and remotely related key complexes – D and G for the 'public' action at the beginning and end, *versus* E flat and B flat for Susanna's and Figaro's 'private' reconciliation in the middle – are juxtaposed, rather than merging into one another.<sup>31</sup>) The supposed parallelism between the overture and no. 1 and these two sections, dubious enough in

<sup>30</sup> Ch. 8; quoted from 'Constructing *Figaro*' (see n. 23), 83–4, 93–4. Compare his 'Tonality and Motif in *Idomeneo*' (see n. 25).

<sup>31</sup> Favourable interpretations of the Act IV finale can be found in Noske, *Signifier* (see n. 22), 16–7; Allanbrook, 173–94; and Platoff, 'Finale' (see n. 19), 418–22.

dramatic terms and in its dependence on ‘symmetry’ (which, with respect to tonal music, exists only in analytical diagrams), thus goes up in smoke. Indeed, this is yet another reason why the conclusion of *Figaro* is so satisfying, ‘despite’ the relative brevity of D major: we finally hear a key which is strongly prepared by its own dominant, and which not only articulates the requisite happy ending, but *resolves* the music of the final dramatic crux. (Of course, this resolution has nothing to do with sonata form.) This difference from the sectionality of the remainder of the finale (let alone of successions of independent numbers) creates a strong effect of culmination at the end of the opera. At the end of *Don Giovanni*, the keys of the last two stable sections are likewise G, for Anna’s and Ottavio’s dialogue and love-duet; and D, for the final pseudo-contrapuntal wind-up. And the dominant mediates between them here as well (mm. 744–55), although the passage is not as strongly through-composed as in *Figaro*.

All this is not to imply that associations of keys with particular characters, dramatic situations, instruments, textual features and so forth have no force, or that key-relations are irrelevant. It cannot be accidental that from *Idomeneo* on Mozart always ended his operas in the key of the overture, always articulated the central finale in a different key, and always ended a finale in the key in which it began (as did all Viennese composers in the 1780s). What must be avoided is the uncritical assumption that these features go together to make up a ‘form’, or that the opera is ‘in’ a key, as in Levarie’s notorious interpretation (pp. 233–45) of the entirety of *Figaro* as a single, gigantic progression, I–bII–V–I. For example, it may be of little consequence that the key of the central finale is ‘remote’ from that of the overture and the ending. Mozart’s primary reason for the choice was purely practical: he used trumpets and drums in only three keys – C, D and E flat.<sup>32</sup> Given that the central finale was to be in any key other than that of the beginning and ending, the relation was necessarily ‘remote’. Thus, to cite the finale of Act II of *Figaro* for the last time, it is not clear whether the confusion and instability at the end have anything to do with the fact that, in the context of a single movement, the key of E flat could be heard as ‘dissonant’ with respect to the D major in which the opera begins and ends. In fact, the overall role of D in *Figaro* is far weaker than that of D in *Idomeneo*, C in *Die Entführung*, D minor/major in *Don Giovanni* or E flat in *Die Zauberflöte*. But even in these operas, the putative ‘tonics’ may represent little more than a network of associations, not so different in its way from what one finds in Verdi or Wagner. The real – that is, critically aware – discussion of whether, and if so how, a Mozart opera is ‘in’ a key has not yet begun.

## 6

The notion of ‘unity’ in Mozart’s operas is doubly suspect: it originated in the historically-culturally delimited and un-Mozartean context of German

<sup>32</sup> Hertz, ‘Constructing *Figaro*’ (see n. 23), 83.

interwar Wagnerian aesthetics; and it leads to absurd results. We can but wish it well in retirement, where it may enjoy the more modest, but also more helpful, role of documenting a long and influential, but now passing, phase in the history of Mozart criticism.

Indeed, the search for 'unity', whose irrelevance to opera now seems obvious, is increasingly coming to seem unsatisfactory even in the realm of instrumental music – even that of the Classical period. The 'reductive' character of any unifying theory seems inadequate to the richness and complexity of all great musical artworks. The realisation that the paradigm of organicism (on which 'unity' depends) arose and flourished in the particular historical and cultural context of German Romanticism and its aftermath allows us to see that it is no more universal than the eighteenth-century doctrine of the affections or today's aesthetics of disjunction. And 'deconstruction' and other post-structuralist approaches reveal unacknowledged contradictions in the discourse of 'unifying' analyses (as well as an underlying dependence on the concept of unity even in most of those who attempt to escape it).<sup>33</sup> The fact that historical and analytical discourse about music can be deconstructed does not imply that music itself can be; a philosophy whose *raison d'être* is the use of language to probe the functioning of language is scarcely equipped to tell us very much about music. A strong irony, however, is that the best English-language analysts of Classical-period instrumental music, such as Tovey, Edward T. Cone, Leonard B. Meyer and Rosen (notwithstanding his sonata-principle orientation), have never set much store by 'unity'.

In all this, the distinction between 'unity' and 'coherence' (referred to at the beginning of §4) is crucial; in essence, it entails two fundamental differences of approach.<sup>34</sup> First, unifying analyses tend to be reductive: both in assuming that a single criterion or domain must be primary, and all others secondary; and that the aim is often literally to 'reduce' a work to some fundamental entity, such as a Schenkerian *Ursatz* or a Schoenbergian *Grundgestalt*. A belief in 'unity' also tends to entail the use of hierarchical methods, which reflect the organicist belief that a central or fundamental entity must be replicated in the detail of all subsequent levels. (The hierarchical paradigm is of all the aspects of organicist thinking one of the most misleading for musical analysis.) By contrast, a complex, non-reductive approach such as multivalence is in principle compatible with a differentiated analysis which comes closer to the complexity of great music. Secondly, a 'unifying' analysis usually underplays the experiential aspects of music (temporal succession, rhythm, timbre, musical processes, listeners' psychology, etc.), in favour of a more nearly abstract or 'ideal' mode of understanding. By contrast, a demonstration of coherence remains compatible with

<sup>33</sup> From this chorus I cite (more or less arbitrarily) Dahlhaus, 'Some Models of Unity in Musical Form', *Journal of Music Theory*, 19 (1975), 2–30; Arnold Whittall, 'The Theorist's Sense of History: Concepts of Contemporaneity in Composition and Analysis', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 112 (1987), 1–20; and Alan Street, 'Superior Myths, Dogmatic Allegories: The Resistance to Musical Unity', *Music Analysis*, 8 (1989), 77–123.

<sup>34</sup> I broach this issue in a somewhat different manner in 'To understand . . . Mozart' (see n. 1), 178–9, 191–2.

adequate attention to these matters. In principle, every analysis, of instrumental as well as vocal works, should account for them.<sup>35</sup>

But a programme of multivalent analysis will not be easy to realise. And in opera, even more than in other contexts, rigorous self-criticism remains essential, in proportion as the genre is more complex than any other, and viable paradigms and theoretical traditions have not yet emerged. A given number cannot be understood except in awareness of its dramatic and musical context, yet concepts for dealing appropriately with that context hardly exist. And in a genre so dependent on convention as eighteenth-century opera, not even *Figaro* can be discussed in a vacuum, without attention to the remainder of its composer's *oeuvre* and works by other composers. And so I can only conclude with an apparently simple question, to which however a satisfactory answer would speak volumes: how shall we understand a single Mozart number?

<sup>35</sup> I have attempted full-dress analyses along these lines in *Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony* (see n. 9); and in 'Zur Form des Finales von Beethovens 9. Sinfonie', in the forthcoming report of a conference on the nineteenth-century symphony, held in Bonn, 1989, to be edited by Siegfried Kross.